

## **CANTERBURY DISTRICT WARD BOUNDARY REVIEW**

### **COUNTER PROPOSALS FROM THE CANTERBURY SOCIETY**

#### **Purpose**

The LGBCE proposal to split two parish council areas, Harbledown & Rough Common and Thanington Without, between two different wards has provoked opposition on several good grounds. Splitting parishes complicates the work of elected parish councillors, of their clerks and of city councillors; it is also liable to confuse residents. A simple alignment whereby the whole of each parish is in one ward promotes better communication, clearer identity, more effective democracy and more convenient administration.

Splitting parishes means using weak boundaries, drawn for mathematical reasons, losing the strength of historic boundaries. In the case of Harbledown & Rough Common it leads to a confusing name, as no one in historic Upper or Lower Harbledown would identify with either Chartham or Stone Street. Generally, such splits weaken effective local government.

Furthermore, no argument is put forward by the LGBCE for sub-division of these two parishes, whether in the discussion of the boundary of Wincheap ward in paras 43-7, or in the sparse and scattered references to Harbledown & Rough Common in paras 55, 94 and 96. The scheme is discussed in terms of political party proposals as if the people in these parishes did not matter. On the contrary, in paras 91-2, the LGBCE recognises the integrity of Herne & Broomfield in rejecting one party's proposal and in para 58 the LGBCE rightly rejected the City Council's proposal to hive off part of Sturry parish.

We believe the principle which the LGBCE has used to protect Herne & Broomfield and Sturry parishes should, and can easily, be applied across the whole district so that no parish is split between wards.

This counter-proposal therefore proposes to re-unite the two split parishes in a single, appropriate ward. At the same time, it produces figures similar to the LGBCE's, makes better use of clear, strong boundaries within urban Canterbury than the BGCE does and by avoiding some arbitrary or confusing new lines drawn between wards, improves respect for community identities within the urban area.

#### **The Alternative Scheme**

To achieve this, the following six adjustments are proposed to the LGBCE draft scheme:

1. Move the part of Harbledown & Rough Common parish proposed to be attached to Chartham & Stone Street ward into Blean Forest ward (626 electors <sup>1</sup>)
2. Move the part of Thanington Without parish proposed to be attached to Chartham & Stone Street ward back into Wincheap ward (267 electors <sup>1</sup>)
3. Move the part of Barton ward south of the junction of Nackington Road with Old Dover Road into Chartham & Stone Street ward (400 electors <sup>2</sup>)

4. Move the part of the South Canterbury urban area placed in Wincheap ward into Barton ward (637 electors <sup>3</sup>)
5. Move the new development (BT site) between Rheims Way and the railway line from Westgate ward into Wincheap ward (288 electors <sup>4</sup>)
6. Move the area between Westgate Court Avenue and the Cemetery proposed to be attached to Blean Forest ward back into Westgate ward (317 <sup>5</sup>)

We also propose two tiny consequential tidying up improvements by using Stuppington Lane as a boundary and by including the whole of Wincheap (the road) in Wincheap (the ward), described below; this takes one elector, living on Wincheap (the road) back into Wincheap (the ward) instead of moving her/him into Barton.

Electorates	LGBCE scheme	This Counter-Proposal
Barton	8238 (2746 per cllr)	8474 (2825 per cllr)
Blean Forest	8011 (2670 per cllr)	8248 (2757 per cllr)
Chartham & Stone Street	5785 (2893 per cllr)	5292 (2646 per cllr)
Westgate	5709 (2855 per cllr)	5738 (2869 per cllr)
Wincheap	5623 (2812 per cllr)	5542 (2771 per cllr)
Average	2795	2774

For three out of the five wards this brings the figures closer to the 2013 norm. Overall, a 21 difference in the averages measure shows only a slight change.

However, Chartham & Stone Street ward moves significantly away from the target, though it is not as far from it as the LGBCE's Northgate (2494). It happens that this ward, within the boundaries proposed here, encompasses most of the rural area south of Canterbury earmarked for massive housing development in the local plan proposals recently put forward by the City Council. Whilst the scale of this development is hotly contested, few argue that more houses are not needed locally and that some of this area is likely to be build over. So it is very likely that by the 2020s, the number of electors per councillor would greatly exceed the norm in the LGBCE's Chartham & Stone Street ward. Starting with an undersized ward will help to maintain electoral equality into the future.

### **Boundaries within Urban Canterbury**

#### (1) Barton and Chartham & Stone Street

The present boundary between these two wards has the virtue of following a parish boundary, but little more. It does not fit with other boundaries on the ground or in day to day usage. The post-code divide, between CT1 and CT3, lies further north, between Underwood Close and The Dene; for many, in the modern world, this is a more real boundary, if invisible on the ground. The A2 bypass, a real and noisy physical boundary on the ground, lies further south.

Coming into Canterbury from the south, along Stone Street, the first point at which the human geography changes is well to the south, at Street End, where the road twists to the right and becomes Nackington Road. Prior to this point, Stone Street is very rural – the villages lie well back to its left or right. From Street End onwards there is some scattered ribbon development, but not continuously. Then, after the bridge over the bypass, continuous housing starts on the left, but the aspect on the right remains agricultural until we reach the CT1/CT3 divide. Paradoxically, along this stretch of Nackington Road the more urban west side is in Lower Hardres parish and so in the present Chartham & Stone Street ward, while the rural east side is unparished and so in Barton ward.

If the boundary is moved north to include in the Chartham & Stone Street ward all properties on Nackington Road or on roads leading off it, then the whole of the Nackington Road community will be in the same ward. There is a good open gap on the west side, in the form of the St Lawrence cricket ground and the hospital. This is not an ideal boundary, but no worse than using the parish boundary or any others cited. It is put forward as the best compromise between the criteria of numbers and strong boundaries.

If the LGBCE feels that the Chartham & Stone Street ward, as put forward here, needs more electors, then the boundary could be moved to include all the properties on the SW side of Old Dover Road from the junction with Nackington Road to the Gate Inn or Park & Ride site. However, this would not be as good and clear a boundary as the distinction between all those living on the Stone Street/Nackington Road radial route in one ward, and all those on the Old Dover Road route in another.

## (2) Barton and Wincheap

Both the present and the LGBCE proposed new lines are messy and bear no relationship to historic communities or to how people in South Canterbury relate to each other, their local South Canterbury community or the wider city. The Old Dover Road brings together people living alongside it, together with the roads off it to the SW (including Puckle Lane and Ethelbert Road) and the smaller roads leading off them, such as Prospect Place, Cromwell Road or Raymond Avenue. From the development of South Canterbury Road in the late nineteenth century that became the name of this cluster of roads. Today, there is a well-organised South Canterbury Residents Association, while the area is also covered by the Oaten Hill and District Society. OHDS recently published a historical guide to the Old Dover Road: “Old Dover Road – Past & Present”, which shows how the history of Puckle Lane, Ethelbert Road and Cromwell Road are linked into that their main artery into the city centre.

This history is reflected in modern habits. This area is close enough to the city centre for many people to walk to it. No one would dream of walking via Wincheap – it’s far too long a way round. Instead people from Puckle Lane, Ethelbert Road and Cromwell Road mingle with those from St Lawrence Forstal or Randolph Close (roads off it to the SW which are in Barton ward) as they walk to and fro along the Old Dover Road.

A simple and clear line along Stuppington Lane, South Canterbury Road and Nunnery Fields to the point where this road crosses the railway would provide a very much better boundary. Though passing along the middle of Stuppington Lane and part of South Canterbury Road, that would reflect housing layout. Most of the few houses on Stuppington Lane are clustered around the entry to Juniper Close; all addresses on South Canterbury Road would be in Barton ward. This is because a high hedge, originally around the workhouse, then the

hospital, lines South Canterbury Road/ Stuppington Lane to the west; the new housing development behind the hedge, on the hospital site, is a distinct little community. Use of Stuppington Lane also places the Simon Langton Boys School in same ward as the rest of Nackington Road. There appears to be no resident here now; but some years ago there were two in the school caretaker's house, who were anomalously attached to Wincheap.

The only difficulty is a very short stretch of Nunnery Fields. Both the present ward boundary and the LGBCE proposal puts parts of this road, albeit in different ways, in different wards. The line proposed here leaves just those properties on the west side above the railway bridge in Wincheap. These neighbour Norman Road and Nunnery Road, both of which slope down towards Wincheap, so making this a transitional zone. Any ward boundary hereabouts divides neighbours; the line of Nunnery Fields proposed here makes best sense as it runs for this short stretch on a ridge, with the ground (and roads) falling away each side.

### (3) Westgate and Wincheap

The LGBCE's use of the railway line as the northern boundary of Wincheap ward means that the few properties on Wincheap (the name of the road here) north of the line are confusingly placed in Barton or Westgate wards, and not in Wincheap ward. Running the line along Station Road East and Rheims Way avoids this. It also keeps in Wincheap ward the property, the Round House, on the corner of Station Road East and Wincheap (road), which the LGBCE proposes to move into Barton.

Its major effect is to move the residents of the recent Telephone House development (Bingley Court and St Andrews Court) from Westgate to Wincheap ward. These residents have to cross the inner ring road by underpass to get to the city centre on foot; all other Westgate ward residents either live within the walls or enter the centre via the Westgate straight into a shopping/eating out street. St Peters. Bingley Court and St Andrews Court people, on the contrary, walk through a significant residential area, with which they have no common history, to get to the shopping and leisure centre.

Residents of Wincheap and roads leading off it similarly have to cross the inner ring road by underpass or footbridge (at the station), so have a very similar relationship with the city centre to those of the Telephone House area. People living in Bingley Court and St Andrews Court live closer to shops, pubs and restaurants which line Wincheap (the road), also now sharing with Wincheap residents the new Aldi supermarket on the corner. They have two walking routes, along the pavement, past Aldi and then along Wincheap (the road) itself; or through what is locally known as the 'goat tunnel' under the railway, bringing them into the Wincheap industrial estate, with its numerous stores.

Thus Bingley Court and St Andrews Court residents are cut off from any identity with the rest of Westgate but are more naturally at home in Wincheap ward.

### (4) Westgate and Blean Forest

The numbers require a move of some part of Westgate into Blean Forest; but the LGBCE has taken the line too close to the urban centre of the city. It will be confusing if roads named for their proximity to the Westgate Tower (Westgate Close and Westgate Court Avenue) are not in the ward named Westgate. Running the line along a quiet residential road, Westgate Court Avenue, divides neighbours unnecessarily.

This proposal uses a natural breakpoint, the cemetery, north of which housing development tends to be later and, as one moves north, begins to be quasi-rural (so more in keeping with the name Blean Forest). Inspection on the ground suggests a cut-off between nos 117 and 119 Whitstable Road, keeping Clifton Gardens, which links into Westgate Court Avenue via Harcourt Drive, in Westgate ward. That is almost opposite Harkness Drive, which the LGBCE makes the new ward boundary between Westgate and St Stephen's. Thus, Westgate ward would extend up St Thomas Hill to the same point on each side, making the new boundaries more easily comprehensible.

More importantly, this adjustment re-unites the cluster of roads at the top of Westgate Court Avenue, which the LGBCE proposes to divide. People living here use the same routes into the city centre, along Westgate Court Avenue or picking up the bus routes which pass along the main roads to their south. The housing is more modest, often social, than the residential area further up the hill; there is no direct road link to take them north of the cemetery and no historic or commercial link in that direction. Their personal or family links tend to be with residents of the London Road estate, due the history of housing management in the city. Though divided from it by a busy road, they more often use the underpasses to go there for recreation (the Victoria Recreation Ground) or home visits than they cross the cemetery to go uphill. They belong, together, in Westgate ward.

This distinct, small, under-empowered community should not be split between wards.

Sources:

1 the 2013 electorate as supplied by Canterbury City Council

2 street analysis supplied by Canterbury City Council shows exactly 400 electors in Ealham Close (40), Nackington Rd (75), Renville (3), The Dene (28), The Foreland (116), The Gap (38), The Ness (33) and Underwood Close (67).

3 street analysis supplied by Canterbury City Council shows 617 electors in Cromwell Rd (113), Ethelbert Rd (160), Juniper Close (33), Lesley Avenue (51), Prospect Place (45), Puckle Lane (92), Raymond Avenue (66), Stuppington Lane (16) and Winchester Gdns (41). In addition, the dozen homes on the north side of Nunnery Fields probably contain about twenty electors, bring the total to 637.

5 street analysis supplied by Canterbury City Council shows 288 electors in Bingley Court (189), St Andrews Close (97) and the small part of Wincheap (the road) now in Westgate ward (2).

6 street analysis supplied by Canterbury City Council shows 287 electors in Clifton Gdns (43), Harcourt Drive (54), Sancroft Avenue (42), Westgate Close (111) and the northern side of Westgate Court Avenue proposed to be moved (37). In addition, nos 85 to 117 Whitstable Rd probably contain about thirty electors, bring the total to 317.

*Compiled by Michael Steed for the Canterbury Society in response to views from affected parishes and areas of urban Canterbury, with gratitude to the city council for the supply of detailed data. The responsibility for the calculations and any errors of detail rest with Michael Steed, who is an honorary lecturer at the University of Kent and both former city councillor for Barton ward and former chairman of the Oaten Hill & District Society.*

19.5.2014