

Thetford

Consultation Question

Thetford Town Council wishes to extend its boundary to include the new Sustainable Urban Extension area (SUE) - this area currently lies within the parishes of Croxton and Brettenham & Kilverstone. The Town Council has also asked to increase its size from 16 to 20 councillors, to reflect the increased area. This would mean there were additional councillors in the Thetford Town Council Wards of Boudica (+1), Anne Bartholomew (+1), Castle Ward (+2)

Guidance

The current electorate of the parish of Thetford is 17,058. The government has advised ‘that it is an important democratic principle that each person’s vote should be of equal weight so far as possible, having regard to other legitimated competing factors when it comes to the election of councillors’. The council notes that the number of parish councillors for each parish council shall not be less than five. There is no maximum number. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) suggests that the minimum number of councillors should be seven and the maximum twenty five.

Number of parish councillor guidelines (NALC)

Electors	Councillors	Electors	Councillors
Up to 900	7	Up to 10,400	17
Up to 1,400	8	Up to 11,900	18
Up to 2,000	9	Up to 13,500	19
Up to 2,700	10	Up to 15,200	20
Up to 3,500	11	Up to 17,000	21
Up to 4,400	12	Up to 18,900	22
Up to 5,400	13	Up to 20,900	23
Up to 6,500	14	Up to 23,000	24
Up to 7,700	15	Up to 45,000	25
Up to 9,000	16		

There is no provision in legislation that each parish councillor should represent the same number of electors. However, the LGBCE believes that it is in the interest of effective and convenient local government, for voters and Councillors to have equal levels of representation between parish wards as far as practicable. Currently in terms of aligning the number of councillors with existing similar size parishes there is no comparable parish data available. Thetford currently has 16 councillors which taking account of the NALC guidance would suggest the town is under represented. Equality of representation allows for councillors to adequately and fairly represent the interests of residents.

Government guidance suggests that in many cases changes to the boundaries of existing parishes, will be sufficient to ensure that community governance arrangements continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, over time communities may expand with new housing developments.

Section 95 of The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH) sets out the considerations which must be made when making changes (if any) to the electoral arrangements which apply to a parish council. In this instance 95 (5) (c) applies the desirability of fixing boundaries which are, and will remain, easily identifiable.

There have been two prior occasions when the parish boundaries of Thetford have been extended to accommodate urban extension, most recently in 2012 when the northern boundary was extended into the parishes Croxton and Brettenham & Kilverstone.

Central to the concept of sustainable communities is community cohesion. The impact of community governance on cohesion is an important factor when taking decisions about community governance arrangements.

It should be noted that a principle council (in this instance Breckland Council) cannot amend district ward boundaries, as this power rests with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and any proposed ward boundary changes would require their permission. Therefore, even if the review concluded that the administrative boundary of the parish should change, the current district ward boundaries would remain unchanged, until such time as the LGBCE consent to amend them.

It should also be noted that if, as part of a community governance review, a principle council wishes to alter the electoral arrangements for a parish/parish ward whose existing electoral arrangements were put in place within the previous five years, the consent of the LGBCE is required. The current warding arrangements for the town of Thetford were agreed in July 2014 as part of a district wide review; therefore any proposals to implement any changes to the current arrangements before July 2019 would require the consent of the LGBCE.

Consultation Feedback

The total number of responses received as part of the stage 1 consultation was in total 525

A total of 400 responses supported the proposal, whilst 109 were against and 16 where the response is unclear as to the respondent's intention.

The data is broken down further by parish in the table below:

	Agree	Disagree	Unclear	Total No of Responses
Croxton	5	31	0	36
Brettenham & Kilverstone	6	50	0	56
Thetford	389	28	16	433
Total	400	109	16	525

Copies of all comments received are attached in Appendix F