

Cramlington Town Council
Meeting 3rd November 2022
Budget 2023/24

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report asks the Council to consider agreeing a Precept and budget for 2023/24 and to confirm priorities for new spending up to 2024/25. The report suggests that in response to the current cost of living crisis, and its financial impact on many sections of the community, that the Council should keep any increase in the Precept to a minimum. In order to accommodate inflationary rises every effort will continue to be made to identify efficiency savings.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has previously agreed guiding principles for its budget, which demonstrate a high degree of prudence and financial responsibility. The proposed principles for setting the budget for 2023/24 maintain this underlying approach:
- Any rise in the Precept must take account of affordability.
 - New schemes should be capital projects with minimum on-going revenue implications.
 - New projects must demonstrate clear community benefits and utilise external resources where possible.
 - All expenditure should clearly demonstrate value for money.
 - Where possible the Council should engage the community, utilizing and co-ordinating their assets and resources.
 - Priority should be given to supporting the most vulnerable sections of the community.
 - The current level of expenditure on planting will not be increased, but changes may be made in how the current budget is used.

3. Priorities for 2023/24

- 3.1 As part of its preparation for the 2022/23 budget, Council agreed a three-year schedule of priorities. This schedule is attached as Table, 1 and schemes currently underway are highlighted.
- 3.2 Since the schedule was approved additional priorities have been identified:
- Speed indicators have been agreed and will shortly be installed at locations around the town; these have been funded from the budget for the current financial year.
 - Discussions are on-going concerning the community asset transfer of sites at Alexandra Park and Cumbria Road. Alexandra Park will be the site of new adventure playground, the costs for which are ring-fenced within the 2022/23 budget. However, the transfer may extend to a wider area, with potential to provide further play and sport facilities in future years. Therefore, it is proposed that £50,000 be allocated for the further development of the site in 2023/24. This could include the provision of new outdoor gym equipment and the renovation of the landscaped area. The site at Cumbria Road has potential to accommodate a dementia garden, and an area for supervised play. If these transfers proceed, it is proposed that design and preliminary works be undertaken in 2023/24 at an estimated cost of up to £50,000. Further works will be undertaken to complete the project in 2024/25. If available, external funding will be sought for this scheme.

- A further review of bus shelter provision and improvement; from earlier work undertaken, expenditure of £25,000 each year for 2 years is likely to be required.
- The playground maintenance budget requires a substantial increase, not least to deal with repeated vandalism of facilities. It is advised that a realistic maintenance budget of £50,000 is required. This amount has been included as committed expenditure.
- In response to growing youth anti-social behaviour the town council has entered into partnership with CVYP to provide youth clubs at three locations in Cramlington. The full year cost of this provision is £26,000
- It is certain that prices will continue to increase over the coming year and provision must be made to cover the costs of further inflation. To meet these, as yet unknown price increases, it is proposed to set aside a contingency fund of £50,000.

4. Financial Position

- 4.1 The cost of the above proposals is £201,000. Taken together with committed expenditure of £813,000, the Council's estimated budget for 2023/24 is £1,014,000. This includes repricing and savings of £25,000 resulting from restructuring. Details are provided in the attached Table 2.
- 4.2 At this stage the level of change to the tax base is not known, but any increase will permit a limited degree of flexibility to accommodate unforeseen demands on the budget and to rebuild the Council's Reserve.
- 4.3 The current precept is £1,019,000 which relates to an annual charge for a Band D property of £116.46p. In consideration of the cost-of-living crisis, the town council is advised to limit any increase in the Precept to a level sufficient to allow on-going projects as set out in section 3, to proceed. This will allow the town council to limit its Precept rise to 3%, increasing the Band D charge to £119.95p a year. Members should be aware that over 70% of dwellings in Cramlington fall into Bands A-C and will consequently pay less.
- 4.4 Should the town council support this approach, Members should be aware that any new, as yet unidentified schemes, could only be bought forward if one or more schemes in Table 1 are postponed or deleted. Members are invited at this stage to propose potential new schemes and possible revisions to the priorities set out above.

5. Reserves

- 5.1 The original schemes agreed for the current year anticipated a withdrawal from Reserves of around £47,000, leaving £150,000 in hand for any unforeseen events. As a result of additional schemes and the unprecedented cost of storm damage, it is likely that £79,000 of the Reserve will be used, leaving around £118,000.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Council is recommended to:
- a. Agree to continue with on-going projects as set out in section 3.2 or to identify alternative projects set out in the priorities schedule 2022/25.
 - b. Confirm an increase in the playground's maintenance budget to £50,000 a year.
 - c. Agree to a contingency budget of £50,000 to meet unforeseen inflationary costs.
 - d. Agree to increase the charge for a Band D property by 3% to £119.95 a year for 2023/24, giving estimated Precept income of £1,050,000.

- e. Note the likely reduction in Reserves and seek to achieve the previously agreed level of £150,000.

Table 1

Proposed New Schemes 2022-24

1. Undertake and implement the bus shelter review.
2. Progress the playground improvement programme.
3. Review playground provision/facilities in new housing estates.
4. Review wider sports provision i.e., free to use tennis courts.
5. Extend outdoor gym provision.
6. Provision of alternative/activity playgrounds.
7. Seek an asset transfer of Alexandra Park pavilion to provide a community café and other facilities.
8. Provision of "gateway" signage at key entrances to the town.
9. Provision of a "doggy activity" park.
10. Provision of public art across the town.
11. Establish of youth clubs to complement and enhance current provision.
12. Production of a town map showing cycling and walking routes, playgrounds, and a proposed heritage trail.
13. Enhancement of Cramlington Station.
14. Painting programme for playgrounds, bus shelters and railings in town centre.
15. Enhancement/planting of roundabout at entrance to Cramlington hospital.
16. Re-position raised bed in the Village.
17. Establish a Police Partnership.
18. Extend current programme of events to include a food festival, young people's jobs fair, arts, and crafts fair/exhibitions provision of the adventure playground.
19. A comprehensive review of wards to identify needs and interventions; this would involve a maximum of 2 wards a year commencing with West and Eastfield.

Notes relating to the above

1. *New shelters will be provided this year at East Cramlington and Northumbria Road. It has been proposed to undertake a further review in advance of budget preparation for 2023/24.*
2. *A new adventure playground has been agreed for Alexandra Park and a replacement playground for Weldon Road. Both projects will commence this year. It is proposed to increase the playground maintenance budget to £40,000*
5. *he proposal to replace the outdoor gym at Alexandra Park has not been progressed in favour of the adventure playground. Subject to the transfer to CTC of a wider area at the park a new outdoor gym could be provided in future years.*
7. *Discussions are continuing with NCC over the community asset transfer of land at Alexandra Park and Cumbria Way.*
8. *An alternative approach is being developed based on a public art theme/trail which will incorporate features at main entrances to the town.*
9. *Project approved subject to transfer of the site by NCC*
10. *See 8 above.*
11. *This will be a priority for the youth co-ordinator when in post*

13. *Meetings have been held with Network Rail and Arriva. The scope for alterations is restricted by health and safety considerations and a reluctance by the operators to engage in this project. Further contact will be made to progress improvements.*
14. *Bus shelter/playground painting has been undertaken by CTC and NCC have agreed to painting railings on Forum Way.*
15. *The Services Manager held discussion with the hospital trust prior to leaving. Further contact will be made.*
16. *Members views are sought on the removal of the raised bed.*
17. *Regular scheduled meetings are held with local police officers and there continues to be frequent informal contact at officer level.*
18. *The Jubilee food festival was cancelled due to a poor take up by stall holders. A programme of events for the remainder of this year and 2023/23 will be prepared and overseen by the Youth and Communities Committee.*
19. *Difficulties have been encountered with obtaining up to date information. It is proposed that reviews await the publication of 2021 census data.*

Table 2

Budget Areas	Current Budget	Proposed Budget
	2022-23	2023-24
	£	£
Management & Administration	145,200	125,500
Support Services	32,500	34,000
Communications	32,400	33,400
Community & Youth	122,600	144,100
Operations Team	186,800	199,300
Environmental & Civil Enforcement	41,200	44,000
General Running Costs	34,300	33,300
Democracy	6,500	6,600
Allotments	54,000	
Playgrounds	32,000	66,000
Operational Services	82,100	62,000
Other Services	56,000	46,000
Council Offices	49,120	51,100
Surveyors House		
Operations Depot	17,280	18,700
Weldon Playground	80,000	
Adventure Playground	100,000	
Dog Activity Area	26,000	
Alexandra Park		50,000
Cumbria Road		50,000
Contingency for Inflation		50,000
Unallocated		36,000
Total Expenditure	1,098,000	1,050,000
Precept	1,019,000	1,050,000
Withdrawal from Reserves	79,000	
Total Financing	1,098,000	1,050,000

Cramlington Town Council

12th January 2023

Community Chest

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is for members to review the community chest criteria and applications process.

2. Background

2.1 Community Chest applications were delegated to the Community and Youth Committee for consideration in April 2022. The application process was amended, and new criteria were approved. It was agreed to undertake an annual review following the changes.

2.2 The current budget is £20,000 and to date 24 applications have been received; 18 were approved totalling £16,500, 5 applications were rejected for failing to meet the criteria and 1 application has been deferred pending more information.

3. Review

3.1 Attached for reference (appendix A) is a revised Community Chest Application Form and guidance notes incorporating the proposed changes outlined below.

3.2 Only applications that meet the essential criteria will be considered by the Community and Youth Committee. Applications will be pre-vetted by the Community and Youth Manager and Finance Manager prior to consideration by the Committee.

3.3 It is proposed to:

- To limit grants to £750 to ensure a fair distribution of available funds. At the moment there is no limit, and each request is considered on an individual basis.
- The Council will no longer solely fund grant requests but will make a maximum contribution of 75% of the total cost of the project with the remaining funds to be self-funded or sourced elsewhere.

4. Recommendations

4.1 To note the report

4.2 To agree the changes to the community chest process outlined in section 3.

**Cramlington Town Council
Meeting 12th January 2023
Report of the Town Clerk**

Review of Electoral divisions 2023

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Council's support for proposed amendments to current electoral divisional boundaries for Cramlington in response to consultation by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

2. Background

2.1 The LGBCE have invited views for a new pattern of electoral divisions for Northumberland. These are independent reviews which recommend new patterns of divisions so that each councillor represents about the same number of electors. Reviews should also aim to ensure that the pattern of divisions reflect community ties and identities and promotes effective local government. The Commission have indicated that the target size of a division should be around 4,000 electors with a variance of no more than 10%.

2.2 The Commission has further indicated that at this stage they are minded to recommend 67 electoral divisions for Northumberland County Council which is the same as the current number of divisions.

2.3 Cramlington is currently covered by 6 divisions with electorates ranging from 5,111 for West ward to 3,207 for the East ward. Clearly, therefore, a degree of realignment is required.

2.4 Based on NCC figures, the 2028 projected electorate for Cramlington will be 26,000. Whilst this is above the target figure for 6 divisions it is below that required for 7 divisions. It is unlikely that the current number of electoral divisions for Cramlington will increase unless there is compelling evidence to support an increase. Moreover, NCC's projected figure also assumes a high level of housing completions which may not be realised in the current economic climate.

2.5 Against this background it is suggested that the Commission are most likely to endorse a continuation of 6 divisions for Cramlington. Council is, therefore, advised to propose a preferred arrangement for 6 divisions incorporating appropriate realignments. A second preferred option could propose 7 divisions, but it is felt that this is unlikely to meet the approval of the Commission.

3. Proposed Changes to Divisional Boundaries for Cramlington.

3.1 The proposed changes have been guided by several key considerations:

- An equal number of electors for each division
- Continuity of existing divisional boundaries where possible
- Ensuring community cohesion
- Achieving a good mix of private and social housing where possible

3.2 The attached plans show existing divisional boundaries, a scheme for 7 divisions and the suggested preferred option for a realignment of 6 divisions. Current and forecast numbers of electors are also shown. These proposals are based on detailed, street by street, electoral roll data. The 2028 forecast information has been provided by NCC.

3.3 For the 7-division option, 5 divisions are within 10% tolerance of the target 4,000 electors figure set by the Commission, all wards demonstrate a good degree of community coherence, and 4 divisions remain unchanged. The main issue lies with a new North-West division which fall significantly below the target figure on current and projected number of electors. Further realignment, taking in part of North or West divisions is possible but would affect both continuity and community coherence. Similarly, East division could be increased by taking in part of Eastfield but again this will affect continuity and community cohesion. It is anticipated that by the time of the 2025 elections the number of electors for West division will increase by 800-1,000 assuming a housing completion rate of 200 dwellings a year.

3.4 The 6-division option requires changes to all divisions to a greater or lesser extent. On the basis of current and projected number of electors, 5 divisions are within 10% tolerance of the target figure on current and projected number of electors. West is currently significantly below with 2,897 electors but this could rise to nearly 4,000 by 2025. All proposed divisions show a high degree of community coherence and a mix of private and social housing.

4. Timetable

4.1 The Commission has published the following timetable for the review.

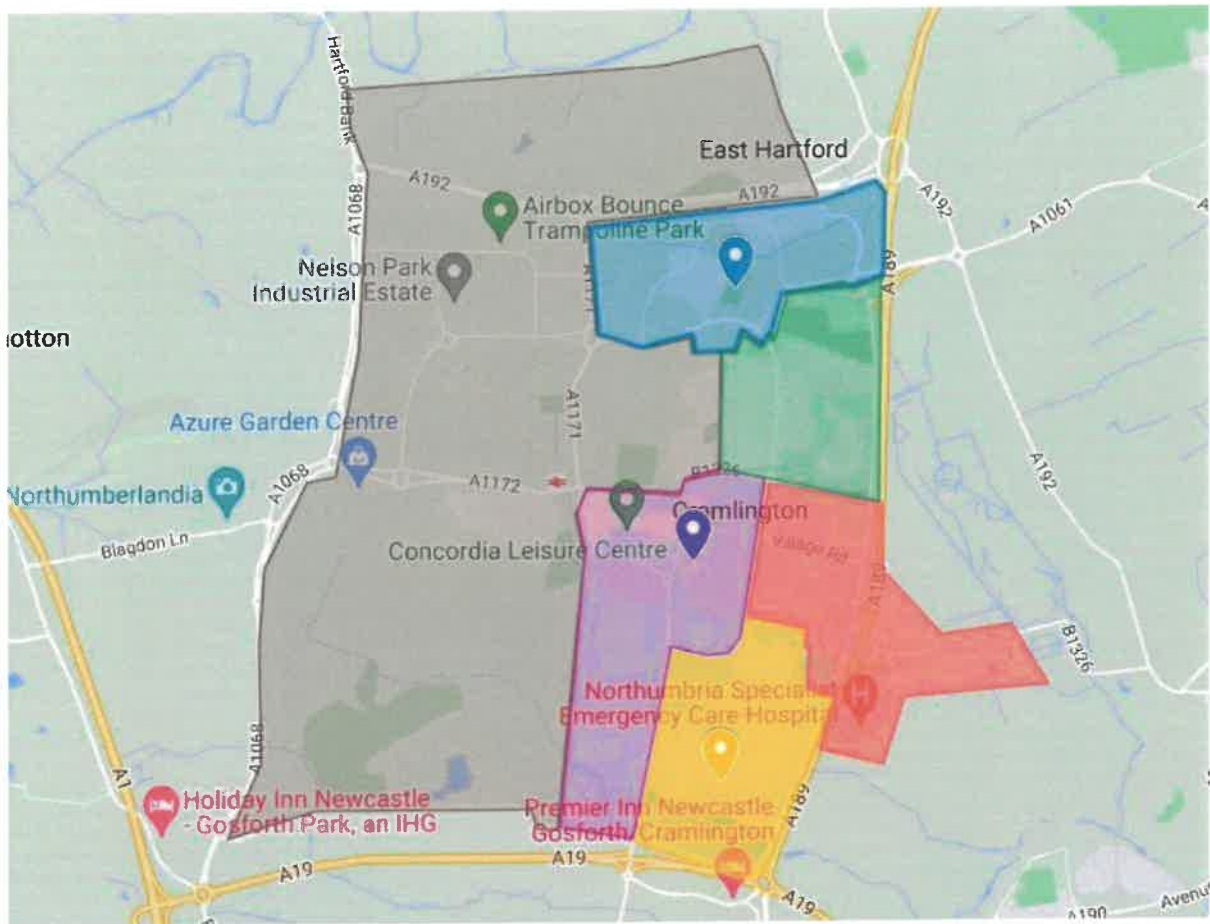
	Date From:	Date To:
Initial consultation You can give us your views on your local communities	22 November 2022	30 January 2023
Consultation on proposals You can give us your views on our proposed new pattern of wards	25 April 2023	3 July 2023
Final report We publish the Commission's recommendations	26 September 2023	
Order laid in Parliament This makes the recommendations law	TBC	
Effective date The new arrangements apply to elections after this date		

5. Recommendations

5.1 Council is asked to

- a. Consider the options proposed in this report in the context of the key criteria set out in section 3.1
- b. To support the suggested preferred option for a realignment of the current 6 divisions for Cramlington
- c. To advise on further changes to this option that adhere to the key criteria for review.
- d. To submit to the LGBCE the arrangements agreed at this meeting as the Town Council's preferred option for change.

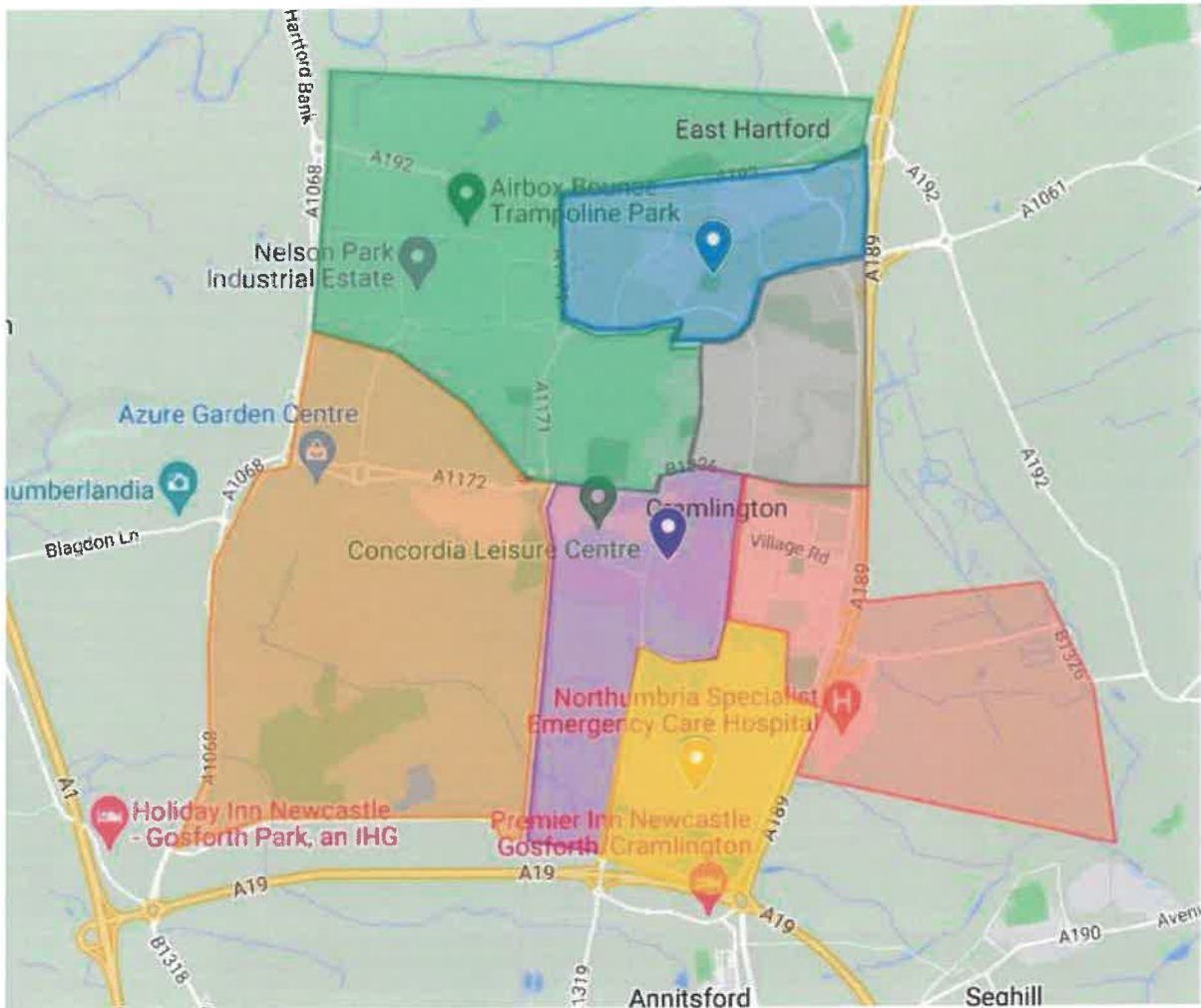
Existing Boundaries



Current Ward makeup	2022	Projected 2028
South East Ward	3666	3757
West Ward	5111	7351
East Ward	3207	3244
Eastfield Ward	3832	3940
Village Ward	3495	3567
North Ward	4062	4131
TOTAL	23373	25990

West to gain an additional 2240 by 2028 with 1749 from the South West Sector Development

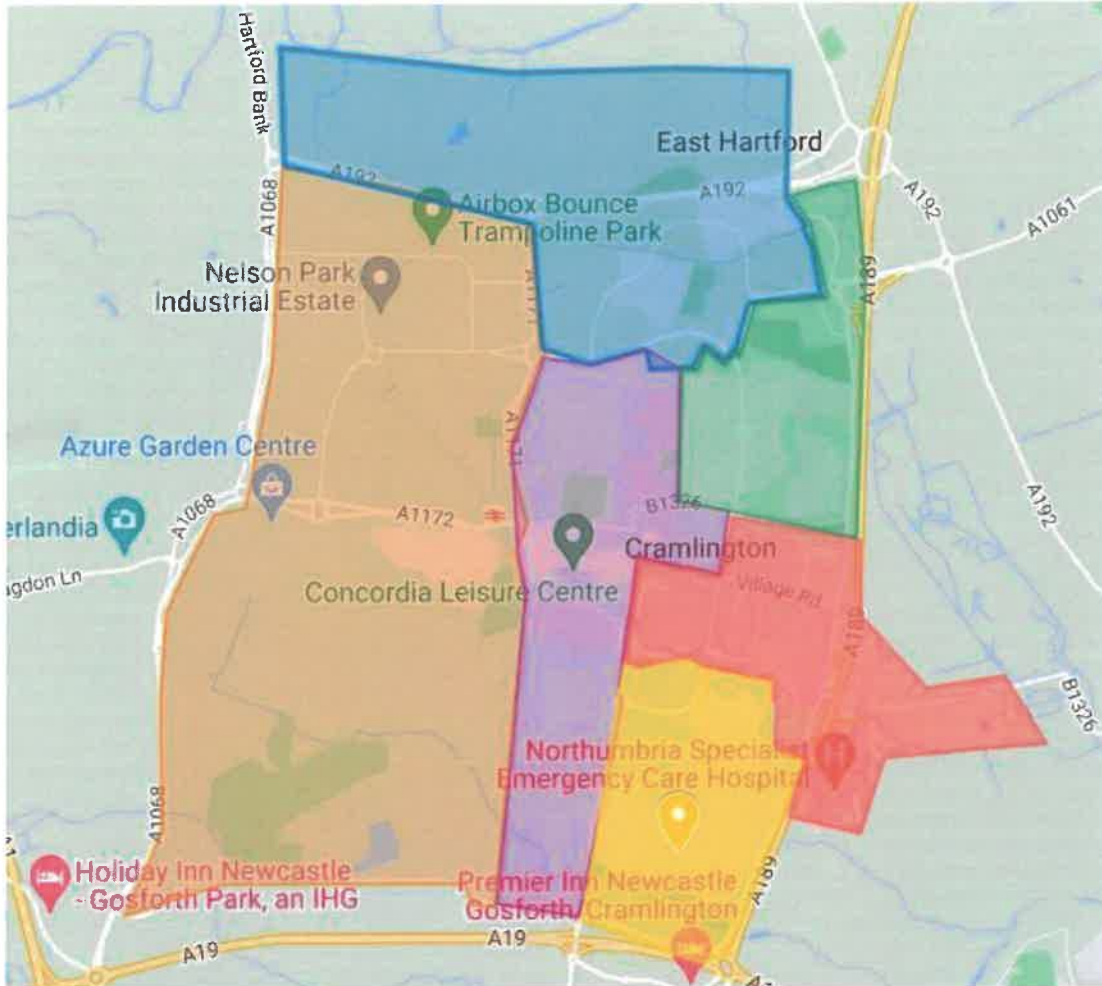
Option A – 7 wards



The West ward would be split into two creating an additional ward. Nelson Village, St Nicholas Manor, Bassington Manor, Westfield Grange and Parkside Glade would create a new North West ward. Beacon Hill, Beacon Lane and the Fairways would remain as the West Ward. North, East, Eastfield, South East and Village wards would remain unchanged.

Option A	2022	Projected 2028
South East Ward	3666	3757
West Ward	2285	4319
East Ward	3207	3244
Eastfield Ward	3832	4040
Village Ward	3495	3567
North Ward	4062	4131
North West	2826	2932
TOTAL	23373	25990

Option B – 6 wards



There would be changes to all wards which are set out in the table below.

Ward	Additional Areas	Removed Areas
South East	Hall Close Glade / hall Close Chase	
West		St Nicholas Manor, Westwood Grange, Parkside Glade and East Hartford
East	Hall Close Green / Hall Close Dale / Hall Close Grange	
Eastfield	Hastings Terrace area	
Village	St Nicholas Manor, Parkside Glade and Westfield Grange	Hall Close Estates
North	East Hartford	Hastings Terrace area

Option B	2022	Projected 2028
South East Ward	4172	4263
West Ward	2897	4759
East Ward	3917	4128
Eastfield Ward	3931	4139
Village Ward	4057	4233
North Ward	4399	4468
TOTAL	23373	25990