



COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW · PROSPECTUS

The Case for a High Wycombe Town Council

What it would control, what it would cost, how it would be run, and the lawful route to creating one. Party-neutral, and honest about the trade-offs.



The Guildhall, High Wycombe. Public-domain photograph via Wikimedia Commons.

In one page

High Wycombe is the only major town in Buckinghamshire without its own parish or town council. The unparished area is overseen by the 16 Buckinghamshire councillors whose wards clip it — none of them elected to represent the town as the town — who also sit as the Charter Trustees that keep the ceremonial mayoralty alive. Nobody is directly elected to speak for High Wycombe. A town council fixes that.

- **The town already asked for one.** In Buckinghamshire's own 2024 consultation, 60% of 2,532 verified respondents backed a town council. It was rejected on the response rate, not the result.
- **The politics have changed.** Buckinghamshire is now under No Overall Control, so the majority that rejected it no longer holds.
- **The cost is modest and capped.** An indicative launch precept of £60–90 at Band D — about £1.20–£2.00 a week, at or below the cheapest comparable council.
- **There is a lawful route.** A petition signed by 7.5% of local electors — about 4,135 names — compels Buckinghamshire to hold a fresh review.

60%

backed a town council in the council's own 2024 consultation (2,532 verified responses)

1 of 16

major Buckinghamshire towns without its own council — only High Wycombe

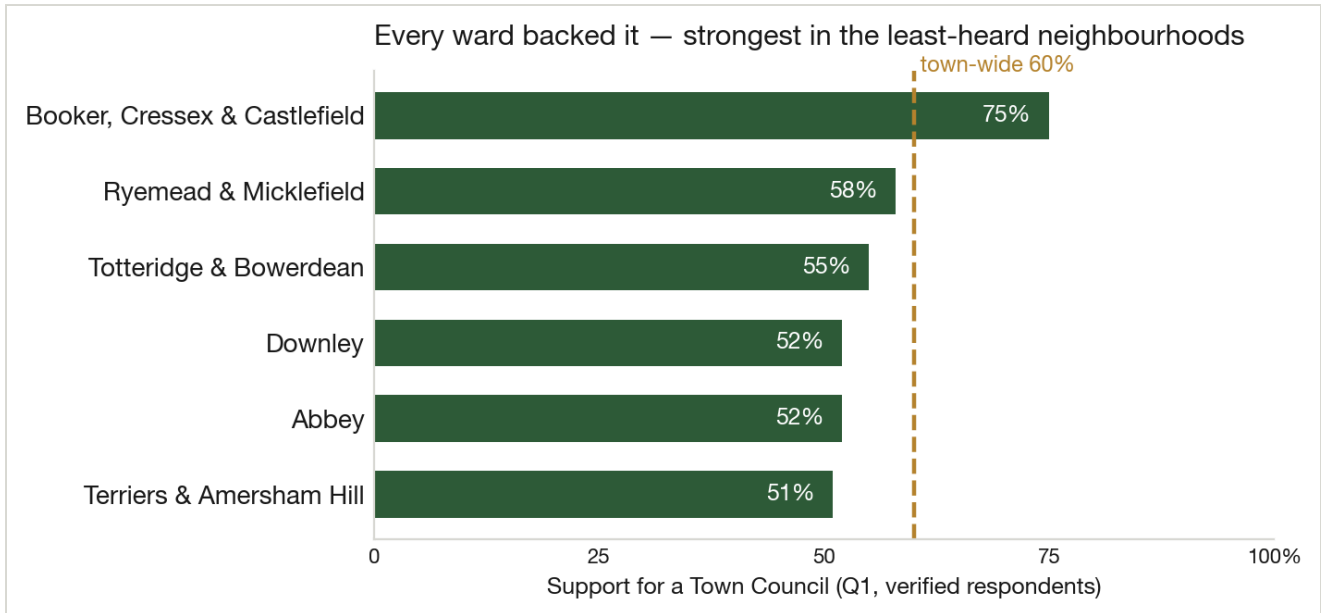
4,135

signatures (7.5% of electors) legally compel a fresh Community Governance Review

The case in brief

In place of an elected town body sit two committees, both made up of the same 16 Buckinghamshire councillors whose wards clip the unparished area: the High Wycombe Town Committee, and the Charter Trustees who annually nominate the Mayor of High Wycombe. A councillor sits on them because their unitary ward overlaps the boundary, not because the town chose them for the job. That is the democratic deficit this prospectus addresses.

This is not a fringe demand. In Buckinghamshire's 2024 Community Governance Review consultation, 60% of 2,532 verified respondents backed a town council and 35% preferred the status quo. The then Conservative-led council rejected it in September 2024, citing the 4.6% response rate rather than the result. The council is now under No Overall Control, so that majority no longer holds.



Support for a town council by ward, 2024 consultation. Source: Buckinghamshire Council CGR Consultation Analysis Report (May 2024); ward figures from the report's choropleth and named results.

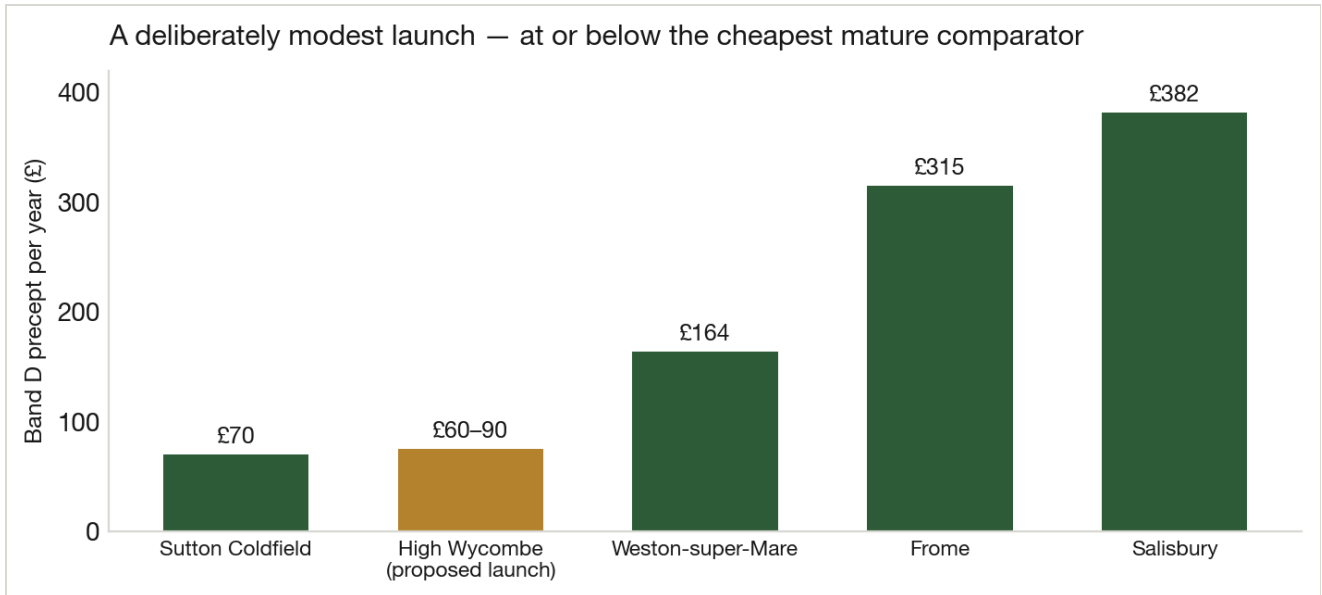
What a town council would control

A town council is the neighbourhood tier. It would not run roads, schools, social care, waste or strategic planning — those stay with Buckinghamshire. What it can do, drawn from what comparable councils run:

- Town-centre life: events, markets, festivals, Christmas lights, public realm and town-centre management.
- Parks, open spaces, allotments, public toilets and community buildings, through assets devolved from Buckinghamshire.
- Grants to local groups, at a neighbourhood scale a 550,000-population county cannot match.
- A statutory voice on planning, and the power to make a Neighbourhood Plan that carries legal weight in decisions.
- Participatory budgeting — residents directly allocating part of the spend, as Frome has done for years.

What it would cost — honestly

A town council is funded by a precept: a locally set line on the council tax bill, collected by Buckinghamshire and passed across in full. The decisive fact is that residents **already pay** for this area. In 2025/26 Buckinghamshire levies a Band D special-expenses charge of £17.99 plus a £2.43 Charter Trustees charge - **£20.42** in total, about £0.5m across the town - for cemeteries, recreation grounds, allotments, footway lighting, the war memorial, grants and events. A town council inherits those services and that funding. An indicative launch precept of £60–90 at Band D funds a £1.46m–£2.20m council; but because £20.42 is already charged, the *net new* cost to a Band D household is only about £40–70 a year (roughly £0.76–£1.34 a week). Most Wycombe homes are in Bands A–C and would pay less.



Annual Band D precept, verified comparators vs the proposed High Wycombe launch. Sutton Coldfield held its precept flat at £49.96 from 2016 to 2024/25, now £69.96 (2026/27). Sources: each council’s published precept for 2025/26–2026/27.

COUNCIL	SETUP	BAND D PRECEPT
Royal Sutton Coldfield	Town inside a unitary (closest analogue)	£50 → £70
Weston-super-Mare	Inside North Somerset unitary	£164
Frome	High-activity “People’s Budget” model	£315
Salisbury	Large devolved service package	£382
High Wycombe	Proposed, capped launch	£60–90

The proposed range sits at or below the cheapest mature comparator. We ask the campaign to be bound by a published commitment: a capped, modest launch precept, with any future rise set through the council’s own policy and its participatory budget. Town precepts are not subject to the referendum cap that applies to larger councils, which is precisely why a self-imposed cap matters.

The objections, answered

THE CLAIM

“It’s just another layer of bureaucracy and a second tax bill.”

THE CLAIM

“Only a few people responded in 2024, so nobody really wants it.”

THE CLAIM

“It’ll be captured by one party or one faction.”

THE ANSWER

Residents already pay a Band D special-expenses and Charter Trustees charge of £20.42 a year (about £0.5m) on this exact area, for cemeteries, recreation grounds, allotments, lighting, grants and events. A town council inherits those services and that funding, so the real change is the precept minus £20.42. The ask to councillors is that the services and assets devolve with it, so the precept buys local control rather than a second bill.

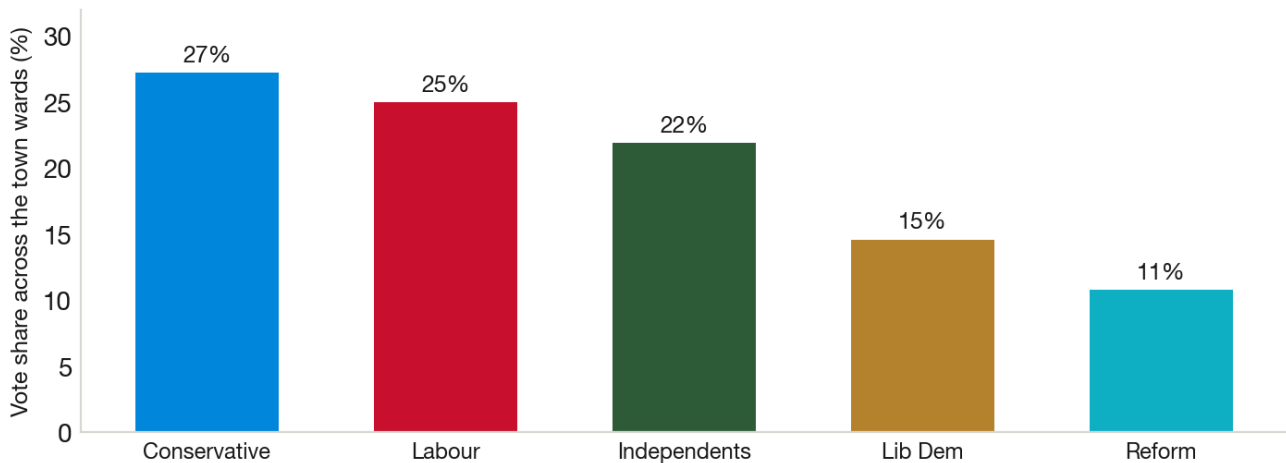
THE ANSWER

A low response rate cannot be read as a silent majority against. 60% of those who responded backed it. The petition route answers the point directly: clear the legal threshold of named electors and the question is settled on numbers, not turnout.

THE ANSWER

Councillors are directly elected by residents. At the town’s most local elections the vote splits several ways, with independents winning as many seats as any party. The campaign is cross-party by design, with a conduct code and participatory budgeting from day one.

No party owns this town — which is why the campaign is cross-party



Vote share across the High Wycombe town wards, May 2025 Buckinghamshire elections. Source: declared results (Democracy Club / returning officer), aggregated across the town wards. “Independents” combines Independent and Wycombe Independents.

Proposed structure

- **Area:** the seven-ward unparished core (~55,000 electors): Abbey, Booker/Cressex & Castlefield, Downley, Ryemead & Micklefield, Terriers & Amersham Hill, Totteridge & Bowerdean, and West Wycombe.
- **Councillors:** around 18–21, directly elected across town wards — within Buckinghamshire’s own 13–25 estimate, with the exact number set by the review.

- **Elections:** four-yearly, co-timed with the Buckinghamshire elections to lift turnout and cut cost.
- **Mayor:** the new council appoints a town mayor, inheriting the civic regalia from the dissolved Charter Trustees.
- **Day one:** a capped launch precept, a cross-party conduct code, and participatory budgeting.

With a Neighbourhood Plan a town council captures 25% of the local Community Infrastructure Levy, uncapped, instead of 15% capped at £100 a home — recurring local money that the town cannot receive today because it has no council to receive it.

The route to creating one

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, a petition signed by 7.5% of local electors — about 4,135 of the roughly 55,000 in the seven wards — compels Buckinghamshire to hold a Community Governance Review. That review completes within twelve months of its terms of reference, and is the formal route to a directly elected town council. The 2024 rejection rested on a low response rate; a petition that clears the legal threshold answers that directly.

“It is clearly unfair that High Wycombe is the only major town in Buckinghamshire not to benefit from a town council.”

— Emma Reynolds MP for Wycombe, September 2024

Running it well

New town councils succeed where they control real assets and keep precept rises modest, and fail where precepts ratchet or a single faction captures a body with weak scrutiny. A council can also be unwound if it loses local consent, as Lickey End was after a 2010 campaign. The defence is the same in every case: sustained legitimacy — a low launch precept, visible early wins, participatory budgeting, and a broad, cross-party founding council.

Sources & credits

Consultation results, electorate and ward figures: Buckinghamshire Council, Wycombe Community Governance Review — Consultation Analysis Report (v4, May 2024). Legal mechanism: Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Part 4 (CGR and petition threshold); Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008, SI 2008/625 reg 15 (charter-trustee dissolution); Local Government Act 1972 s.79 (qualification to stand). Comparators: the published precepts of Sutton Coldfield, Weston-super-Mare, Frome and Salisbury town/city councils (2025/26–2026/27). CIL: CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended), neighbourhood portion. Ward politics: declared May 2025 Buckinghamshire results. MP quote: reported September 2024.

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