

Options for local governance in High Wycombe Consultation document

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This document tells you about important options for the future of local government in the High Wycombe area. It explains how local government in Buckinghamshire is organised now and tells you about important changes happening in April 2020. Above all, it asks your opinions about how best to represent the interests of the High Wycombe area. For more information, please consult the website at www.wycombe.gov.uk/highwycombecgr and give your views by completing a questionnaire online or on paper, and/or by sending a letter or email to the address given at the end of this document.

The consultation is being conducted by Wycombe District Council and they have appointed ORS (a specialist social research practice) to analyse responses and report the findings fully and objectively.

Why consult us? Haven't you already made up your mind?

Wycombe District Council has not made up its mind about how best to represent the interests of the town under the new local government system to be introduced in 2020, and it genuinely wants to know your views before it makes any recommendations. The consultation will run from 5 August 5 to 30 September 2019 and the Council will consider the findings before making recommendations in November 2019.

How does local government work now in Buckinghamshire?

Like many other parts of England, Buckinghamshire currently has two main tiers of local government which are:

Buckinghamshire County Council that provides county-wide strategic services, such as adult and children's social care, educational services, highways and environmental services

Four district councils (Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks, and Wycombe) that each provide a wide range of local services, such as waste collection, local planning and building regulations, housing advice, licensing, benefits, council tax collection, community safety, car parks, and community centres and parks.

High Wycombe has only the two tiers of local government described just above. However, many areas of Buckinghamshire and England have a 'third tier' consisting of either town or parish councils (with democratically elected councillors) that are 'statutory consultees' – entitled to be consulted by their district or unitary councils on planning and decisions. Many town and parish councils are responsible for some local services and many of them charge a council tax precept in addition to those of the county and district councils and the police and fire services.

Until now, the ten wards of High Wycombe have not had a town or parish council(s) because they were represented by Wycombe District Council and the High Wycombe Town Committee. However, the three Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge wards have petitioned to have their own separate parish councils; and residents of other wards have petitioned for a town council. Those four petitions, and the local government changes coming in 2020, have led Wycombe District Council to consider whether the local representation of all ten High Wycombe wards should be enhanced through the creation of a town council or up to three parish councils.

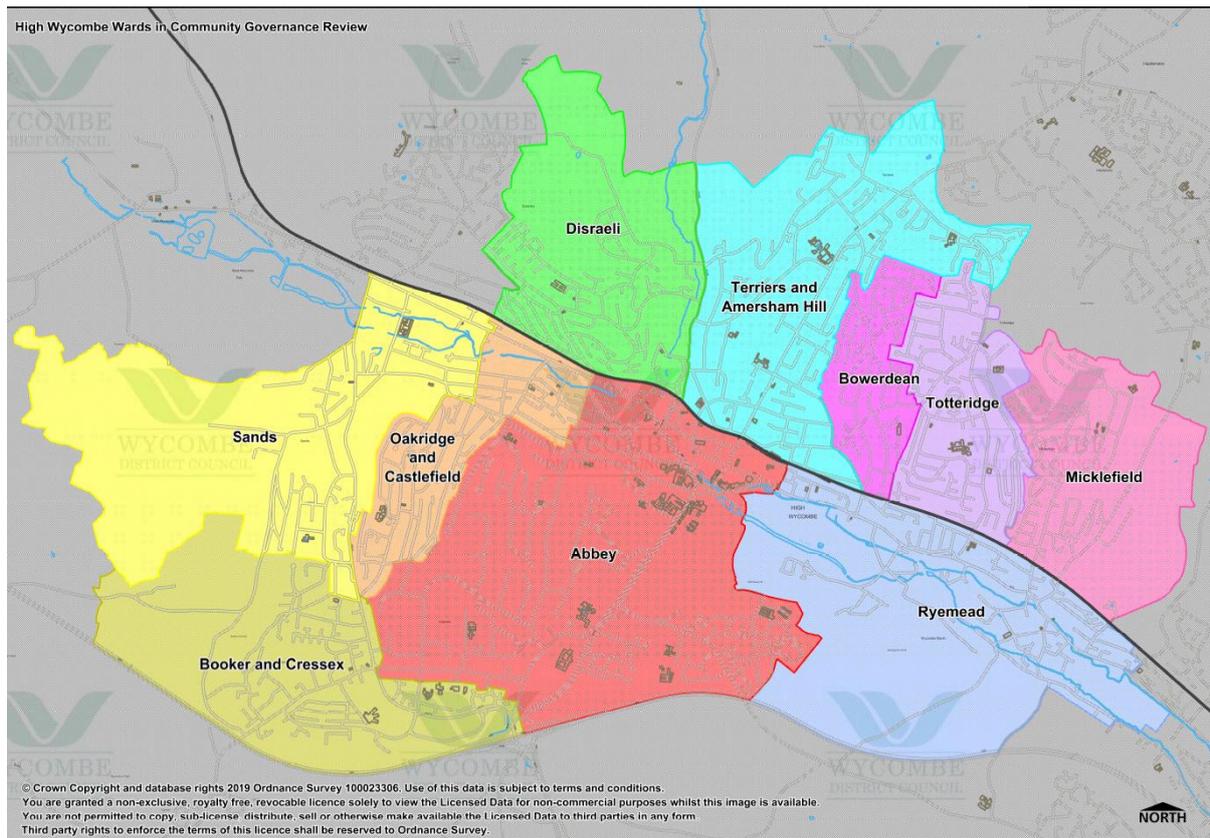


Figure 1: Illustrative map of unparished wards of High Wycombe

What happens in 2020?

In April 2020 the current two-tier system will be abolished and replaced by a new single-tier Unitary Council that will be responsible for all local government services across the whole of Buckinghamshire. The new unitary Buckinghamshire Council is already in place, as a 'shadow' authority alongside the current two-tier system and in April 2020 it will take over completely, with abolition of the current county council and four district councils.

How do the changes affect High Wycombe?

In April 2020, all the services currently managed by Wycombe District Council and the High Wycombe Town Committee, and any assets belonging to them, will transfer to the new Buckinghamshire Council. The current High Wycombe Town Committee will dissolve, but the Mayoralty and the Charter Trustees will continue under the new Buckinghamshire Council, which could also set up a local board for the High Wycombe area.

The rest of Buckinghamshire will continue to have town or parish councils acting as statutory consultees for their local areas and delivering some local services, whereas High Wycombe would not. While it is not essential to have town or parish councils, it is possible that High Wycombe's residents could feel under-represented compared with other areas of the county: they might feel that their interests would be better served with elected town or parish councils as 'intermediaries' with the new Buckinghamshire Council. On the other hand, new town or parish councils are likely to charge council tax precepts to fund their activities, which could increase the overall council tax for residents.

What do parish and town councils do? What would they do in High Wycombe?

Town and parish councils are corporate bodies with unpaid elected councillors that exist to represent the interests of their residents. Across England, town and parish councils are important statutory consultees that represent the interests of their residents in the planning process and also manage some or all of the following: allotments, cemeteries, community centres, play areas, local events and in some cases car parks. Town councils are generally larger than parish councils and manage more services, such as markets and tourism, parks and open spaces, footpaths and village greens, entertainment and arts events.

In High Wycombe, a town council or the three proposed parish councils would be statutory consultees for the new Buckinghamshire Council on planning; but it is not possible to at this stage to specify exactly what local services they would manage; and, likewise, what level of council tax precept they would charge.

What are the consultation issues?

Because of the changes to local government in Buckinghamshire, and because it has received petitions to create separate parish councils for each of the Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge wards, Wycombe District Council is considering the following issues:

- **Would the creation of a new democratically elected town council for all ten wards protect High Wycombe's identity and heritage, promote the interests of the town, and represent local residents democratically?**
- **If a town council for all ten wards is not created, should Micklefield and/or Sands and/or Totteridge wards each form democratically elected parish councils (that is, up to three separate parish councils)?**
- **Is some other option more appropriate for any or all of the ten High Wycombe wards?**

These are important questions for the future of High Wycombe and the district council would like to know your views before any decisions are taken.

Can you summarise the issues?

In summary the key points are:

If a new town council were created, the High Wycombe Town Committee and the Charter Trustees would dissolve, but the Mayoralty would continue. The town council would be democratically elected and have a role in representing residents on planning, local matters and local service provision. It would charge a separate council tax precept, with the amount depending upon the level of responsibilities agreed with the new Buckinghamshire Council.

If a new town council were not created, High Wycombe would remain as an unparished community without parish elections. Any services currently managed by Wycombe District Council and the High Wycombe Town Committee, and any assets belonging to them, would transfer to the new Buckinghamshire Council. The current High Wycombe Town Committee would dissolve, but the Mayoralty would continue, and the Charter Trustees would carry on under the new Buckinghamshire Council, which could also set up a local board for the High Wycombe area.

If a new town council were not created, up to three of the Micklefield, Sands and Totteridge wards could form separate, democratically elected parish councils with five to ten members in each. These parishes would charge a council tax precept depending upon their level of responsibilities.

Where do I get more information?

For more information about the community governance review, visit:

www.wycombe.gov.uk/highwycombecgr

For more information about parish and town councils, visit www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/elections-2/2814-all-about-local-councils-2018/file

For examples of what town councils in Buckinghamshire do, visit www.aylesburytowncouncil.gov.uk

For examples of what other large town councils in the country do, visit www.dunstable.gov.uk; www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk; www.salisburycitycouncil.gov.uk; www.chippenham.gov.uk

For more information on parish council tax precepts, visit: www.opendatacommunities.org/data/council-tax/collected/category

How do I take part in the consultation?

Please complete the online questionnaire online by 30 September at: www.wycombe.gov.uk/highwycombecgr

Alternatively, you can request a paper questionnaire by calling 01494 421 052 or emailing highwycombecgr@wycombe.gov.uk and then returning your completed form to ORS at the following address:

ORS, FREEPOST, SS1018, PO BOX 503, SWANSEA SA1 1ZL.

You may also email or write your views to Wycombe District Council at highwycombecgr@wycombe.gov.uk or

High Wycombe Community Governance Review, Electoral Services, Wycombe District Council, High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 1BB

Are my responses confidential?

Yes, definitely. All questionnaire will be independently processed by ORS (Opinion Research Services) in Swansea and no one else will see your questionnaire. All information provided to ORS (via the questionnaire and/or by any submissions) will be processed in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act and the EU General Data Protection Regulation. Personal information will be kept by them for no more than 1 year after any decisions have been finalised. For further information, please see www.ors.org.uk/privacy and www.wycombe.gov.uk/privacy

No members of the public will be identified in any ORS reports; but where feedback is submitted by a representative on behalf of an organisation, or by an elected representative, or by someone acting in their official capacity, this may be attributed.