



COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW · BUSINESS CASE & SUBMISSION

The Case for a High Wycombe Town Council

A costed business case and formal submission inviting Buckinghamshire Council to undertake a Community Governance Review of the unparished area of High Wycombe, with a view to establishing a directly-elected town council.

Submitted to

Buckinghamshire Council (Standards & General Purposes Committee)

Prepared by

The “A Town Council for High Wycombe” residents’ campaign (cross-party)

Statutory basis

Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Part 4

Version / date

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Status of this document. This is a business case and submission, not a decision. The statutory power to conduct a Community Governance Review (CGR) and to recommend creating a parish (town) council rests with Buckinghamshire Council under Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This document sets out a costed, defined proposal against the criteria in the statutory *Guidance on Community Governance Reviews* so that the Council, its officers and members can consider the question on the evidence. Financial figures drawn from the Council’s own published accounts are cited; figures that are indicative or modelled are labelled as such.

Executive summary

- **The proposal.** Establish a directly-elected High Wycombe Town Council for the unparished area of the town — seven wards, 236 Output Areas, 55,125 local government electors. This area is *already defined* in the Council’s own finances as the “High Wycombe Town” special-expenses area and is served by the existing (appointed) Town Committee and Charter Trustees.
- **The democratic gap.** No one is directly elected to represent the town. The Town Committee is composed of the 16 unitary councillors whose wards fall partly within the area; the Charter Trustees, the same members, maintain the ceremonial mayoralty. A town council replaces both with a body elected by, and accountable to, the town.
- **Residents already pay for this.** In 2025/26 the area is charged a Band D special-expenses precept of **£17.99** plus a Charter Trustees charge of **£2.43 — £20.42** in total, raising about **£0.50m** a year for cemeteries, recreation grounds, allotments, footway lighting, the war memorial, community grants and town events. A town council would inherit these services and this funding; it is not a wholly new cost.
- **The cost is modest and mostly already on the bill.** On the area’s tax base of **24,397.68** Band D equivalents, an indicative launch precept of £60–90 at Band D funds a **£1.46m–£2.20m** council. Because £20.42 is already charged, the *net new* cost to a Band D household is only **£39.58–£69.58 a year (about 76p–£1.34 a week)**.
- **The demand is on record.** In the Council’s 2024 consultation, 60% of 2,532 verified respondents supported a town council.
- **The route.** The Council may initiate a CGR directly. Failing that, a petition signed by 7.5% of local electors — about **4,135 names** — obliges it to do so.

1. The proposal and the area

That Buckinghamshire Council undertake a CGR and recommend the creation of a single town council for the unparished area of High Wycombe, coterminous with the existing “High Wycombe Town” special-expenses area. The area comprises seven 2024 wards and 236 Output Areas:

WARD	WARD CODE	OUTPUT AREAS
Abbey	E05013120	35
Booker, Cressex and Castlefield	E05013131	31
Downley	E05013142	37
Ryemead and Micklefield	E05013157	36
Terriers and Amersham Hill	E05013160	32
Totteridge and Bowerdean	E05013163	33
West Wycombe	E05013166	32
Total		236

The area **excludes** the already-parished Chiltern Villages and Tylers Green and Loudwater (within Chepping Wycombe Parish). Defining the area as the existing special-expenses footprint gives a clean, administratively-settled boundary and avoids conflating the town with the wider parliamentary constituency. The electorate of the area at the 2024 consultation was 55,125.

2. Current governance and the special-expenses position

The unparished area has no directly-elected local tier. Two appointed bodies stand in its place, both composed of the same Buckinghamshire unitary councillors whose wards fall partly within the area:

- **The High Wycombe Town Committee** — 16 unitary councillors (reduced from 24 at the May 2025 boundary change), members by virtue of ward overlap, not by election to the town.
- **The Charter Trustees of High Wycombe** — the same members, who annually nominate the Mayor of High Wycombe and maintain the civic regalia.

Crucially, the area is *already* a defined precepting unit in the Council's finances. The 2025/26 Council Tax Resolution levies, on the High Wycombe Town area, a Band D charge of **£20.42** — **£17.99** of special expenses plus **£2.43** of Charter Trustees costs — on a tax base of **24,397.68** Band D equivalents, raising approximately **£0.50m** a year. The services this funds are precisely the parish-tier functions a town council exists to run:

What the special-expenses charge already pays for: two cemeteries (Town and Penn Road); three recreation grounds (Booker/Fernie Fields, Shelley Road/QEII, Totteridge); the All Saints Closed Churchyard; eight allotment sites; footway lighting; war-memorial maintenance; community and town-twinning grants; and Wycombe events, including a £12,000 contribution to the town-centre BID (HWBIDCo).

A town council would inherit these services and the charge that funds them. The Charter Trustees would be dissolved on creation, with the mayoralty, regalia and assets passing to the new elected council (Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008, SI 2008/625, reg. 15). The result is one directly-elected body in place of two appointed ones — not an additional tier.

3. Statutory framework and how the proposal meets it

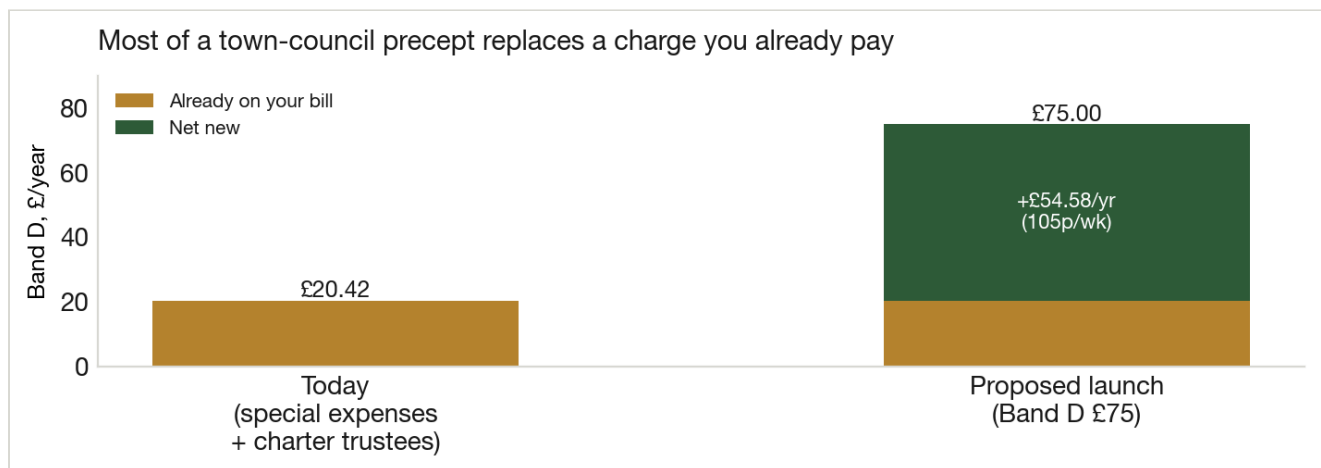
A CGR is governed by Part 4 of the 2007 Act and the statutory *Guidance on Community Governance Reviews* (MHCLG and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England). The guidance asks

whether new arrangements would reflect the identities and interests of the community, and whether they would be effective and convenient. The proposal is tested against those criteria below.

Community identity and interest	High Wycombe is a town of long-standing civic identity (a borough from 1237; a mayoralty maintained to this day). The proposed area matches a community the Council already treats as a single unit for special-expenses purposes.
Effective and convenient governance	A single town council, directly elected on existing ward lines, with a clear precept and an inherited, already-funded service base. The boundary is administratively settled.
Clear, identifiable boundary	The seven-ward special-expenses area; 236 Output Areas; excludes neighbouring parished areas. No boundary ambiguity.
Evidence of local support	60% support among 2,532 verified respondents to the Council’s own 2024 consultation; the route can be confirmed by a statutory petition (s.80).
Electoral arrangements	A proposed 18–21 councillors across town wards (within the Council’s own 2024 range of 13–25), elected on the four-year cycle (s.93).

4. The financial case

The financial question is not “what new bill does this create?” but “what does the town get for converting a charge it already pays into a precept it controls?” The model below uses the Council’s own published tax base (24,397.68 Band D equivalents) and current charge (£20.42 Band D).

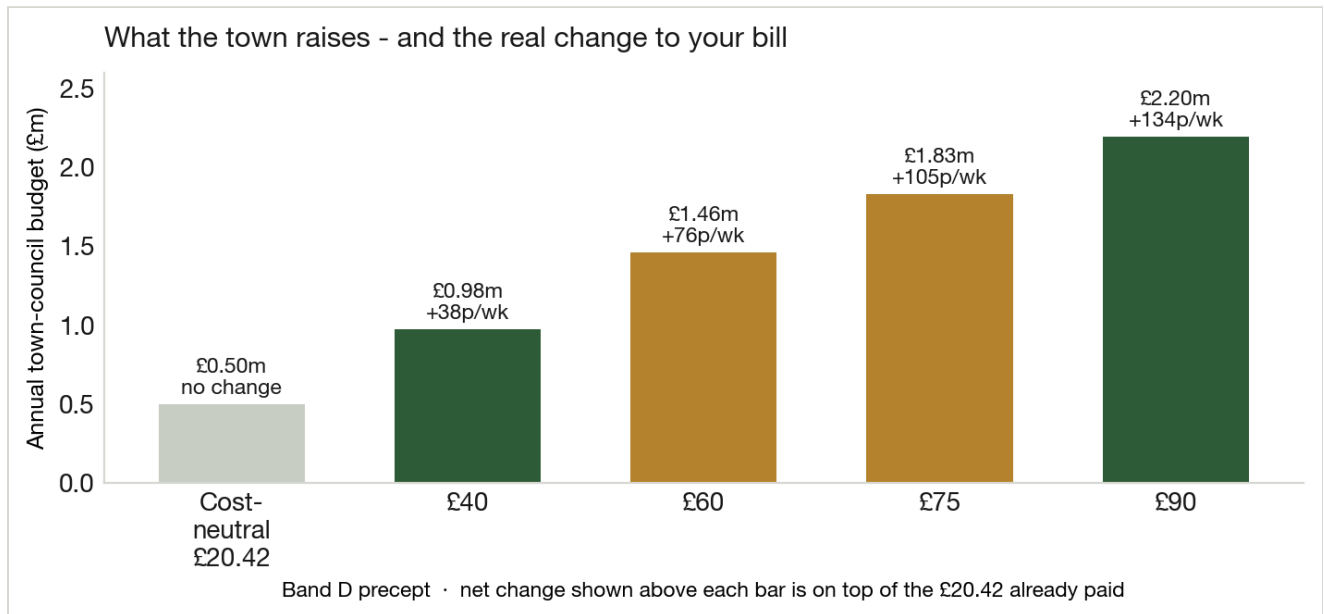


Source: Buckinghamshire Council Tax Resolution 2025/26, Schedules 1–2; campaign modelling.

4.1 Precept scenarios

Precept yield is the Band D charge multiplied by the tax base. Because £20.42 is already levied, the *net new* cost to a Band D household is the proposed Band D figure minus £20.42.

BAND D PRECEPT	ANNUAL BUDGET	NET NEW VS TODAY	NET NEW PER WEEK
£20.42 (cost-neutral)	£498,000	£0.00	—
£40	£975,900	£19.58	38p
£60	£1,463,900	£39.58	76p
£75	£1,829,800	£54.58	£1.05
£90	£2,195,800	£69.58	£1.34



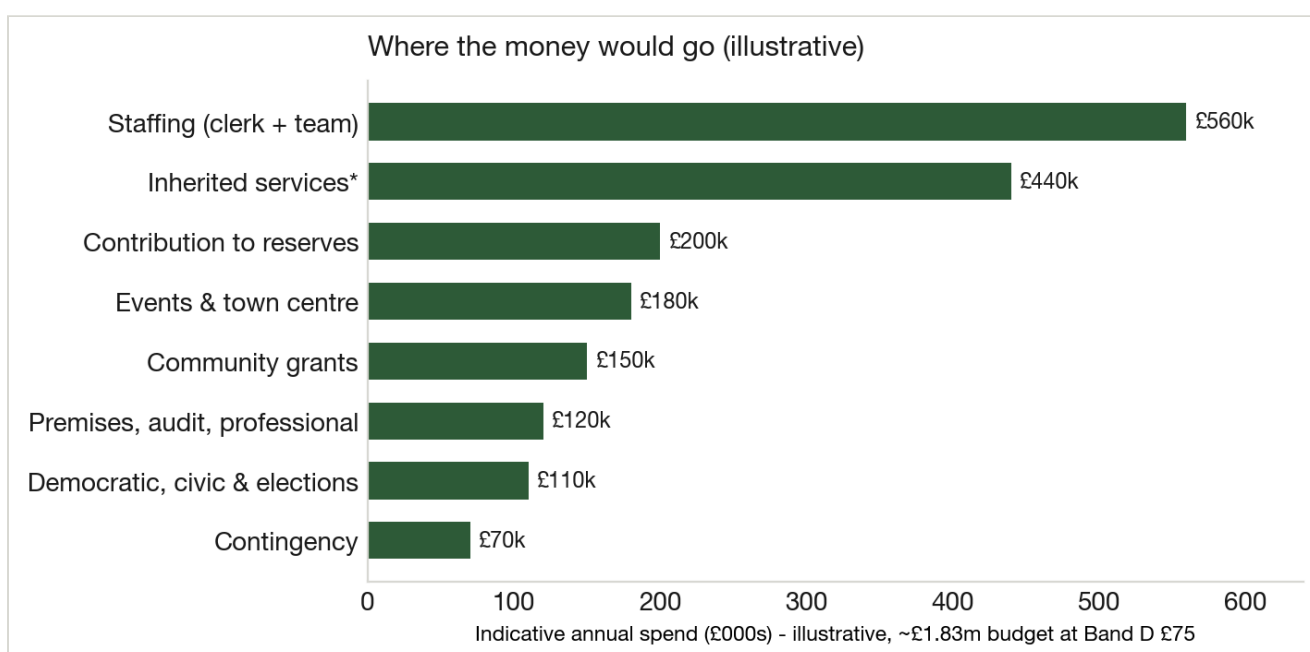
Indicative. Most Wycombe homes are below Band D and would pay less. Source: campaign modelling on the Council’s published tax base.

Most dwellings in the town are in Bands A–C and pay less than the Band D figure. Across Buckinghamshire 36.8% of dwellings are in Bands A–C and 56.6% are at or below Band D (VOA, 2025); the urban Wycombe stock is weighted further toward the lower bands, so the “most homes pay less” position is stronger here than the county average. For comparison, Frome Town Council reports that 76% of its households are in Bands A–C.

4.2 Indicative expenditure (recommended launch, Band D £75 ≈ £1.83m)

The illustrative budget below is modelled on the published budgets of comparable town councils (Royal Sutton Coldfield, Frome, Salisbury) and the inherited special-expenses service base. It is indicative; the founding council would set its own budget.

BUDGET LINE	£ PER YEAR
Staffing (town clerk + finance, admin, grounds and projects team)	560,000
Inherited services (cemeteries, recreation grounds, allotments, lighting, war memorial)	440,000
Contribution to general reserve	200,000
Events and town-centre programme (including BID partnership)	180,000
Community grants	150,000
Premises, office, IT, insurance, audit and professional fees	120,000
Democratic, civic and elections (incl. mayoralty)	110,000
Contingency	70,000
Total	1,830,000



Illustrative allocation at a Band D £75 launch precept. A town clerk for a council of this size sits at NJC scale LC4 (~£56,700–£63,900, 2025/26).

A general reserve should be built toward the level the sector's *Governance and Accountability Practitioners' Guide* (JPAG, 2024) sets: between three and twelve months of net revenue expenditure, with councils above £200,000 of turnover planning toward at least three months. For a ~£1.83m council that is approximately £460,000, built over the first two to three years via the annual contribution shown and any opening transfer agreed with Buckinghamshire.

4.3 Asset transfer and cost-neutrality

The decisive financial test is that services and assets transfer with the precept. The strongest model is Wiltshire's 2009 transfer to its new town councils (parks, CCTV, car-parking), structured to be broadly cost-neutral to both parties, with agency agreements where land tenure prevented a full transfer. Applied here: the special-expenses services (§2) transfer to the town council, Buckinghamshire ceases to levy the £17.99 special-expenses and £2.43 Charter Trustees charges on the area, and the resident's net change is the proposed precept minus £20.42. We do not assume a net financial gift; the asset and charge package should be settled in writing in the review's terms of reference.

4.4 Additional local revenue

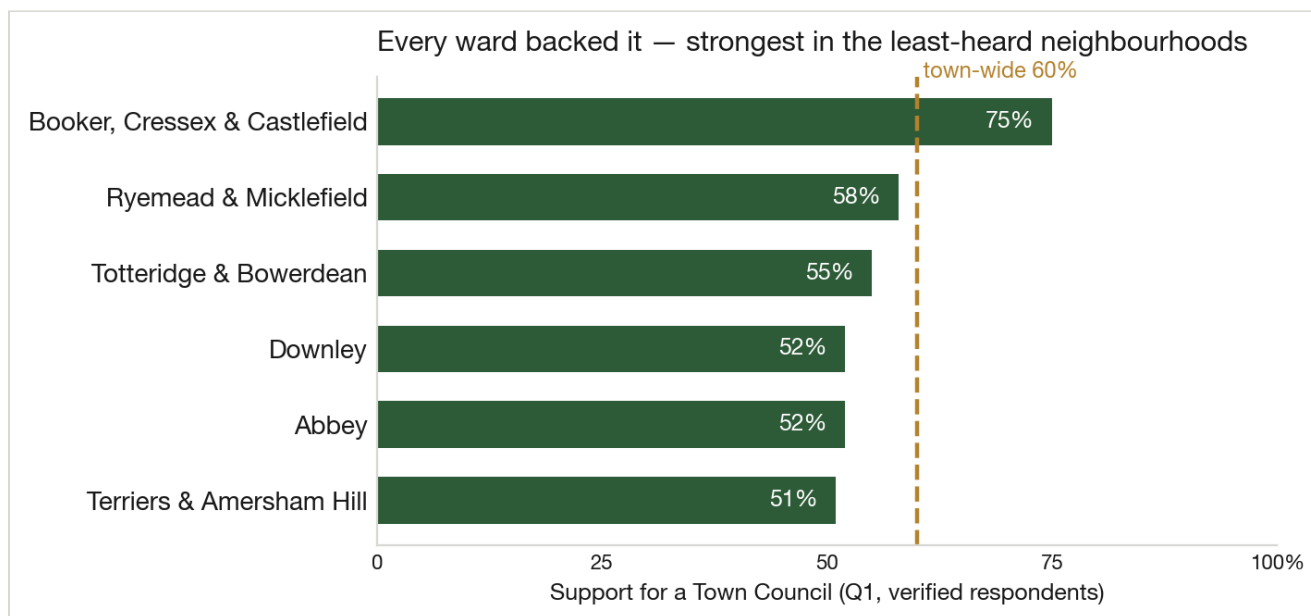
A town council with a “made” Neighbourhood Plan receives 25% (uncapped) of the local Community Infrastructure Levy, against 15% (capped at £100 per dwelling) without one. High Wycombe has levied CIL since 2012 (the former Wycombe District schedule); absent a parish, that neighbourhood portion is currently retained by Buckinghamshire. The yield depends on development coming forward, so no fixed figure is forecast here, but it is recurring local infrastructure money the town cannot currently receive.

5. Electoral arrangements (proposed)

- **Councillors:** 18–21, elected across town wards aligned to the seven existing wards (roughly two to three per ward, scaled to electorate); within the Council’s own 2024 estimate of 13–25.
- **Elections:** four-yearly, co-timed with Buckinghamshire’s elections to maximise turnout and minimise cost.
- **Town Mayor:** appointed by the new council, inheriting the civic regalia from the dissolved Charter Trustees; the ceremonial office is preserved and made accountable to an elected body.
- **Eligibility to stand** (Local Government Act 1972, s.79): registered electors of the area, those owning or renting premises in it, those whose principal workplace is in it, or those resident within three miles of the boundary — allowing town-centre traders to stand.

6. Evidence of community support

The Council’s 2024 consultation drew 2,532 verified responses; 60% supported a town council and 35% favoured the status quo (64% once weighted to the area’s age profile, on the Council’s own analysis). Support was recorded in every ward, strongest in Booker, Cressex and Castlefield (75%) and lowest in Terriers and Amersham Hill (51%).



Source: Buckinghamshire Council, CGR Consultation Analysis Report, May 2024.

On the separate willingness-to-pay question, respondents split No 46% / Yes 43% / Don’t know 11%. The Council’s own cross-tabulation shows this tracks the principal choice: town-council supporters were willing to pay by 69% to 16%, while those preferring the status quo refused by 95% to 2%. The price objection is downstream of the principle, and is materially softened by the finding in §2 that residents already pay

£20.42 for these services. A fresh consultation should therefore put a specific, capped figure to residents rather than an open-ended question.

7. Governance, deliverability and risk

RISK	MITIGATION
Perceived double taxation	Residents already pay £20.42 for these services; pair creation with asset transfer and a commensurate reduction in the Buckinghamshire charge (\$4.3).
A council without assets stalls (e.g. Sutton Coldfield's early underspend)	Settle the asset and service package in the terms of reference; phase transfers; budget the first year realistically.
Precept ratcheting	A published, capped launch precept and a precept policy; participatory budgeting. Town precepts are outside the referendum cap, so self-restraint is set out up front.
Single-party or faction capture	A cross-party founding council and member conduct code from day one.
Loss of consent (e.g. Lickey End, unwound after 2010)	Sustained legitimacy: a low launch precept, visible early delivery, and a broad-based council.
Repeat of the 2024 low-response rejection	Engineer the fresh consultation for high response; the 60% positive signal already exists.

8. Recommendation and route

We invite Buckinghamshire Council to **initiate a Community Governance Review** of the unparished area of High Wycombe on the terms set out above. The political composition that produced the September 2024 rejection no longer holds (the Council has been under No Overall Control since May 2025), and this document answers the “no proper detail” criticism on which that decision rested.

Should the Council decline, residents may compel a review under s.80 of the 2007 Act: for an area of more than 2,500 electors the petition threshold is 7.5% of electors, which on 55,125 electors is approximately **4,135 valid signatures**. A CGR, once initiated, completes within twelve months of its terms of reference; aligning the first town-council elections to the next Buckinghamshire cycle would minimise cost and maximise founding turnout.

Sources

Tax base, current special-expenses and Charter Trustees charges, and Band D figures: Buckinghamshire Council, *Council Tax Resolution 2025/26*, Schedules 1–2, and the Special Expenses service schedule (Buckinghamshire Council / moderngov). Council tax band distribution: Valuation Office Agency, *Council Tax: stock of properties 2025* (CTSOP1.1). Consultation results, electorate, ward figures and willingness-to-pay: Buckinghamshire Council, *Wycombe Community Governance Review — Consultation Analysis Report* (v4, May 2024). Comparator budgets and precepts: published budgets of Royal Sutton Coldfield, Frome and Salisbury councils (2025/26–2026/27). Reserves: JPAG, *Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities — a Practitioners' Guide* (2024), paras 5.33–5.35. Clerk pay: SLCC/NJC pay scales 2025/26. Legal framework: Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Part 4 (ss.79–102, incl. s.80 petition threshold and s.93 electoral arrangements); Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008, SI 2008/625, reg. 15; Local Government Act 1972, s.79; CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended); LGBCE/MHCLG *Guidance on Community Governance Reviews*. Ward boundaries and Output Area membership: ONS Open Geography / campaign ward dataset.

This business case models the structure, cost and powers of a possible town council. It does not substitute for a formal Community Governance Review, which remains the only statutory route to creation. Indicative and modelled figures are labelled; published figures are cited to source. This is an independent, cross-party residents' campaign and is not affiliated with Buckinghamshire Council.