

CGR_G

Parishes Affected

Didcot

Matter to be considered

A review of the number of councillors elected for each town council ward to reflect the number of electors they represent.

Impact on district and county council boundaries

Didcot West and Didcot East & Hagbourne County Divisions.

There would be no impact on the district wards arising from the recommendation.

Proposal agreed by the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee on 25 May 2022 for consultation

To consult on a proposal that each of the existing parish wards is represented by the following number of councillors:

All Saints – 5 councillors

Ladygrove – 6 councillors

Millbrook – 1 councillor

Northbourne – 3 councillors

Orchard – 1 councillor

Park – 5 councillors

Summary of responses to the draft consultation

As can be seen from the engagement summary report, the consultation responses are equally split between those who support the draft proposal and those who oppose them – although the number who strongly oppose the draft proposal is higher than those who strongly support them. Feedback from the consultation included several comments suggesting that the parish should be divided into several more parish wards, a reduction in ward size, the merging of some of the existing wards and that account should be taken of future housing/population growth in certain areas of the town.

It is important to note that the current Community Governance Review was intended to pick up issues raised by parish councils for review and not intended as an extensive district wide review. Guidance suggests that such

district-wide reviews should be undertaken every 10-15 years and South Oxfordshire undertook such a review in 2013/14. In responding to the request from Didcot Town Council, officers have sought to address the councillor to elector ratio within the existing ward structure and council size (number of councillors).

Didcot Town Council responded that its comments and requests “had been largely ignored” by the committee. The resolution of the town council meeting held on 7 March 2022 is set out below:

1. SODC to conduct the full boundary review based on population growth.
2. The whole of Great Western Park to be within the Didcot boundaries and under the remit of Didcot Town Council.
3. Aspiration to have an equal number of Councillors to represent an equal number of residents on each ward.

Resolutions 1 and 2 are both outside the remit of a community governance review.

In respect of resolution 1, this is interpreted as relating to district wards and would require an electoral review to be undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

In respect of resolution 2, as advised at the previous meeting of this committee, parishes must fall within the boundaries of a single principal council area. Therefore, any move to include the whole of Great Western Park within Didcot parish would necessitate a Principal Area Boundary Review to alter the district boundary between South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council. Such a review would be undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

In respect of resolution 3, this committee agreed draft proposals for consultation at its meeting on 25 May 2022 recognising that other proposals could be put forward. In doing so there was an expectation that the town council would put forward proposals. As can be seen from the consultation responses, Didcot Town Council has not put forward any suggestions.

Recommendation

To combine the parish wards of Northbourne and Orchard and for each parish ward to be represented by the following number of councillors:

All Saints – 5 councillors

Ladygrove – 6 councillors

Millbrook – 1 councillor

Northbourne and Orchard – 4 councillors

Park – 5 councillors

Justification for recommendation

It is an important democratic principle that each person’s vote should be of equal weight so far as possible. Whilst there is no legislative provision that each parish councillor should represent the same number of electors, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England states that it is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government to have significant differences in levels of representation.

At the last meeting of the committee a number of members suggested that combining wards could achieve improved equality of weight. Combining Northbourne and Orchard wards addresses the anomaly of a councillor representing less than 500 electors.

Based on the current electorate for the parish (at 1.5.22) each of the 21 councillors would represent approximately 1103 electors across the whole parish. Based on this ratio the number of councillors for each ward would then be allocated as follows:

Parish Ward	Proposed number of councillors	Electorate at 1.5.22	Proposed electors per councillor (existing ratio shown in brackets)
All Saints	5 councillors	5896	1179 (1179)
Ladygrove	6 councillors	6102	1017 (872)
Millbrook	1 councillor	1637	1637 (1637)
Northbourne & Orchard	4 councillors	4405	1101 (985+467)
Park	5 councillors	5115	1023 (1705)

It is recognised that Millbrook will still have a larger elector to councillor ratio. However, the ward has a well defined boundary along Jubilee Way and the railway and is not suitable for merging with another ward.

Officers acknowledge that a wider review may be required to address the growth in population and potentially the size of wards, both matters raised during the consultation, but that this should form part of the next district wide review.