Policy and Resources Committee
Monday, 10 March 2025

PART I

Local Area Forum boundaries
ADLDS

1 Summary

1.1 This report seeks the views of the Policy and Resources Committee on whether to amend the boundaries for the Local Area Forums

2 Details

2.1 The Council has 5 area forums. Each area forum is an opportunity for Councillors to meet with the public and discuss issues specific to that community. The forums are:

- Chorleywood and Sarratt (including the unparished area west of the M25)
- Rickmansworth (including the unparished area east of the M25)
- Croxley Green
- Watford Rural
- Abbots Langley

2.1.1 Although the constitution suggests that there is one forum for each of the parished areas, in practice there are no set geographic markers stipulating the boundaries of each forum, and any councillors whose ward falls within that parish / area are invited to attend the relevant forum. For Abbots Langley, this is more straightforward as the District ward and Parish boundaries align. For Chorleywood and Sarratt, this is more complex as both the Penn and Mill End, and Rickmansworth Town district wards partly overlap with the Chorleywood Parish boundary.

2.1.2 A further particular issue is the small area of unparished land in the Chorleywood North district ward. This area sits between the Chorleywood, Sarratt, Croxley Green and Batchworth parish boundaries. As this is to the east of the M25, the suggestion has been made that this means the area is in the Rickmansworth area forum, and therefore Chorleywood North and Sarratt members should be part of that forum. However, there is a counter argument that the references to an unparished area in the constitution was supposed to refer to the area to the South of the district (Penn, Mill End and Maple Cross) and wasn't intended to relate to the small area at the junction of the other parishes.

2.1.3 Over time, queries have arisen as to what members are part of which area forum, and whether there is opportunity to give further clarity to the issue. Several options are considered as below.

2.1.4 To assist members, there are 3 maps included as appendices to this report. Appendix 1 shows the current Parish and District ward boundaries overlayed; appendix 2 a closer view of the overlap between District wards and the

Chorleywood parish boundary, and Appendix 3 a closer view of the small unparished area.

Maintain the basis on Parish boundaries, but look at options for the unparished areas

2.1.5 Ideally, the Parish and District ward boundaries would align and therefore the Area Forums could be neatly assigned. However, this is not the case, and the only way to achieve a neat alignment is to base the situation on parish boundaries (plus unparised areas) as the council has, or to base it on District ward boundaries.

2.1.6 Looking at Parish boundaries as an option, the issue becomes the unparished area, and there is the potential that a specific area forum could be formed for the area south of Chorleywood.

2.1.7 This potentially give more prominence to those communities who have no parish council to represent them, and a clear avenue for discussion of issues in those communities. However, it does not resolve the overlap issue as the members involved (Chorleywood South and Penn and Mill End) would still be in the Chorleywood Area forum too. Care would need to be taken to ensure that the area forum does not become the “defacto” parish council.

2.1.8 There is also the question of whether the communities in that area would naturally feel an affinity with each other or with the other area forums. For example, Mill End sits with the Rickmansworth area forum at the moment and may be more connected to the Batchworth community than other parts of the unparished area, whilst residents of Long Lane are more naturally connected to Chorleywood.

2.1.9 As such, whilst there is logic in having an unparished area forum, this might not be the most effective solution for those communities.

2.1.10 The other unparished area to resolve would be the small area between Chorleywood, Sarratt, Rickmansworth and Croxley Green. It is suggested that this could readily be included as part of the Chorleywood area forum moving forwards, given it falls within Chorleywood North and Sarratt district ward.

Base the area forums on District wards

2.1.11 This option does help make clear to District Councillors which area forums they are part of. However, it creates its own issues in the same areas which currently have challenges with members attending multiple forums or not being clear which forum they are part of.

2.1.12 There is some overlap between the District and ward boundaries. Two wards cross over the Chorleywood Parish boundary, and whilst it would be logical to debate issues relating to the Chorleywood community at the Chorleywood district member forum, this could inadvertently exclude Rickmansworth Town and Penn and Mill End district members who also represent parts of Chorleywood but the primary part of their wards are in the Rickmansworth area forum.

2.1.13 This solution may also cause challenge for Parish Councillors, who may feel obligated to attend multiple area forums to hear issues being discussed.

2.1.14 Overall, this solution creates some of the same challenges that is trying to be avoided through doing this review.

Base the area forums on County divisions

2.1.15 There are 6 County Councillors that represent the Three Rivers area. The County Divisions boundaries align overall with the District Boundaries, so it could be feasible to use the 6 divisions as a basis for area forum areas. This would be more straightforward for County Councillors in terms of attendance.

2.1.16 There is significant disparity between County divisions and parish and district ward boundaries – for example, the County Councillor representing Sarratt also represents Bedmond, which is more associated with Abbots Langley at a District level, and is part of Abbots Langley parish council.

2.1.17 This solution may therefore cause further confusion with a lot of cross over of issues between area forums – moreso than under the present structure. It is not considered this offers a better solution than the present situation.

Amending District / Parish boundaries to better fit to each other and an area forum structure

2.1.18 Whilst this may provide the optimum solution, it is practically very difficult to achieve. Only the Local Government Boundary Commission for England can alter District ward boundaries. Their primary focus is in ensuring electoral equality, in that no ward should be more than 10% different from another in terms of electoral numbers. Their last review, in 2014, specifically looked at some of the overlap issues referred to above, and there would need to be strong persuasive arguments to initiate a new review at this stage and during the review, arguments put forward to demonstrate why alternative solutions are better for community governance. Their work will presently be focused on areas which are going through local government reorganisation or have electoral inequality, and they may not be able to prioritise a review of this nature.

2.1.19 The District Council does have the power to amend parish boundaries. However, a review of this nature can require significant officer time, and again, there would have to be strong, persuasive arguments to justify the amendment of parish boundaries, or even the creation of new parishes, to align to district ward boundaries.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1.1 Having reviewed the options above, there is no ideal and straightforward solution as to how the local area forums should be divided. Alternatives to the present structure each present their own challenges and there is no persuasive argument at this stage which would favour one option over the other.

3.1.2 There is a powerful argument that the current approach is focused on community, not boundaries, and the area forums provide the opportunity for councillors and residents to meet to discuss issues that are impacting or will impact on that community.

3.1.3 It is therefore recommended to maintain the status quo position, however, in light of the specific query relating to the small unparished area, for clarity, it is suggested this could be formally included in the Chorleywood area forum.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

Financial, Legal, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

None specific.

5 Recommendation

That the Policy and Resources Committee agrees to maintain the current area forums as set out in the constitution.

Recommend full Council approves an amendment to Article 10 of the constitution to clarify the unparished area between Chorleywood, Saratt, Batchworth and Croxley Green is within the Chorleywood area forum.

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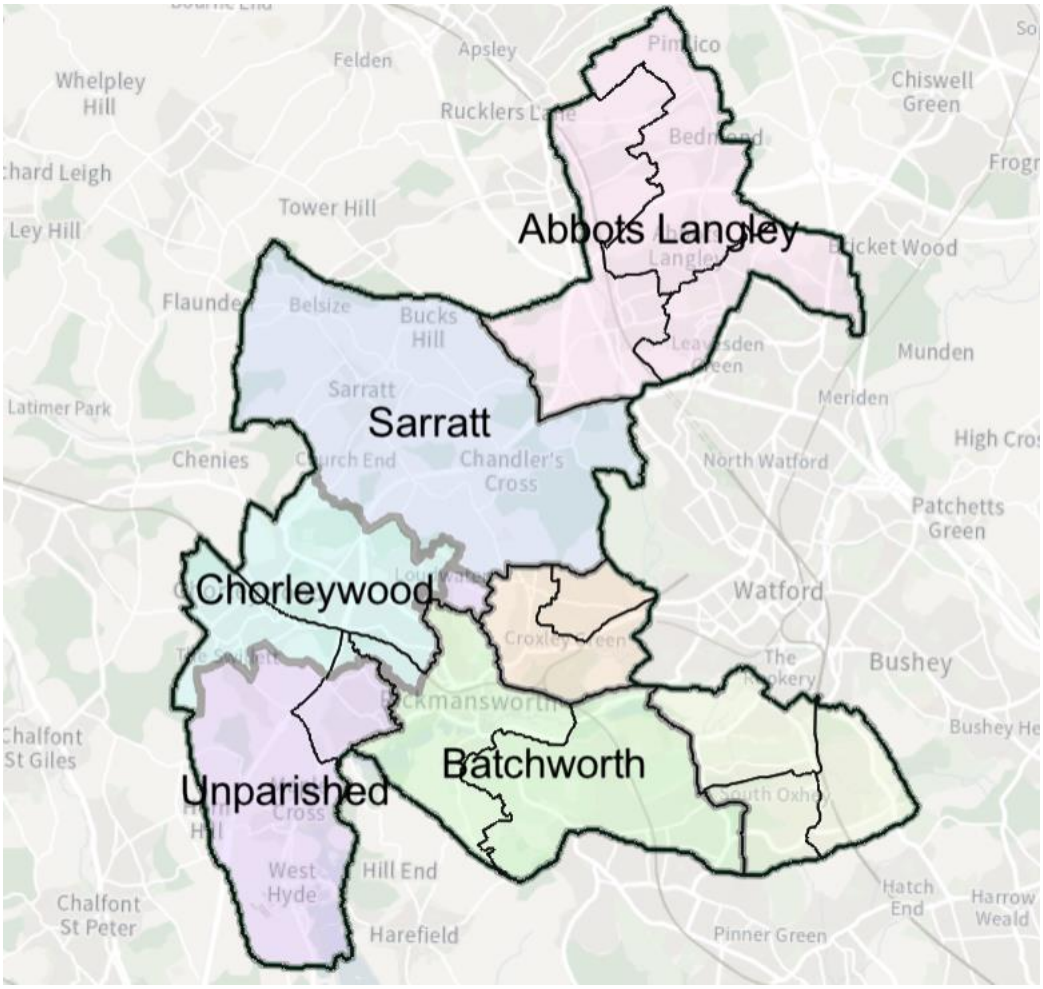
APPENDICES:

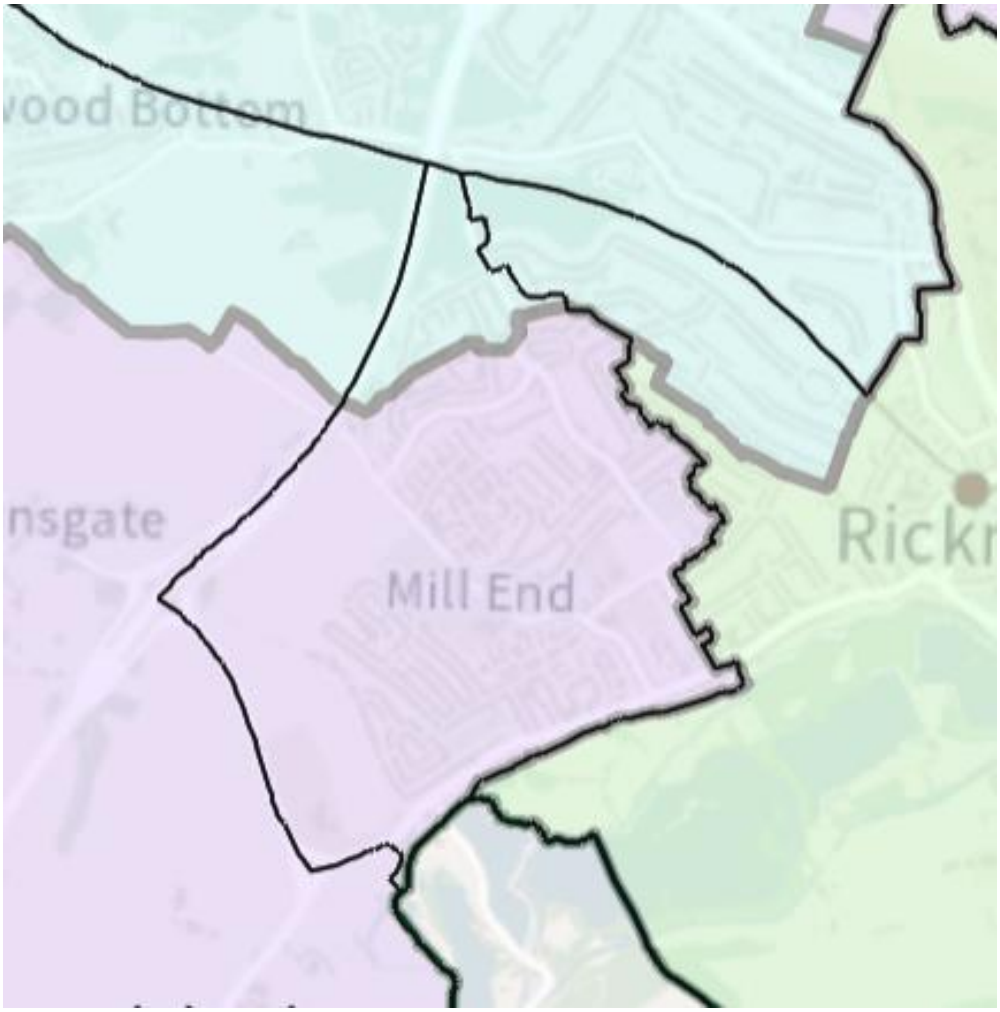
Appendix 1: Parish and District ward boundary map

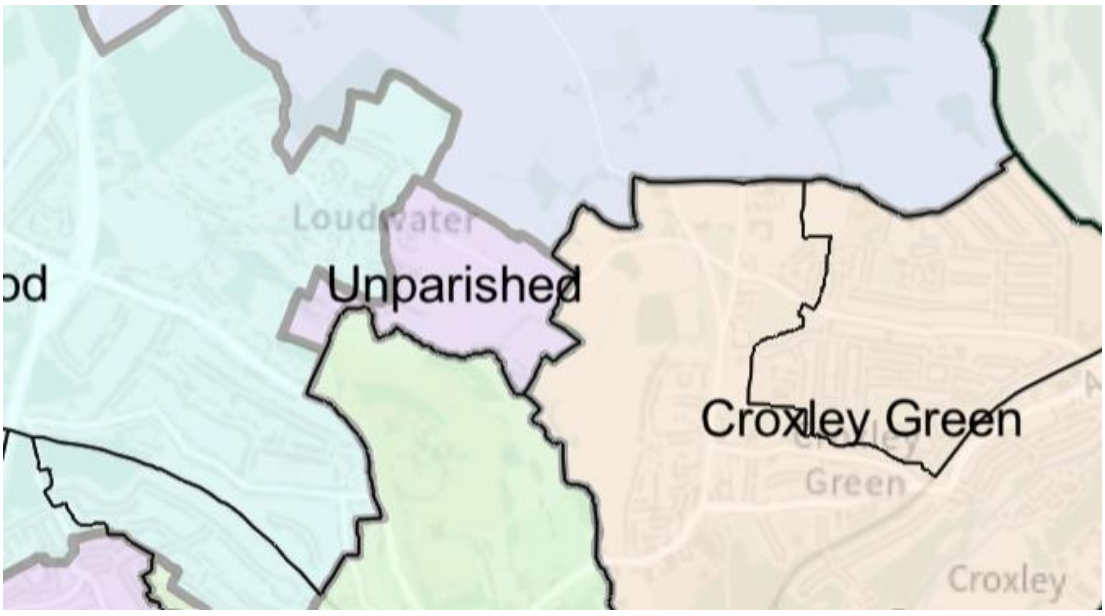
This map shows the current Parish and District ward boundaries within Three Rivers district. Parish areas are shaded in colour, and unparished areas in light purple. The ward boundaries are divided by thin black lines. The names of Croxley Green and Watford Rural parishes are not stated on the map, but are marked in orange and light yellow respectively.



Appendix 2:

This map demonstrates the overlapping District ward boundaries around Chorleywood, the unparished area at Mill End and the Rickmansworth Town ward more closely:



Appendix 3: Unparished area between Chorleywood, Sarratt, Batchworth and Croxley Green:

This map shows the small unparished area, in light purple, more closely.