

South Oxfordshire District Council

Warding Proposals

Introduction

1. The Council has previously submitted a proposal to the Commission for a council size of 36, which the Commission has indicated it is minded to agree. Our attention has now turned to the warding arrangements that would result from having 36 councillors representing the district of South Oxfordshire.
2. Our projected electorate for the whole district in 2018 (the date for which we were asked to make projections) is 108,651, which is consistent with the recently published 2011 census data. It takes account of expected new developments, in line with the council's emerging core strategy, and discussions with house builders about build rates. To date, the Commission has not raised any issues regarding the projected figure. 108,561 divided by 36 gives an average electorate per councillor of 3018.
3. In developing our proposal we have taken full account of the three statutory criteria that the commission must consider in developing its proposals;
 - to deliver electoral equality for voters
 - to provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
 - to provide effective and convenient local government

Development of the council's proposed warding arrangements

4. The council's proposal was developed by the officer team led by the chief executive and an all party councillor working group before being presented to the full council for approval. It has unanimous support, other than in those areas indicated in the accompanying letter. We think that the Commission should give significant weight to the level of consensus that we have achieved around these proposals.
5. In addition to the statutory criteria, the working group also applied a number of subsidiary criteria, as follows:
 - a presumption in favour of single member wards unless local circumstances dictated otherwise. The council has a clear view that single member wards aid accountability and provide clarity for electors. The only exception proposed is Didcot, which reflects the scale of housing growth and uncertainty of the timing of its delivery. We are of the view that single member wards in Didcot run the risk of failing the equality of elector test over a relatively short period of time.

- to keep town parishes (Didcot, Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford separate from the surrounding rural parishes unless local circumstances dictated otherwise. The original proposal for 36 councillors was, in part, decided upon to facilitate this
 - to use whole parishes as building blocks wherever possible
6. Table 1 sets out in summary form the council's warding proposals. This is followed by a brief commentary on the rationale for each proposal. The electorates quoted are based on our projections by parish. Where we have created wards within parishes the electorates are approximate. We would look to work with the Commission to define precise boundaries (and electorates) if it is minded to accept the principle behind each proposal.
7. In each case we have proposed a name for the new ward. We have adopted a pragmatic approach, using the names of larger settlements to define wards – usually one but occasionally two where we consider that this is helpful. In two cases we have proposed generic names because there are no dominant settlements. Within the more urban wards we have proposed names that we think best define those parts of the town covered by the ward.

Ward Name	Number of Cllrs	Projected electorate 2018	% variance from average
Didcot All Saints	2	5820	-3.6
Didcot Hadden	3	8940	-1.3
Didcot Park	3	8280	-8.5
Henley Fairmile	1	2960	-1.3
Henley Greys	1	3080	+2.7
Henley Newtown	1	3100	+3.3
Thame Barley Hill	1	3200	+6.7
Thame Cuttlebrook	1	3010	+0.3
Thame Park	1	3010	+0.3
Wallingford Castle	1	3140	+0.7
Wallingford Winterbrook	1	2990	-0.3
Benson Village and Warborough	1	3200	+6.0
Berinsfield	1	2890	-4.2
Brightwell	1	3390	+12.3
Chalgrove	1	2740	-9.2
Chinnor North	1	3100	+2.7
Chinnor South	1	3100	+2.7
Cholsey	1	3410	+13.0
Crowmarsh	1	3270	+8.3
Forest Hill	1	2930	-3.1
Garsington and Horspath	1	2862	-5.2

Goring	1	3059	+1.4
Haseley Brook	1	3118	+3.3
Kidmore End and Whitchurch	1	2838	-6.0
Peppard	1	2780	-7.9
Sandford and the Wittenhams	1	3084	+2.2
Shiplake	1	2797	-7.3
Sonning Common	1	3065	+1.6
Watlington	1	2822	-6.5
Wheatley	1	3222	+6.8
Woodcote	1	3163	+4.8

Didcot All Saints

8. This two member ward is largely based on the existing All Saints ward. It is the ward with the most immediate increase in electorate as a major housing development, Great Western Park, takes shape to the west. The boundaries are well defined by Wantage Road/Broadway to the south and the railway/Basil Hill Road to the north.

Didcot Hadden

9. This three member ward combines the whole of the existing Ladygrove ward with eastern part of Northbourne ward. Northbourne ward contains a small area of East Hagbourne parish (part of the Fleet Meadow estate) and we propose that this arrangement continues to reflect natural communities and to facilitate the delivery of effective and convenient local government. The proposed ward also includes part of Long Wittenham parish where a major housing development is expected to generate an additional 1236 electors by 2018. We think important that the electors on this development, which forms a north-east expansion of the town, should be represented by the same councillors who represent other electors to the north and east of the town.

Didcot Park

10. This three member ward combines the whole of the existing Park ward with the eastern part of Northbourne ward and small part of All Saints ward south of the Wantage Road. We also propose the inclusion of a small part of West Hagbourne parish that will form part of the Great Western Park housing development in due course. We consider that community identity is best served by all of the electorate of Great Western Park being represented by Didcot councillors.

Henley Fairmile

11. This proposed ward covers the northern part of Henley parish. The Fair Mile road runs through the centre of the area, hence the proposed ward name. The southern boundary is well defined by roads and field boundaries running east to west through the parish. This proposal achieves good electoral equality, as do the other proposed wards for Henley.

Henley Greys

12. This ward comprises the central part of Henley, west of Reading Road. The northern boundary with Fairmile ward is as described above whilst the southern boundary is largely defined by St. Andrew's Road. Greys Road runs through the centre of the ward, hence the proposed name.

Henley Newtown

13. This is the southernmost of the three wards proposed for Henley. Its northern boundary is as described above, whilst the parish boundary defines the remainder. Newtown is the name given to a part of Henley that was developed in the 19th century and that sits centrally in the ward. It is also the name given to a large business park in the east of the ward.

Thame Barley Hill

14. This ward comprises the north-east part of Thame parish and is largely made up of the Barley Hill estate, hence the proposed ward name. It is well defined to the west by the Aylesbury Road and reasonably well defined to the south by footpaths and divisions between different developments. As with the other wards proposed for Thame it provides good electoral equality.

Thame Cuttlebrook

15. This ward covers entire western part of the parish including the village of Moreton, which is separate from the town of Thame. It includes most of the town centre. Cuttle Brook runs centrally through the ward, hence the proposed name.

Thame Park

16. This ward covers the south east of the parish. Its northern boundary with Barley Hill ward is as described above. The western boundary is well defined by main roads, the principle one being Thame Park Road. Thame Park sits to the south of the ward, hence the proposed name.

Wallingford Castle

17. This ward comprises the northern and western parts of the parish of Wallingford, including the site of Wallingford Castle, hence the proposed name. Its southern and western boundary is well defined by the High Street and the line of the old Wallingford branch railway. It includes the whole of the Hithercroft Industrial Estate. It delivers good electoral equality.

Wallingford Winterbrook

18. This ward comprises the south east part of Wallingford parish with the Winterbrook area of Cholsey parish. The northern and western boundaries with Castle ward are as described above. Wallingford bypass provides a strong boundary to the south. We consider that Winterbrook forms a natural community with Wallingford and this ward provides excellent electoral equality.

Benson Village and Warborough

19. This ward comprises part of Benson parish and the whole of Warborough parish. Benson parish contains two geographically distinct communities – Benson village and RAF Benson. Part of the residential accommodation at RAF Benson sits in Ewelme parish. We consider that the statutory criteria are best met by placing the whole of RAF Benson in the proposed Crowmarsh and Ewelme ward as explained later. There is a good road link between Benson and Warborough villages.

Berinsfield

20. This ward comprises the parishes of Berinsfield, Dorchester and Drayton St. Leonards. Berinsfield and Dorchester villages sit either side of the A4074, with Drayton St Leonard village two kilometres east of Berinsfield. This is a compact ward that brings together three communities that are in close proximity to each other.

Brightwell

21. This ward comprises seven parishes, largely defined by the boundaries of Didcot, Wallingford, the River Thames and the district boundary. Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is the biggest community accounting for over one-third of the electors.

22. West and East Hagbourne sit at the western edge of the district. Road links to the remainder of the proposed ward are through Didcot parish. We considered whether there was a case for linking the Hagbournes in a ward that encompassed part of Didcot but we rejected this. The villages surrounding Didcot have a strong collective identity and linking the Hagbournes with the Moretons, in particular, in our view best reflects local community identity.

Chalgrove

23. This ward is centred on the village and parish of Chalgrove, which accounts for over 80 per cent of the electorate. Three much smaller parishes make up the rest of the ward. Although residents of Brightwell Baldwin have to travel out of the proposed ward to reach Chalgrove this is for a short distance only. To move Brightwell Baldwin to an alternative ward would result in reduced electoral equality.

Chinnor North

24. Chinnor is a large village in the north-east corner of the district. It is too large to be represented by one councillor and too small to be represented by two if we are to achieve electoral equality. We consider that the best option is to create two single member wards that also include some surrounding parishes. This achieves good electoral equality. Chinnor is already divided into two electoral districts and we have used these to define the boundary between the two wards within the town.

25. The ward comprises the northern half of Chinnor parish together with the neighbouring parishes of Sydenham and Towersey. There are good road links between the three villages

Chinnor South

26. This ward comprises the southern half of Chinnor parish with the neighbouring parishes of Crowell and Aston Rowant. The main communities very well connected via the B4009 – virtually all of the electorate lives within a few hundred metres of this road.

Cholsey

27. This ward covers the parishes of Cholsey (south of the A4130) and Moulsoford. Cholsey accounts for nearly 90 per cent of the electorate. It has the largest electorate of any of the wards we are proposing, 13.1 per cent above the average.

28. Options for linking Moulsoford parish with other parishes are constrained by the district boundary and the River Thames (with no crossing points). Cholsey is the only feasible option. We are reluctant to propose a further sub-division of Cholsey parish having already proposed that the northern part sits in a Wallingford South ward. In addition, there is no obvious further sub-division available. Hence, although electoral equality suffers we think that our proposal best reflects community identity.

Crowmarsh

29. This ward comprises three parishes west of Wallingford and that part of Benson parish that includes the RAF base. Crowmarsh parish accounts for nearly half of the total electorate.
30. There are good road links between Crowmarsh Gifford, Ewelme and RAF Benson. Part of the residential accommodation at the RAF base sits within Ewelme parish. The residential accommodation also sits closer to Ewelme village than Benson village. We consider that community identity is best served by placing the electorate from RAF Benson in this ward.

Forest Hill and Holton

31. This ward comprises nine parishes (minus a small part of Holton parish south of the A40 - see Wheatley) in the north-west of the district, loosely linked by the A40. Geographic considerations constrain options here, principally the northern boundary of the district and the boundary with Oxford City.
32. The existing ward of Forest Hill and Holton comprises six of the nine parishes – we have proposed adding three more to the west to achieve electoral equality. The road link between the seven western parishes and the two most easterly ones goes outside the ward for a short distance but we do not consider that this is of significance. Of greater importance in community identity terms is that eight of the nine parishes sit wholly within the Oxford Green Belt, with the ninth, Tiddington with Albury, partially covered.

Garsington and Horspath

33. This ward comprises three parishes to the east of Oxford City and south of Wheatley. There is a strong shared community identity as all three sit in the Oxford Green Belt.

Goring

34. This ward brings together the parish of Goring with the much smaller parish of South Stoke. Goring village accounts for almost 90 per cent of the total electorate. The River Thames provides a natural boundary to the west and the Chilterns escarpment to the east.

Haseley Brook

35. This is a collection of eight parishes linked by the A328 and A40, although two are very small in terms of both size and electorate. There is no dominant village. It lacks the community identity apparent in some other parts of the district, bringing together as it does a number of villages in a sparsely populated part of South Oxfordshire. To achieve equality of electorate, however, we think that this is an acceptable proposal.
36. We propose the ward name of Haseley Brook as this is a feature that runs east to west through the ward and part defines the boundary of seven of the eight parishes.

Kidmore End and Whitchurch

37. This ward comprises four parishes in the south of the district bounded by the River Thames and the district boundary with Reading. All the communities in this area tend to look southwards towards Reading and West Berkshire.

Peppard

38. This ward comprises five parishes in the Chiltern Hills above Henley. Rotherfield Peppard accounts for nearly half of the electorate, hence the proposed name. The various communities are well linked by the B481.

Sandford and the Wittenhams

39. This ward traverses the River Thames, bringing together six parishes north of the river with two to the south. The crossing point is a well used bridge between the villages of Clifton Hampden and Long Wittenham, which are about two kilometres apart.
40. Electoral equality dictates that it is necessary to create a ward that straddles the Thames and we are satisfied that this is the most appropriate location. There are good road links northwards into Oxford. Although there are no dominant settlements, the proposed name identifies the ward well and will be recognisable to electors.

Shiplake

41. This ward brings together five parishes in the far south east of the district. The southern and eastern boundary is well defined by the district boundary and that of Henley-on-Thames. Shiplake is the dominant community accounting for just under half of the total electorate. There are a myriad of country lanes that link together the villages and hamlets throughout the proposed ward.

Sonning Common

42. The ward boundary is co-terminus with the parish boundary.

Watlington

43. This ward comprises seven parishes, with Watlington sitting at the centre. Watlington is the dominant community accounting for over 70 per cent of the electorate. The surrounding parishes all look to and link well with Watlington.

Wheatley

44. The ward boundary is co-terminus with the parish boundary, with the exception of the inclusion of a small part of Holton parish south of the A40. We think that the inclusion of this area in Wheatley ward best reflects the natural community.

Woodcote

45. This ward comprises four parishes in the Chiltern Hills. Woodcote is the dominant parish with over 60 per cent of the electorate. The main settlements have reasonable road links with each other.