

Wycombe District Council – Community Governance Review

Initial Proposals for the CGR Public Consultation

This report is prepared by LGRC (Local Government Resource Centre) on the instructions of Wycombe District Council. The purpose of the report is to conduct a facts based analysis to prepare initial proposals for consultation. At this stage it does not take into account the views of individuals or groups. The report makes preliminary recommendations about what form of governance meets the criteria so that when consultation is carried out there is sufficient information to ensure that those being consulted understand what is being proposed. This report is based on the criteria for conducting a community governance review which are set out nationally. These are that the governance arrangements should reflect the identities and interests of the communities in High Wycombe and that they should provide effective and efficient local governance.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

- 1.1 Community Governance Reviews (CGR's) provide the opportunity for principal councils (in this instance Wycombe District Council-WDC) to review and make changes to community governance within their areas. The legislation for CGR's is contained in Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and there is also Government guidance to inform the review process [Guidance](#)¹. Within this report, section 3 of the Guidance is important, and particularly pages 19 to 21 that cover the issues of '*the identities and interests of local communities and effective and convenient local government*'.

Background

- 1.2 A principal council (in this case Wycombe District Council) has the power to undertake community governance reviews and make changes to local community governance arrangements. Any review has to be undertaken with regard to the community governance review guidance issued jointly by (the former) Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the LGBCE (Local Government Boundary Commission for England) in 2010. This guidance is referenced under note 1 above.

¹ Guidance on Community Governance Reviews - Department for Communities and Local Government Local & Government Boundary Commission for England, March 2010

What is a community governance review?

- 1.3 A community governance review can consider a number of things including:
- Creating, merging, altering or abolishing parishes including town councils;
 - The naming of parishes and the style of new parishes;
 - The grouping of parishes under a common parish council;
 - The electoral arrangements for parishes;
 - Council size i.e. the number of councillors and parish warding.
- 1.4 In undertaking any Review, the Council is guided by the following legislation:
- Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007;
 - Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/625);
 - Local Government Finance (New Parishes) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/626);
 - Relevant parts of the Local Government Act 1972.

Final Decision

- 1.5 When the CGR is completed it will be presented to the relevant member body for a final decision. Because Wycombe District Council is subject to The Buckinghamshire (Structural Changes) Order 2019 and the decision will be made during the transitional period the Shadow Executive of the new Buckinghamshire Council will be the relevant member body.
- 1.6 The Shadow Executive will need to consider whether to make a Reorganisation Order to change the existing arrangements and whether to create any parish council for the area.

Submitted Petitions

- 1.7 On Monday 10 December 2018, the following two petitions were handed in
- a petition by the residents of Totteridge for a Community Governance Review with a view to forming a parish council in Totteridge.
 - a petition by the residents of Micklefield for a Community Governance Review with a view to forming a parish council in Micklefield.
- 1.8 On 21st February 2019 a further two petitions were handed in:
- A petition by the residents of Sands Ward for a Community Governance Review with a view to forming a parish council in Sands
 - A petition by the residents of the unparished area i.e. the wards of Abbey, Booker and Cressex, Bowerdean, Disraeli, Micklefield, Oakridge and Castlefield, Ryemead, Sands, Terriers and Amersham Hill and Totteridge with a view to forming a town council for the unparished area.

- 1.9 The petitions were verified and therefore Community Governance Reviews must be carried out of the relevant areas. At its meeting the Council decided to combine the reviews so this report considers the proposals in all four petitions. The timescale of the review because it is combined into a single review of the unparished area will run to 10th December 2019 as that is the timeframe for the first review to be completed.
- 1.10 The 2007 Act requires the Council to consult the local government electors for the area under review and any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the Review and to take the representations that are received into account by judging them against the criteria.

Charter Trustees

- 1.11 The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008 (provide that

15.—(1) The following provisions of this regulation apply in any case where, in consequence of a reorganisation order, a city or town for which charter trustees have been constituted by or under any enactment becomes wholly comprised in a parish or in two or more parishes.

(2) On the date on which the first parish councillors for the parish or parishes (as the case may be) come into office—

(a) the charter trustees shall be dissolved;

(b) the mayor and deputy mayor (if any) shall cease to hold office as such;

(c) the appointment of any local officer of dignity shall be treated as if it had been made by the parish council;

(d) all property, rights and liabilities (of whatever description) of the charter trustees shall become property, rights and liabilities of the parish council;

- 1.12 If the Shadow Executive decided to make a Reorganisation Order to create a parish or a town council for the whole of the unparished area the Charter Trustee arrangement would therefore come to an end. Where only part of the area remains unparished this would not be the case.

Terms of Reference for Reviews

- 1.13 Section 81 LG&PIHA 2007 requires the principal council to draw up terms of reference specifying the area under review. There is no legal requirement to consult on the terms of reference. The guidance identifies that:

‘the terms should be appropriate to local people and their circumstances and reflect the specific needs of their communities.’

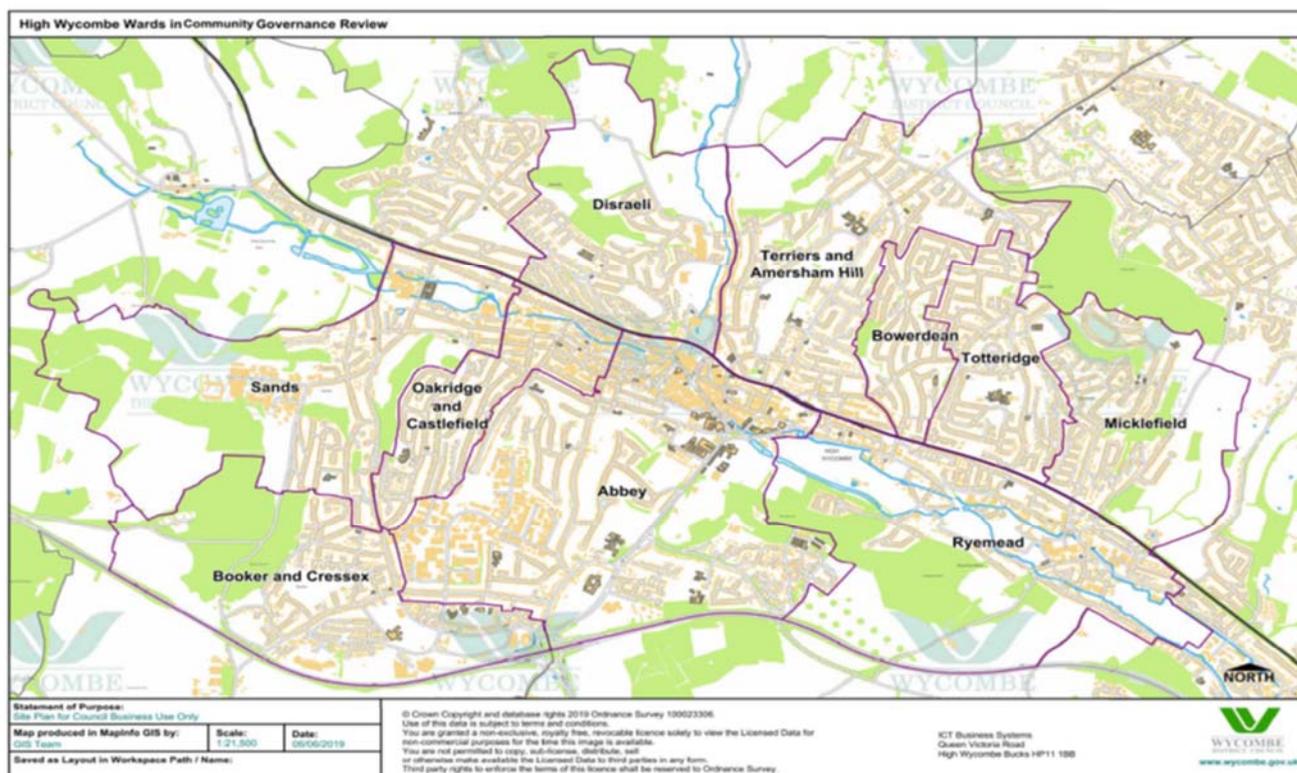
- 1.14 WDC agreed the Terms of Reference for the CGR at its Regulatory and Appeals Committee held on 18 March 2019. The Terms of Reference stated that the CGR would consider the subject of all four petitions that triggered the Governance Review, namely, to consider:
- Whether to establish a parish council for the ward of Micklefield
 - Whether to establish a parish council for the ward of Totteridge
 - Whether to establish a parish council for the ward of Sands
 - Whether to establish a town council for the whole of the unparished area of High Wycombe
- 1.15. Following the Council's publication of the Terms of Reference, LGRC were retained by the Council to assist with the CGR process. Part of the brief given to LGRC was to draw up preliminary conclusions about what form of governance would best meet the criteria.
- 1.16. This report provides recommendations which will inform the public consultation process. LGRC have completed a mainly desk top exercise which will be subject to consultation before any final decision is made. The final decision will be based on the stated criteria but will take into account the consultation responses.

2. THE IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- 2.1 This section of the report considers whether the wards of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge show any characteristics which could define them as having discrete identities from the rest of High Wycombe by examining a range of statistical data and natural geographical traits. In order to identify what constitutes a community and to develop our conclusions, LGRC have used a range of statistical data comprising ward population and electorate data; indices of multiple deprivation; income data, employment data; education, skills and employment data; health and crime data; barriers to housing and services data and data on living environment. In addition, we have presented conclusions on population and geographical information including age and ethnicity and the location of cultural, leisure and other local services. Defining 'community' is not a precise science and an element of subjective reasoning is required, however, the conclusions have been influenced by the facts available to us and not by the views of local people. The conclusions will be subject to consultation.

Geography and Population

- 2.2 High Wycombe is currently an unparished area comprising ten wards bordered by nine parished areas. It is the only unparished area in the, soon to be created, new Unitary Authority area of Buckinghamshire and if the outcome of this review is no change, it will have different governance arrangements to the remainder of the Buckinghamshire area.



- 2.3 The map illustrates that High Wycombe is a clearly defined town and the only current area that is unparished in the district of Wycombe. The area of the town defines High Wycombe as a distinct geographical location and is recognised as a separate community. The town is served by a single main hospital, single rail station, and has a well-defined town centre with a high concentration of restaurants, bars and retail outlets which further demonstrate its position as a single commercial and residential area, with a distinct identity widely recognised historically and currently as a specific community area.
- 2.4 As the map shows, the wards of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge do not stand out as discrete geographical areas and visually the wards appear to be established within the town of High Wycombe.
- 2.5 High Wycombe is largely an urban environment and whilst there are distinct green areas in the town, the aerial map illustrates that the town is relatively homogenous with, perhaps, the exception of the parish of Downley to the north west which could potentially be seen as part of the town and subject to a future Community Governance Review. However, Downley is already a parish council and it does not form part of the unparished area and is not included within this review.
- 2.6 According to 2011 ONS statistics, the town of High Wycombe has a population of 71,062. The ward of Abbey has the largest population with Booker and Cressex having the least population as shown in the table below.

Ward	Population	Size in Hectares	Electorate ²
Abbey	10,365	455.8	7,716
Oakridge and Castlefield	9,406	111.14	6,496
Terriers and Amersham Hill	9,181	276.48	7,103
Ryemead	7,088	346.06	5,728
Totteridge	6,562	121.42	4,887
Sands	6,214	337.16	4,733
Disraeli	5,891	213.51	4,668
Micklefield	5,807	177.47	3,969
Bowerdean	5,574	74.24	4,014
Booker and Cressex	4,974	262.4	3,751

Source: 2011 ONS statistics - Table 1

2.7 The population sizes of Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge do not make them stand out as being remarkable, nor do the sizes of electorate. The relevance of this is to show that the three wards cannot evidence any form of domination within the town of High Wycombe arising from population numbers or indeed the size of the electorate. Ward populations within High Wycombe clearly merge and in all ten wards there will be individual roads that are divided by artificially imposed ward boundaries. Again, this begins to evidence that the geography of High Wycombe and ward boundaries would appear not to create obvious communities of identity.

‘Place’ Indices³

2.8 The table given below shows a range of indices covering relative deprivation; income; employment; education, skills and training; health deprivation; crime; barriers to housing and services and living environment. The purpose of this is to show whether a pattern emerges that shows whether any of the three petitioned wards are markedly different in nature from the rest of High Wycombe, thereby indicating that a separate community may exist. Government guidance on undertaking Community Governance Reviews is clear that ‘place’ is important when considering community governance and whether to set up a parish council. Consideration of a range of indices is therefore necessary when determining whether a community offers a safe, healthy and sustainable environment.

² Source: WDC 2019 Electoral register

³ The table shows a range of data reflecting Lower Layer Super Output Area’s (LSOA’s) that have been averaged for each of the ten High Wycombe wards to generate a single figure for each data set.

Scores are given out of 10 where 1 is in the most deprived 10% of LSOA's nationally. Scores are rounded to the nearest .5

Ward / Overall Rank and score	Index of Multiple Deprivation	Income	Employment	Education, Skills and Training	Health	Crime	Barriers to Housing and Services	Living Environment
Abbey 1 (7.18)	8	7	8	7.5	9	6	5	7
Terriers and Amersham Hill 2 (7)	7.5	6.5	7	8	9	6	6	6
Sands 3 (6.63)	7	6	6.5	5	9	5	7	7.5
Disraeli 4= (6.56)	7	5.5	6	4.5	8.5	6	6	9
Totteridge 4= (6.56)	6.5	5	6.5	4	8.5	7	6	9
Booker and Cressex 5= (5.88)	6	5	5	5	7	5	4	10
Ryemead 5= (5.88)	6	5	7	6	9	6	3	5
Bowerdean 6 (5.75)	6	4	5	4	8	6	5	8
Micklefield 7 (5.31)	5	3.5	4	3	8	5	5	9
Oakridge and Castlefield – 8 (4.5)	4	3	4	2	7	4	5	7

Source: Government National Statistics – English Indices of Deprivation 2015 – Table 2

- 2.9 The table above shows that, overall, Abbey is the least deprived ward and Oakridge and Castle is the most deprived ward. However, the table also shows that in general the picture for High Wycombe is good and that the variation between the most deprived and least deprived wards is relatively low. Few indices are in the top 10% nationally and few are in the bottom 10% nationally. In particular, High Wycombe appears to be a very healthy town.
- 2.10 The table shows that the three focus wards of Sands, Totteridge and Micklefield do not stand out as remarkable, their overall scores being very similar.
- 2.11 This analysis shows that High Wycombe as a community entity is relatively prosperous, enjoying overall high health indices and high living environment indices. There are few indices that are very low which arguably helps evidence that High Wycombe is generally a successful community which is thriving.

Age and Ethnicity

- 2.12 Government guidance makes it clear that the demographics of an area are an important consideration for Community Governance Reviews. Specific

demographics regarding age and ethnicity play a strong role in determining the make-up of a community.

2.13 The table below shows a breakdown of age ranges for each of the ten wards in the unparished area of High Wycombe.

Ward / Total Population	Ages 0-9	Ages 10-17	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-64	Age 65+
Abbey – 10,365	1,094	1,344	2,577	4,172	1,178
Booker and Cressex – 4,974	489	447	678	2,287	1,073
Bowerdean – 5,574	833	691	1,163	2,420	467
Disraeli – 5,891	804	568	1,339	2,594	586
Micklefield – 5,807	956	628	960	2,618	645
Oakridge and Castlefield – 9,406	1,656	994	2,355	3,696	705
Ryemead – 7,088	1,050	515	1,571	3,636	316
Sands – 6,214	895	601	1,188	2,947	583
Terriers and Amersham Hill – 9,181	1,066	939	1,949	4,120	1,107
Totteridge – 8,683	1,046	899	1,048	4,407	1,283

Source: 2011 ONS statistics – Table 3

2.14 The table shows that the age demographic in High Wycombe is fairly evenly spread. Across all wards the highest concentration of age population is within the 30-64 age bracket with no ward showing a particularly high concentration of either older or younger populations. Totteridge has a slightly higher percentage of older residents than Sands and Micklefield, and Micklefield has a slightly higher percentage of 17 year-olds and below, but neither difference could be deemed significant and there is little evidence to show that age could be a factor in determining a separate community identity for any of the three focus wards.

2.15 The table below shows the demographics of High Wycombe broken down into white, mixed multiple ethnic groups, Asian/British Asian, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and Other ethnic groups.

Ward	White %	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups %	Asian/Asian British %	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British %	Other ethnic group %
Abbey	62	4	27	6	1
Booker and Cressex	75	3	15	7	0
Bowerdean	46	4	42	8	0
Disraeli	65	4	24	7	0
Micklefield	71	6	13	10	0
Oakridge and Castlefield	35	4	51	9	1
Ryemead	79	5	10	6	0
Sands	66	5	23	5	1
Terriers and Amersham Hill	75	4	15	5	1
Totteridge	70	5	17	7	1

Source: 2011 ONS statistics – Table 4

2.16 Ethnic population breakdowns, or communities of interest are an important focus in Community Governance Reviews since building or maintaining community cohesion is important if local governance arrangements are changing as they are in Buckinghamshire. The figures above clearly show that High Wycombe enjoys a varied multi-cultural population and there are two wards with higher percentages of Asian/Asian British population. The wards of Bowerdean and Oakridge and Castlefield have a relatively high percentage of Asian/Asian British residents when compared with other wards. However, the wards of Sands, Micklefield and Totteridge do not have any particular differences which would indicate that they are separate communities to other parts of the town in relation to demographics.

2.17 This provides further evidence that there is no particular evidence in favour of establishing separate parish councils for these wards and thereby different governance arrangements from the rest of High Wycombe. It may even be divisive and have a negative impact on community cohesion if specific wards are singled out and separated from the wider community which currently appears to be a stable community within the High Wycombe area.

Access to culture and services

2.18 High Wycombe enjoys access to a number of public amenities, facilities, parks and open spaces, religious establishments, arts facilities etc. All ten wards have access to play areas and public open spaces and there is a main public library supported by local libraries in Micklefield and Oakridge and Castlefield. There is a main arts centre and theatre in the centre of town as well as a main Wycombe Leisure Centre and sports centre located in Ryemead. Most of the ten wards are served by some form of community centre and there is a main

museum located in the centre of town. There are churches across the whole of High Wycombe and 3 Mosques in Oakridge and Castlefield, Micklefield and Terriers and Amersham as well as a temple also in Oakridge and Castlefield.

2.19 This distribution of local amenities evidences good access across the whole of High Wycombe that is not centred in any particular area except the town centre. Although Micklefield does have its own library and Mosque this is not unique to Micklefield and similar patterns are not evident in Totteridge or Sands. There is therefore no indication from the amenities that would support identifying those wards as functioning as separate communities from the Town. The distribution of cultural facilities and services does not identify any particular area as being dominant and does not mark out any of the three focus wards as having any special identity as result of being, for instance, a cultural quarter.

2.20 In conclusion and in accordance with Government guidance on undertaking Community Governance Reviews, having examined a range of factors that affect the identities and interests of local communities, it has not been possible for us to clearly evidence that any of the three focus wards display traits that might separate them out as being a particular area of separate identity that might benefit from its own very local form of governance outside the rest of High Wycombe. In relation to Wycombe District Council consulting on a Community Governance Review, with regards to the identities and interests of local communities **LGRC recommend** that if a parish council is to be formed as a result of the review it should be a parish covering the whole of High Wycombe which would best promote the development of a safe, healthy and sustainable governance environment.

However, this analysis of community is based on the physical and community characteristics and has not taken into account the views of local communities which are an important factor in determining community identity. The question of community identity should therefore continue to be a focus of the consultation to better understand the views of residents in the local area before any final decision is reached.

3. EFFECTIVE AND CONVENIENT LOCAL GOVERNANCE

3.1 The previous section of this report examined a range of factors that determine the identity of a local community and how this is best served by local governance. This section will now examine whether a parish council as a possible new form of local governance in High Wycombe can be viable in terms of:

- enabling the delivery of effective local services
- cost- effective delivery of local services
- best supporting local democracy and engagement

3.2 In order to properly examine this issue, it is necessary to consider also whether the same or better outcomes might be achieved by other forms of non-parish local governance. There are examples across the nation of other forms of local governance which are not based on democratically elected representatives.

These include Area Committees, Neighbourhood Management, Area/Community Forums, Tenant Management Organisations, Residents and Tenants Associations and Community Associations. All such groups could exist in areas within High Wycombe and the Council could decide to recommend the formation or recognition of any of these types of local groups. Indeed, such groups could exist alongside a new parish council structure, as for instance is the case in Wiltshire that operates an Area Committee structure as part of the Unitary Authority that functions alongside fully parished governance arrangements. The table submitted at appendix 1 illustrates a comparison of the alternative governance arrangements alongside parished governance arrangements.

3.3 It is important to stress that all other forms of local governance arrangements can and do run alongside parished governance, so it is not necessarily an either/or consideration.

3.3.1 **Parish or Town Council**

The main feature of a parish or town council is that it is independent and would be a new form of governance for the area. This would provide local governance at a tier below the new unitary council which will in the future represent the County area. A parish council is a legal entity which gives it the power to enter into contractual arrangements, employ staff and raise revenue which enables it to fund and manage local services in its area. It can also generate income and use that income to pay for services. Revenue generated or raised by the parish council must be used in the local area and be directed to the service of the local area. There are also specific powers available to parishes which are not available to other arrangements. A parish council is therefore financially independent from the principal council. The concerns raised in relation to the creation of new parishes relate to a proliferation of small parishes which have little capacity to deliver services. High Wycombe, if it is to be a parished area, would have one of the larger populations and is not overlapping or changing existing parished areas.

3.3.2 **Current Arrangements**

The current arrangements include both Charter Trustees which deal with the historical and ceremonial aspects of the area. They precept to raise revenue to provide for this and employ a clerk to support the Trustees and the Mayor. There is also an area committee within Wycombe District Council which is used to consider needs of the local area. Wycombe District Council also raises revenue through Special Expenses which is spent in the local area following consultation with the Town Committee. With the abolition of Wycombe District Council there is an option for the new unitary Council to create a similar area committee and to operate in a way that serves the local community through an area based committee. However, this is a decision which is outside this review. Even if an area committee exists there is no obligation on the unitary to establish local arrangements or to direct revenue to specific parts of the area. The unitary council has a responsibility to all its residents according to the

needs of the area. It is worth noting that while over 70% of the territory of England has parish governance arrangements, this represents only 30% of population, so more locally adopted other arrangements both in cities and in other urban areas are not uncommon.

The Shadow Council is currently drawing up Localism arrangements having regard to the County Council business case which identified 19 Community Boards across Buckinghamshire. These arrangements are likely to be put in place across the whole of the Buckinghamshire area on a consistent basis to provide a pattern of local representation and engagement. If these governance arrangements are to be the only form of governance for the unparished area then High Wycombe would be represented solely by the Unitary Council, a situation which would be unique in Buckinghamshire. Within our work up to this point we could find no substantial argument for treating High Wycombe as an exception.

3.3.3 Other Governance Arrangements

In preparing this report we have explored a range of alternative governance arrangements which seek to identify whether there are other forms of governance which would best meet the criteria of effective and efficient local democracy. The chart set out at Appendix 1 summarises these governance arrangements and the considerations in relation to the pros and cons of their local governance. In conclusion there is no specific governance arrangement that has the wide range of powers that a parish council would offer which would enable it to provide effective services in the area, whilst it may not be the most lowest cost option it is the only option which provides local democratic representation for the area.

3.4 It is therefore the conclusion of LGRC that a parish Council is the governance model that is most likely to provide effective, efficient and local governance.

3.5 These conclusions have been based on a factual analysis of the area and the views of local residents have not been considered as part of this process. It is however recognised that the four petitions which were submitted demonstrate that there is a proportion of the population who do not feel that the current governance arrangements are sufficient. It is recommended that the consultation should further explore this to establish whether there is a more widespread appetite for new local governance in the area.

Funding Arrangements

3.6 One of the main concerns about the creation of new governance is cost and whether it is cost effective to put in place an additional tier of governance. Parish councils are revenue funded by raising a local council tax which then generates what is called a precept. This precept is a sum of money that is then collected and distributed to the parish council by the principal authority. In the case of High Wycombe or any parish for Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge, this would be the new Unitary Authority for Buckinghamshire. Parish councils can also generate additional revenue by raising income themselves by charging for

local services that they may provide such as burial services or charges for allotments provision.

3.7 Key to generating an income through the precept is an areas tax base. Put very simply, the tax base is the number of houses that a parish council can charge council tax.⁴ Residents in High Wycombe are already charged an additional amount of council tax through what is called Special Expenses. The current Special Expense amount for a Band D property is £14.50. This charge goes towards funding the delivery of some specific services in High Wycombe such as High Wycombe Cemetery and the costs associated with having Charter Trustees. Special expenses are different to the council tax charged by parish councils, the amount of which is determined exclusively by the parish council themselves.

3.8 The table below shows the 2018/19 Band D tax base for the unparished area of High Wycombe and indicative tax bases for the ten wards of High Wycombe calculated to help illustrate the difference in income a parish council can generate depending on its tax base. The precept is calculated simply by multiplying the council tax charge by the tax base and the total precepts shown are for illustration only based on the current Special Expenses charge of £14.50 for a Band D property.

Ward	Indicative Tax Base (based on Band D properties)	Indicative Council tax charge (based on current special expenses charge)	Precept (income generated by the council tax charge)
Abbey	3,374.66	£14.50	£48,932.57
Booker and Cressex	1,640.53	£14.50	£23,787.69
Bowerdean	1,755.56	£14.50	£25,455.62
Disraeli	2,041.59	£14.50	£29,603.06
Micklefield	1,735.88	£14.50	£25,170.26
Oakridge and Castlefield	2,841.08	£14.50	£41,195.66
Ryemead	2,505.19	£14.50	£36,325.26
Sands	2,070.02	£14.50	£30,015.29
Terriers and Amersham Hill	3,106.56	£14.50	£45,045.12
Totteridge	2,137.37	£14.50	£30,991.87
Whole of unparished area of High Wycombe	23,208.46	£14.50	£336,522.67

⁴ The calculation for the tax base is more complicated than this and is affected by the housing type in any given area and the number of households receiving council tax benefit, plus other factors.

- 3.9 This table clearly shows, the greater the tax base, the greater the income. The population of a given area is therefore very important with regards to income generation and efficiencies created by economies of scale. Equally, the greater the council tax charge, the greater the income. A parish council can set its own council tax charge, and this figure varies greatly across the country from nil charges in some areas to some parish councils that charge an annual band D council tax in excess of £300. The national average council tax charge for Parish Councils is currently in the region of £60. The average council tax charge for parish councils in the District of Wycombe for 2019/20 is £47.95
- 3.10 In terms of providing effective local governance with the ability to deliver local services a parish council based on the whole of High Wycombe would in our view be more effective than smaller parishes based on the wards of Micklefield, Sands or Totteridge because the administration would lower as a percentage of the revenue raised. It would also provide greater revenue providing greater flexibility in how that revenue was directed to services within the area. If the current services delivered under the existing Special Expenses scheme were to be transferred locally once the new Unitary Authority of Buckinghamshire is established then they could only practically be delivered at parish level based on the whole of High Wycombe, not on a smaller ward level. Similarly, the Charter Trustees can only be absorbed on the whole area and not on part.
- 3.11 It is unlikely however that an annual council tax charge based on the current Special Expenses and Charter Trustee rate only would continue after the new Council is created. If services were transferred to a new parish council for High Wycombe, the new parish council would incur additional expenses other than those required for delivering the services provided through the District Council and the Town Committee. The new unitary is likely to engage with a new Council about devolution of services. The new council may have to fund infrastructure such as premises, support functions such as HR and accountancy and they would have to employ a 'Proper Officer' (a clerk or chief executive) and a 'Responsible Financial Officer' as a minimum. The likelihood of establishing a new parish council for High Wycombe on the illustrative council tax charge of £14.50 as shown above would therefore be unlikely. It is likely that a new Council would result in an increase to the current tax charge.
- 3.12 While it is possible for the principal council to establish a parish council and to determine its first year precept in subsequent years the new members will have the opportunity to take independent decisions about revenue charges which is likely to see some increase to local tax payers. This is however a matter for the new Council and the size and type of parish is a matter for the new parish itself once created.
- 3.13 In conclusion, therefore, LGRC do not recommend consulting on a specific council tax charge or council tax charge range as it is not yet known what services/assets might be transferred to a new parish council. Instead **it is recommended** that a minimal council tax charge / precept is set in the first year to cover the costs of the Charter trustees and the new Buckinghamshire Council

budgets to provide a single lump sum to establish the new council with a view to the new parish council determining its structure and what it would like to achieve during its first twelve months of existence and to set its first normal council tax in 2021/22. It is recommended that the lump sum be sufficient to enable the new council to become established. That should enable the new parish council to employ its statutory staff and fund any new premises, the maintenance of any assets and any responsibilities adopted from the dissolution of the Charter Trustees. The new council would also need to fund the conduct of elections in its first year so determining the actual lump sum figure needs further consideration.

4. OTHER COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE ISSUES

4.1 As part of the Community Governance review process, Wycombe District Council must consider several other related issues with regards to the potential of establishing a new parish council. These are:

- **What name should the parish council have?**

Parish councils can be called a range of different names. However, of the alternatives the only appropriate alternative to the style of Parish Council, would be to designate any new Council as High Wycombe Town Council. In terms of process it is recommended that any consultation should be based on a potential parish council covering the whole of High Wycombe being initially designated as High Wycombe Parish Council. It is however recognised that it is up to the new Council whether to style itself as a Town Council and whether to have a Town Mayor and **it is likely that any new Council would wish to do so** using its powers under s245 Local Government Act 1972. It is therefore recommended that the Council is initially named High Wycombe Parish Council but that any order creating the council provides for it to style itself as a Town Council as one of its first acts at its first meeting.

If it is decided at a later date that any parish council should be created for any of the three wards which are subject to the petitions i.e. Micklefield, Totteridge and Sands then it is recommended that the new parishes be named in line with the current ward names which were the subject of the petitions.

- **What should happen to the Charter Trustees if new parish governance is agreed?**

If a new parish for the whole of High Wycombe is established, the new parish council will absorb all the current responsibilities and assets of the existing Charter Trustees (as set out in paragraph 11). If new parishes are formed for Totteridge, Micklefield and Sands, then the issue is slightly more complicated, but it is recommended in this case that the Charter Trustees for High Wycombe should remain as they are now. If the Governance Review results in no change to the local governance arrangements, then the Charter Trustees would remain extant.

- **What should be the electoral arrangements for any new parish council?**

This issue is relatively straight forward as any new parish council will be elected at the same time as councillors for the principle council and serve the same term of office. Under The Districts of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe (Changes to Years of Elections) Order 2018 parish elections in the Wycombe area will take place in 2020 and in 2025 at the same time as elections to the new unitary Council. LGRC therefore recommend that any new parish council should be first elected in May 2020 and then in accordance with the 2018 order in 2025. The number of electoral seats on the new council will be determined by the number of members which is explored below. Prior to the first election is recommended that a shadow parish council is created. It is proposed that as the High Wycombe Town members are already established into a committee that that committee act as the Shadow Council between 1st April 2020 and the election in May 2020. The Shadow Parish will therefore have 23 members. The members of Wycombe District Council will continue to serve as members of the Shadow Buckinghamshire Council during this period and therefore will continue to have a role before the election despite the demise of Wycombe District Council.

- **How many Councillors should any new parish arrangements have?**

A parish council should have the number of councillors it needs to serve the adopted democratic arrangements, i.e. the council should have enough councillors to allow it to conduct its business under good governance arrangements. The only caveat is that this number must be five or greater but there is no maximum number. LGRC recommend that in the first instance this number could reflect the existing number of councillors for High Wycombe under Wycombe District Council; i.e., 23 and for individual parishes, if created, then this number should be between 5 and 10.

- **What should be the warding arrangements?** It is recommended that the area of the town council given its size should be divided into wards in the first and subsequent years. Those wards should be drawn up and presented on maps in the event that the decision is made to proceed with the creation of a new parish. LGRC recommend that in the first instance the warding arrangements should as far as possible reflect the proposed existing warding for Wycombe District Council. This is because there is some overlap between the new unitary council wards and existing parishes.

If a parish council is created on the area of one of the three wards which were subject to individual petitions there should be no warding.

5. INFORMATION FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND LEAD PETITIONERS

- 5.1 As part of the research undertaken to prepare this paper, LGRC wrote to 170 stakeholder organisations and had conversations with the lead petitioners, where they were able to do so, for all the four petitions submitted. The letter to stakeholders is submitted at Appendix 2 of this report. It specifically asked key stakeholders to provide any information they might have that would assist in drawing up proposals for consultation.

At this stage of the review we are gathering information to enable us to draw up some proposals for consultation. In particular we are interested to ensure that we have all relevant information relating to the delivery of service in the area to ensure that our proposals meet the second of the two criteria. This is not a consultation and the aim at this stage is just to gather relevant information.

A total of 7 written responses were received and each of them are available online. A summary of information from relevant responses is given below but LGRC have not taken into account any views or opinions expressed in the responses as the letter made it clear that the exercise did not form part of the consultation. All **stakeholders together with the public will have the opportunity to give their views as part of the consultation stage.**

A summary of the information received is set out below:

- One response drew attention to the new Unitary Authority arrangements and the potential for retaining a town committee style form of local governance. (appendix 2).
- Another response gave detail on the existing Mayoralty, Charter Trustees and High Wycombe based civic traditions.
- Downley Parish Council made it clear that there was an existing parish boundary for that area and the parish intended to keep its current parish boundaries and separate identity.
- One response drew LGRC's attention to the work of the High Wycombe Society.

In addition, the conversations with lead petitioners were provided local information about why they took the decision to undertake the petitions and why the petitioners believed their wards demonstrated particular community traits. LGRC received a written response from the lead petitioners for the Sands petition and High Wycombe petition.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows are LGRC's recommendations for Wycombe District Council to consult on as part of the Community Governance Review process.

1. That a new parish council be created based on the whole of the current unparished area of High Wycombe.

2. That if a new parish council for High Wycombe is formed it should be named High Wycombe Parish Council (It is however recognised that it is up to the new Council whether to style itself as a Town Council and whether to have a Town Mayor and **it is likely that any new Council would wish to do so** using its powers under s245 Local Government Act 1972).
3. That should a new parish council be created, it includes all the existing responsibilities and assets of the Charter Trustees, who will be dissolved by the Re-organisation Order (*Reg 15, Local Government (Parishes and Parish Council) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI No.625)*).
4. That elections for the new parish council be held in May 2020 and May 2025 and every 4th year thereafter.
5. That the number of Councillors for the new High Wycombe Parish Council be 23 in line with the number of Councillors for the current wards for High Wycombe within the Wycombe District Council. This is because the new unitary wards overlap with the area which is already parished.
6. That the warding arrangements for any new parish council should reflect the existing warding arrangements for Wycombe District Council.
7. That Buckinghamshire Council provides a lump sum to the new High Wycombe Town Council for its first year of operation to allow the new Council to establish itself with the appropriate staff and premises, and election costs, allowing it time to prepare to set its first full council tax charge and associated precept for 2021/22. In addition, the new parish council precepts for the costs of servicing the Charter Trustee responsibilities as is the current situation.

7. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Comparison of different types of local governance

Appendix 2 - Letter sent by LGRC to stakeholders

The following documents are available online on Wycombe District Council's website:

- Email from Chairman of the High Wycombe Town Committee
- Email response from Secretary of Warren Wood Residents Association
- Written response from Wycombe Liberal Democrats
- Email response from Clerk to High Wycombe Charter Trustees
- Email response from Clerk to Downley Parish Council
- Written response from Lead Petitioner, Sands petition
- Written response from Lead Petitioner, High Wycombe petition
- Response from Secretary of High Wycombe Society
- Response from West Wycombe Parish Council

Comparison of different types of local governance

Governance Structure	Delivery of Effective Local Services	Cost Effectiveness	Best supporting Local Democracy and Engagement
Parish Council	Parish Councils are independent and have extensive powers to deliver a whole range of quality of life public services and can work independently, in partnership or under contract to a principal authority. There are many examples of parish councils that deliver high quality, effective local services ¹ . Parish councils are also effective at influencing local service provision as a result of their democratic legitimacy	Parish councils have the power to raise a local precept through the council tax charge mechanism making them very robust financially. They can also raise income from direct service delivery such as burial services	Parish councils are democratically elected and are able to engage more locally with their electorate than larger unitary councils
Area Committee²	Area Committees in themselves do not deliver local services as they are still part of the main principal council. They do, however have an influence over the delivery of services at a more local level	Area Committees may have control of funds delegated to them for local decision making, however, this will still be under the auspices of the controlling principal council and as a result are subject to the vagaries of public funding	Area Committees will comprise locally elected councillors and do engage on a local level but still under the wider control of the principal council
Neighbourhood Management³	Neighbourhood Management arrangements can deliver local services but mostly under the control of an accountable body which is typically the principal council. They are also typically supported by officers from the principal council so can be quite labour intensive and are more likely to be an influencing body	Neighbourhood management arrangements typically attract funding from central government and other public bodies mainly the principal council and as a result are subject to the vagaries of public funding	Neighbourhood management is a process which brings the local community and local service providers together, at a neighbourhood level, to tackle local problems and improve local services, so whilst they are not themselves democratically elected, they are a good way of providing local engagement.

¹ <https://www.dunstable.gov.uk/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Area_committee

³ <http://www.sqw.co.uk/files/5713/8712/8264/80.pdf>

Governance Structure	Delivery of Effective Local Services	Cost Effectiveness	Best supporting Local Democracy and Engagement
Area/Community Forums⁴	Area/Community Forums are typically set up to influence the delivery of local services rather than deliver direct.	Forums are typically run by the local principal authority and as a result will require the input of publicly funded resources	They may comprise locally elected representatives but are not elected in themselves. They will though comprise local residents and community groups
Tenant Management Organisations (TMO's)⁵	TMO's exist under specific legislation to take over responsibility for the running of their homes from the local authority or housing association and as a result are very specialist in nature	Whilst acting as a Corporate Body they are ultimately funded from public resources through the landlord which is typically the local authority or housing association	TMO's operate at a very local level under a management committee comprising local residents, so will only engage on a limited level
Residents and Tenants Associations⁶	Like a TMO above, such associations exist to improve housing and environmental standards rather than wider public service delivery	Residents associations can raise funds but only on a very local level for very specific projects and initiatives	Associations operate at a very local level and comprise local residents, so will only engage on a limited level
Community Associations⁷	Community Associations come in many guises for a range of reasons such as a Neighbourhood Watch. They are more likely to influence rather than deliver services directly, but they will include volunteers	They may require some resources from the principal council	They will be made up of local residents and interest groups but will lack democratically elected legitimacy
No local governance arrangements	Parish councils largely exist to deliver discretionary quality of life services. The opportunity to deliver such services may well be lost under stand-alone unitary governance arrangements	Parish governance arrangements normally come with an additional council tax charge. This would not be the case if only unitary governance existed although the new unitary authority may still decide to charge local Special Expenses	The truly local nature of parished democracy would be lost but there would still be locally elected representatives for High Wycombe residents

Table 5

⁴ <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/area-forums>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenant_management_organisation

⁶ https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_topics/neighbourhood_issues/tenants_and_residents_associations

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_association



Dear Stakeholder

Re: Community governance review of the unparished area of High Wycombe

We have been commissioned by Wycombe District Council to review the way in which High Wycombe is represented and locally governed. The area that we're reviewing, which is shown in the map attached, includes the district wards of:

Abbey; Booker and Cressex; Bowerdean; Disraeli; Micklefield; Oakridge and Castlefield; Ryemead; Sands; Terriers and Amersham Hill; and Totteridge.

As you may know, High Wycombe is not currently represented by either town or parish councils. It is the only area in Buckinghamshire that does not have either a town or parish council. Instead, the wards are represented by a committee of Wycombe District Council – High Wycombe Town Committee. Wycombe District Council, along with Buckinghamshire County Council, will be abolished at the end of March 2020 to make way for the new Buckinghamshire Council.

The review has been triggered because the council received four petitions which met certain statutory criteria from residents of the wards of Sands, Micklefield, Totteridge and the wider unparished area of High Wycombe (all of the ten wards above), calling for the creation of new parish and town council(s). The way that we have to conduct the review – known as a community governance review – is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

We are currently considering a range of information in order to draw up a proposal about local representation and governance in the areas mentioned above. There are in essence two key criteria which the act requires us to consider as follows:

The principal council must have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review

- (a) reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area, and*
- (b) is effective and convenient.*

At this stage of the review we are gathering information to enable us to draw up some proposals for consultation. In particular we are interested to ensure that we have all relevant information relating to the delivery of service in the area to ensure that our proposals meet the second of the two criteria. This is not a consultation and the aim at this stage is just to gather relevant information.

Once we have drawn up proposals they will be subject to a ten-week public consultation starting in July. At that stage anyone can put forward views about our proposals. As stakeholders, you will be given the opportunity to make representations

about the proposal as part of that consultation. The proposal will then be reviewed in light of the consultation responses and updated, before a recommendation is presented to the Shadow Executive of the Shadow Buckinghamshire Council for a final decision in November.

If you feel that you have any information which is relevant to the criteria which we should consider before drawing up proposals, we would be grateful to receive it by 6pm on Friday 21 June to the email dgwaconsultancy@hotmail.com and please do not hesitate to ring me with any queries on 07792561103

Yours faithfully

**David Ashlee
Lead Consultant
LGRC**