

Electoral Working Group meeting on 28 November 2012

When the EWG met on 26 September it was decided to defer further work on the FER until after the PCC election on 15 November to allow for further discussion within the political groups.

The following comments have now been received:

Conservative Group

The Conservative Group has highlighted three areas of particular concern. These concerns are listed below with officer comments appended.

- Broad Oak and the Hallingburys: The Group wishes to retain the existing linkage between Hatfield Broad Oak and Great and Little Hallingbury and has submitted a proposal to re-jig boundaries of the three wards south of Takeley and Dunmow to achieve that. Map C shows the suggested ward boundaries.

Officer comment: the proposal adds Great Canfield to the existing Broad Oak and the Hallingburys ward, adds White Roding to the existing Hatfield Heath ward, and adds High Easter to what remains of the existing Rodings ward. This proposal effectively reallocates the eleven parishes without affecting any of the remaining proposed wards. The variance of all of the proposed wards is within the accepted tolerance range and is likely to be acceptable to the LGBCE.

Members therefore have a straight choice (but see alternative proposal from Cllr dean below) between the original option and the Conservative Group proposal. Both would work in terms of equality of representation and community identities and interests.

- The proposed inclusion of Little Walden within Ashdon ward and its consequent exclusion from a Saffron Walden based ward. The Group has proposed that Ashdon ward should remain as at present and that Little Walden should be added to a Saffron Walden ward instead.

Officer comment: this proposal will not work in terms of electoral equality and is unlikely to be accepted by the LGBCE. The deviation from the electoral average will be -15% at current figures and -16% by 2018. There seems little point in putting forward a proposal that clearly does not meet the statutory criteria unless there is overwhelming evidence of community ties that would justify a departure from the requirement for electoral equality.

This argument does not seem to apply in this case as, although joined to the parish of Saffron Walden, Little Walden is not part of the urban core of Saffron Walden, is a separate and distinct rural community and could integrate well with the nearby similar settlements of Hadstock and Ashdon.

If members are minded to disregard officer advice by linking Little Walden to Saffron Walden instead of Ashdon, then a compensating change will be needed to bolster electoral numbers in the proposed Ashdon ward. This can only be achieved by combining 200-300 electors from either Radwinter or Wimbish. Either of these options may not be considered satisfactory as it would require a division into separate parish wards in whichever of those parishes was selected. At first examination, although no detailed evaluation of this possibility has been

carried out, it seems unlikely that a clear or satisfactory division into separate community groupings can be achieved in either Radwinter or Wimbish. A proposal to add part of one of these parishes to Ashdon ward would have repercussions for the rest of the proposed scheme.

- **Elsenham and Takeley:** The Group has concluded that a merger between the villages of Elsenham and Takeley in a three member ward (or two wards of two members each incorporating Little Canfield) is too large and joins two completely unrelated communities. Two possible alternatives are suggested. The first would be to retain Takeley and Little Canfield in the same ward leaving the existing ward of Elsenham and Henham intact. The second option is to have Takeley as a standalone ward thus removing Little Canfield.

Officer comment: The proposal to combine Elsenham with Takeley (less the Priors Green area) in a three member ward (leaving Little Canfield and the Priors Green area as a single member ward) is acknowledged to be a difficult one for members to accept. It is also not ideal from the viewpoint of community identity because the two villages are located a few miles apart and do have different interests and identities.

As already stated, the proposal was made to resolve a logjam in the southern half of the district as it enabled the remaining parishes to fit together in a coherent warding pattern. It is still difficult to see any real alternative as described below.

If Elsenham and Henham is retained as an existing ward, the proposal for a Henham ward incorporating Debden Green and other neighbouring wards falls apart (although Cllr Dean has proposed a way of dealing with this difficulty).

Takeley and Little Canfield combined produces a 2018 electorate of 4231 which is 19% greater than the average per councillor and therefore very unlikely to be accepted. Takeley excluding Little Canfield would be very near to the required electoral average at -2% and would therefore be acceptable (although it would divide the community of Priors Green) but it leaves Little Canfield parish adrift with no ward to which it can be attached.

Officers will continue to explore alternative arrangements to avoid a pairing of Elsenham with Takeley but there may be no acceptable or practicable option available.

Councillor Dean

At, or just before, the EWG's last meeting on 26 September, Councillor Dean had suggested an alternative means of arranging new ward boundaries to enable the Elsenham/Henham and Barnston/High Easter wards to remain intact. This scheme contained a number of flaws including the probability of detached wards of Takeley/Broxted and the Canfields/High Roding/Little Easton.

Cllr Dean had now suggested two revised options to overcome these difficulties.

Option 1: Elsenham and Henham ward would gain the northern half of Broxted parish (which would then be warded) giving a total in the region of 3,800 electors or +7%.

Takeley ward (x2 members would then consist of the remainder of Broxted (230 electors) and the whole of Takeley parish, including Priors Green (although not the part in Little Canfield). There would be in the region of 3,700 electors or +4%.

There would be a ward consisting of Great Canfield, Little Easton, High Roding and the majority of Little Canfield parish excluding only that part east of High Cross Lane West and south of the old A120. The detached eastern part of Little Canfield including just over 100 electors would be added to a Great Dunmow based ward. The resulting ward would include some 1770 electors or 0%.

Great Dunmow would then receive 104 voters from Little Canfield, together with Little Dunmow producing 8996 electors divided by five members which overall would be at +1%.

Officer comment: This is a revised scheme to take account of the problems about detached wards mentioned above. The proposed Canfields based ward does seem unsatisfactory in a number of respects. First, the division of Little Canfield takes little account of community loyalties as the proposed split is not between Priors Green and the village community but divides the old village community along what seems to be an artificial boundary. Part of the old village is then paired with that part of Priors Green included within Little Canfield and that is where the parish ward division would fall. This then leaves the community of Priors Green itself divided between two wards. If Little Canfield is to be divided it would be better to make a clean division between Priors Green (including some properties clustered nearby along Stortford Road) and the rest. The LGBCCE say they would not normally recommend the creation of parish wards containing less than 100 electors. The proposed eastern division of Little Canfield would result in a parish ward very close to that minimum figure.

In addition it seems less than satisfactory to attach a very small number of rural electors to a ward with largely urban characteristics (in Great Dunmow), especially where no close community links can be found.

The other problem with the Canfields ward is the inclusion of Little Easton as there are no direct road or other links between that village and the other parishes concerned. This is in contravention of the LGBCCE's guidance in paragraph 5.31 to ensure that wards are internally coherent by ensuring there are reasonable road links across the ward so that it can be easily traversed.

In terms of electorate figures, the proposals in Cllr Dean's option 1 are all within tolerance levels.

Option 2: Takeley ward consisting of the main core of Takeley village and the whole of Priors Green (including that part in Little Canfield) but excluding everything in Takeley parish north of the A120. There would be in the region of 3860 electors in this ward with a variance of +9.

Elsenham and Henham ward would then consist of the existing electors together with some 200 electors in Takeley north of the A120, producing a total of 3830 with a variance of +8%.

The Canfields ward would then include Great Canfield as well as most of the old community of Little Canfield (170 electors), together with Broxted, Little Easton

and High Roding. There would be in the region of 1710 electors in this ward at a variance of -4%.

Great Dunmow wards would remain as before but without the addition of any electors from Little Canfield.

As an alternative to the above, Great Easton could be transferred into the Canfields ward to replace Broxted which would then go into the Thaxted ward.

Officer comment: Many of the comments listed in respect of option 1 apply also to this option. The figures would all work but the two member wards of Elsenham/Henham and Takeley/Priors Green would both have variances close to might be considered acceptable.

Councillor Lemon

Councillor Lemon has proposed a single member ward for Hatfield Heath, as at present, but with the addition of electors from the New Common area of Little Hallingbury to make the numbers balance between Hatfield Heath and the Hallingburys which would then revert to a single member ward.

His letter states that it is easier for the elected member to work in one community where it is possible to get to know everyone and that Hatfield Heath, as one of the seven principal villages of Uttlesford, should be separately represented.

Officer comment: If members select the Conservative option the problem alluded to by Cllr Lemon will be resolved as White Roding will be added to Hatfield Heath to produce the required number of electors.

If the original option is favoured, it seems there are an insufficient number of electors at New Common to balance the numbers between the two areas. I could find only about 50 electors whereas around 200 are required.

Great Hallingbury Parish Council

The Parish Council has written to the LGBCE, copied to UDC, asking for Broad Oak and the Hallingburys ward to remain intact with the addition of Great Canfield. A case is made for this proposal based on a commonality of community interests relating to Hatfield Forest, Stansted Airport and other related matters.

Officer comment: The parish Council's proposal coincides exactly with the proposal from the Conservative Group although it conflicts with the original officer option and the options submitted by Cllr Dean. As already stated above, the alternative Conservative proposal fits with the statutory criteria and therefore provides an acceptable solution.

Residents of WickenBonhunt

A number of residents from WickenBonhunt, including Mr and Mrs Taylor, Mrs Murray and Anna Arend have objected to the proposal to detach WickenBonhunt from the Calvering ward and to include it instead within the Newport ward. The objections are all based on community links and values and the strong representation received from the Clavering ward member.

Officer comment: I have responded to say that there are no firm proposals as yet but that, in formulating a revised scheme, the whole of the district must be taken into account.

Timetable for concluding the review and decisions needed

This stage of the FER concludes on 14 January 2013 and, whatever else happens, a fully worked up warding scheme is must be agreed by the Council in time to make a submission by that date.

The timetable looks to be as follows:

- EWG meeting this evening. A clear steer from members is requested this evening to enable the under-mentioned detailed evaluation and mapping work to be carried out. There is very limited time for this exercise to be completed.
- A further meeting, or possible two further meetings, will almost certainly be needed between now and Christmas.
- A fully developed scheme with full mapping and reasons for the decisions made must be prepared and signed off by the EWG by no later than 20 December.
- This will involve agreeing the number of electors as at 2018 on a street by street basis and drawing clear boundaries identifiable on a map, in Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted, as well as in those parishes that are proposed to be divided between different wards.
- The agenda for the extraordinary Council meeting must be published by 28 December. The report, incorporating the Council's case for the scheme being proposed, together with full mapping, must be fully settled by then. In practice, the details must all be agreed and worked out by no later than 20 December.
- Full Council meeting on 9 January 2013 to agree the Council's submission to the LGBCE.
- The agreed scheme will be submitted by no later than 14 January.

Possible dates for the further EWG meetings are Monday, 10 December and Wednesday, 12 December (after Planning). If a further meeting is needed it could take place on Monday, 17 December or Wednesday, 19 December.

Clarity is needed this evening on the approach to take to inform the further evaluation and mapping work needed to prepare a scheme for approval.

Ideally, the following is needed:

- Whether Little Walden is to be included in a revised Ashdon ward and, if not, full and supportable reasons why not. If Little Walden is not to be included in Ashdon ward, an alternative means is needed of balancing the number of electors needed.
- Whether the pairing of Elsenham with Takeley is acceptable and, if not, an alternative workable solution.
- Whether Priors Green is to be included in the same ward area.
- The configuration of the revised wards to the south of Takeley and Great Dunmow.

The maps provided are:

- Map A – Map indicating the 2012 and 2018 electorate figures submitted to the LGBCE shown by parish and polling district
- Map B – Map showing the officers' original revised option scheme
- Map C – Alternative suggestions submitted by the Conservative Group
- Map D – Councillor Dean's option 1 scheme showing alternative proposals covering the central and southern parts of the district
- Map E – Councillor Dean's option 2 scheme

Peter Snow
28/11/12