

Annex 1

Background information

The Ross-on-Wye area is currently governed by Ross-on-Wye Town Council and Ross Rural Parish Council. However, the physical area that is currently divided between the town and rural parish councils appears increasingly linked as a single whole in terms of economic and recreational activity and planning.

Residents of the Ross rural area also use and enjoy facilities provided within the town, such as Dean Hill Park, St Mary's Churchyard, the weather station, skatepark, bandstand and allotments. The town council also purchased the Larruperz Centre, which is now run by a community association for the local community. The town council is also in negotiation with Herefordshire Council for the possible transfer of the following buildings and land under the community asset transfer scheme:

- The Old Chapel, Cantilupe Road: This is the former registrars' accommodation and a social care locality team, located next to the library.
- The Market House: This is a scheduled ancient monument and was used up until January this year as a heritage / visitor centre. It also hosts an open market beneath the house.
- Homs Road car park: This is for cars and coaches and has flood alleviation infrastructure beneath it.
- Wilton Road car park: This is a free site on the outskirts of the town close to the River Wye.
- Crossfields car park: This is a small pay and display site which serves visitors to the church, bowling club and tennis courts.
- Wye Street public conveniences: These are located near the riverside open space to support tourists, canoeists and events at the bandstand.
- Red Meadow car park public conveniences: These are located in the town centre next to the new Aldi development and serve shoppers and swimming pool users.
- Rope Walk Meadow and playground: This is a large open space which borders the River Wye and is used for summer events, although the area is liable to flooding.
- Blake Memorial Garden: This formal tiered garden is planted with flowers and shrubs and leads from the town centre to the riverside.
- Long Acre: This is a large open space between Wye Street and the River Wye.
- Caroline Symonds Gardens: This is a large open linear space on the opposite side of Wye Street to Long Acre and contains the bandstand and public conveniences.

Those council taxpayers living within the town council boundary currently pay approximately £1.50 a week for these facilities, whilst council tax payers in the rural area, who also benefit from these facilities, only pay the parish council in the region of £0.15 a week.

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However, residents in the rural area have no opportunity to express their views about either the current facilities provided by the town council or the proposed asset transfers. Similarly, the views of residents in the town area are not represented in considering developments in the rural area which, nevertheless, impact on the town.

Councillor numbers

There are currently 12 councillors representing Ross-on-Wye Town Council and eight which represent Ross Rural Parish Council. The review group has also considered the number of councillors representing the market towns of Ledbury and Leominster.

The below table shows the populations and representations for other areas in Herefordshire:

Council	Number of councillors	Population (2011)	Electorate (2014)	Electors per councillor (2014)
Ledbury Town	18	9,600	6,994	388
Leominster Town	16	11,700	8,327	520
Ross-on-Wye Town	12	9,600	7,098	591
Ross Rural Parish	8	1,000	840	105

Voluntary positions

It must be highlighted that town and parish councillors are volunteers who are not paid for the work they do, so the number of councillors will not impact on local government costs to council tax payers.

Currently, on Ross-on-Wye Town Council there is one councillor for approximately every 800 residents. If 1,000 new homes raised the population by approximately 2,000, this would probably mean around an additional 1,400 electors (based on the current proportion of electors to residents in Ross Town), giving a total electorate of around 9,300 for a combined Town and Rural area. The Table below sets out the number of electors represented per councillor for various sizes of combined parish council.

Number of councillors	Electorate	Electors per councillor
13	9,300	715
15	9,300	620
17	9,300	547
19	9,300	489
21	9,300	443
23	9,300	404
25	9,300	372

On balance, if the current town and rural parish councils were to be merged, the review group considers that 15 councillors would be an appropriate number to represent the entire Ross-on-Wye area and ensure adequate representation for all residents. The review group considers that having an odd rather than even number should assist decision-making with fewer occasions for matters to be determined by the chairperson's casting vote; and that 15 is an effective size for the new council.

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Council costs

The cost of the town council to council tax payers is currently about £1.50 a week, while the cost of the rural parish council is about £0.15 a week.

Parish precepts				
	2014-15		2013-14	
Parish council	Amount Required*	Band D	Amount Required*	Band D
	£	£	£	£
Bromyard and Winslow Town Council	186,955	122.10	171,000	111.20
Hereford City Council	815,715	47.32	724,960	41.39
Kington Town Council	70,000	68.81	64,000	64.11
Ledbury Town Council	271,912	74.32	266,596	73.61
Leominster Town Council	290,228	72.65	241,098	59.84
Ross-on-Wye Town Council	264,635	75.58	196,500	54.79
Ross Rural Parish Council	3,000	6.77	3,000	6.80
* The amount required is met partly through a government grant with the balance being a precept on council tax payers in the parish				