

## **LIBERAL DEMOCRAT SUBMISSION TO BOUNDARY COMMISSION SWALE BOROUGH COUNCIL 8.1.12**

### **BACKGROUND**

**1. Ward Size** – Two lib dem councillors have experience of being councillor in different sized wards. Mike Henderson has been councillor in Davington Priory ward as a 2 member ward and 1 member ward. Elvie Lowe has been councillor in Milton Regis ward as a 3 member ward and a 2 member ward. Discussions with these councillors and others who have been members in different sized wards have developed views of different ward sizes. A modest number of electors have also given their views and these concur with councillor views.

It is considered that in terms of creating wards with good community links, providing the ability to interact strongly with all residents and exercising community leadership that 1 and 2 member wards are both effective. 3 member wards – where the average size should be approximately 6500 electors tend to be too large. They will not normally have close community links across the whole of the ward. They are too large for an individual councillor to cover effectively. Where all three members are of the same political party the workload can be shared to some extent but practically residents often wish to deal with one of the ward members. Where the political parties are mixed within a single ward this is much more difficult. It could happen that such a ward has members from 3 different political groupings which could result in each one of the three looking after 6500 electors. Additionally we believe that independent candidates for councillor should be encouraged. Potential for this is likely to be made very difficult in the case of 3 member wards as a single independent will find it very difficult to impact on a ward with 6500 electors

It is therefore proposed that 3 member wards should be eliminated from the structure within Swale

**2. Isle of Sheppey** – It is considered that there should not be a ward crossing the Swale between Sheppey and the mainland

**3. Ward size between local areas** – To provide the strongest community links it is considered that Swale Borough should be split into four areas – Faversham, Sittingbourne (including Borden and Iwade & Lower Halstow), Sheppey, and the mainland villages. The total electorate for Swale Borough in 2017 is predicted to be 101366. Dividing this by 47 gives an average number of electors per councilor of 2156. Splitting the borough into the 4 areas identified using the current number of councilors gives  
Faversham - 14871 electors, 7 current councilors, average per councilor 2124. Divide total by borough average justifies 6.897 councillors.  
Sittingbourne – 40214 electors, 18 councillors, average 2234. Divide total by borough average justifies 18.652 councillors  
Sheppey – 29103 electors, 14 councillors, average 2078. From borough average justifies 13.498 councillors

Mainland Villages – 17178 electors, 8 councillors, average 2147. From Borough average justifies 7.967 councillors.

**4. Total number of councilors** – The biggest ward discrepancy at present by far is Iwade and Lower Halstow at 69% in 2017. It is considered that this needs to be made into a two member ward to retain a reasonable sense of community. This leaves several subsequent options:

(i) Raise the total number of councilors to 48. This is considered to be relatively easily achievable

(ii) make changes throughout Sittingbourne to remove one councillor from the rest of the Sittingbourne area, and leave 47 councillors. It is considered that this would be very difficult to achieve, would need substantial changes in almost every ward, and would badly split up some communities. It would also arguably be unfair on Sittingbourne which justifies 18.652 councillors

(iii) Reduce the number of councilors on Sheppey to 13. This would be a very marginal decision as Sheppey justifies 13.498 councillors.

We propose that the most logical and fair change would be to increase the number of councilors to 48. This would leave the least change which is considered desirable, and would leave most wards covering recognizable communities.

**5. Proposed changes in Faversham** – The number of Councillors should not be changed. Faversham is strongly a single community and has a mayor and a Town council. There is no reason to make any substantial changes to the ward boundaries. The key breaks between different parts of the town are the Creek and the railway lines and where possible the ward boundaries should recognize these boundaries.

Abbey ward will be oversize in 2017 (by 490 11%). Davington Priory will be undersize (by 99, 5%), St. Anns will be undersize (by 180, 8%) and Watling will be undersize (by 126, 6%). It is proposed that the section of Abbey ward bounded by Love Lane and the two arms of the railway line travelling NE and SE out of Faversham be moved into Watling ward. This would take approx 400 electors out of Abbey ward (2010 figures) bringing Abbey down to only about 90 oversize. This was in any case the position pre 2002. This would make Watling oversize by about 270. This overage could be moved into St. Anns in the area north of the railway line and east of the western link road. Davington Priory it is suggested could either be left as is or perhaps add Stonebridge Way (as far as Finlay Close) plus Granville Close and Finlay Close – approx 150 into Davington Priory from St. Anns.

## **6. Sittingbourne**

(i) Recommend that Iwade and Lower Halstow becomes a 2 member ward. This could be achieved by putting Bobbing village and the surrounding countryside into I&LH. This would add approx. 430 electors (2010 figures) taken from Grove. This would give I&LH 4075 electors. Note in all cases the changes up and down are approximate as there has been limited access to the post code maps held by SBC.

- (ii) Milton Regis. Recommend that streets South of the Northern part of Atlee Way and West of Grovehurst Road be put into Milton Regis, taken from Kemsley. Approx. 385 electors. Additionally add those streets West of Chalkwell Road, South of Staplehurst Road Link and North of Waterloo Road to Milton Regis taking from Chalkwell ward approx 582 electors. These changes fit well into the present community of Milton Regis . They move Milton Regis to 4473 electors, only around 150 too high against the average. Milton Regis is a clear community and these new boundaries are close to the historical and community boundaries of the area
- (iii) Chalkwell. Recommend adding to Chalkwell from the East end of Grove ward that area South of the railway, East of Staplehurst Road and North of A2; and the area of the Australian estate South of the A2. That change adds approx 800 electors to Chalkwell. This would mean that Chalkwell gains 800 and loses 580, a net gain of 220 giving a total of 4000, 300 too low which is some 9% too low. This area close to central Sittingbourne has not a single community feel but it is suggested that this cannot be avoided.
- (iv) Borden. 2017 prediction is 1952, 200 short. Recommend move dwellings South of A2 and West of Cryalls Lane into Borden from Grove. Approx 234 electors. This would give Borden almost exact average.
- (v) Grove. Forecast 5603 in 2017. Grove at present is a very large sprawling ward with little sense of community. The movement of parts of Grove ward into other wards would reduce Grove by approx 1400 electors bringing Grove down to 4203 and to a much closer sense of community. Grove ward would then be approximately 100 electors undersize.
- (vi) Kemsley. The move from Kemsley into Milton Regis will not damage the community of Kemsley and will reduce the ward size from 4972 to 4390, very close to average.
- (vii) Roman and St. Michaels. An adjustment of the borders between these two ward would bring each ward to within 150 of average. We have no recommendations as to where these moves should be.
- (viii) We do not propose changes to other Sittingbourne wards.

**7. Sheppey** – It is proposed that Sheppey should retain 14 councillors. We suggest Leysdown and Warden be expanded to include Eastchurch and parts of either Minster Cliffs or Sheppey Central to become a 2 member ward. It is proposed strategically that there should not be any 3 member wards (see introduction) and that therefore there should be 7 two member wards on Sheppey. We do not make any detailed proposals here as residents and councilors on Sheppey will have a closer sense of logical communities.

**8. Mainland Villages** – We propose no changes to Boughton and Courtney, East Downs, Hartlip Newington and Upchurch, Teynham and Lynsted or West Downs.

**9.** We have focused on retaining or improving the community sense of individual wards together with achieving ward sizes close to the average. Note the ward size figures throughout this paper relate to the current 47 councillors. If agreement is reached to expand to 48 councillors the average for 2017 will be 2111, rather than 2156.

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