

## Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

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### Comment text:

Submission by Hawkhurst Parish Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission relating to the Borough Council boundary changes for Tunbridge Wells. Hawkhurst Parish Council wishes to register to the Boundary Commission Electoral Review our concerns relating to the current proposals for the Tunbridge Wells Borough. • We recognise the reduction of the number of Borough Councillors from 48 to 39, (a decision by the Commission) • TW Borough Councillors voted for election by thirds, rather than "all-out" every 4 years • Based on 39 councillors, with a voting regime of election by thirds, TW will be split into 13 wards of 7,050 electors in each, with 3 councillors in each ward. These proposals produce seriously unsatisfactory consequences, especially for the rural parishes. Accordingly, on behalf of our community, Hawkhurst Parish Council registers its OBJECTION to the current proposals. The reasons are: • In rural areas, the current ward structure pays close respect to "parishes" and "communities". • The now proposed 7,050 elector non-community wards will require combining multiple parishes. Parishes may be split into different wards. All this would break the very close link between Councillors and their parish, cutting across historic communities. • Most of the rural Parish Councils are apolitical. Only political parties have election capabilities of contesting such large rural multi-parish wards, reducing the opportunity for worthy local individuals to be recognised and elected as Borough Councillors. • It will be difficult for individual Councillors (volunteers, without private offices unlike MPs) to be known and personally represent 7,050 electors across several different rural parishes, often with different local issues. Three-member representation reduces individual accountability to their parish or community. • We have concerns about the likely turnout, voting annually in large wards, in some cases 15 miles across, with unknown candidates to represent artificially created non-community wards. These proposals disadvantage smaller parties and independent candidates. In the rural areas community matters. None of this was anticipated at the first consultation, which is why many voted to maintain the status quo of voting by thirds. We will be asking ALL our Borough Councillors and candidates for election May 2022 to vote to change the proposed voting system to 'all-out' elections every 4 years to remove the requirement for all wards to be 3 member wards. Thus our concerns with the proposed very large non-community rural wards of 7050 electors can be avoided. If such a solution is not achieved, then we will press LGBC to determine ward boundaries that respect the historic parish boundaries. Following this review there will be a Review of Parish Boundaries; and the results of any unsatisfactory changes to TW ward boundaries could be taken as a starting point or template for future re-districting, thus circumventing our historic parish boundaries. Local residents identify more closely with their Parish than their ward. Consequently, we feel that it is essential that every effort is made to avoid splitting parishes across the new wards. We understand that the future population figures are only projected for two years. TW's Local Plan is currently being examined. If this were to be approved, it would result in significant population growth in certain areas of the borough, presumably requiring a further review of ward boundaries in the near future. In light of this, it surely makes sense to limit the impact on existing communities at this time. The ward of Hawkhurst and Sandhurst is currently well served by its 3 councillors. We recognise that with a forecast electorate of 5127, the ward boundary would need to be re-drawn. We consider that a ward consisting of Hawkhurst, Sandhurst and Benenden would be appropriately sized for the current proposal of 3-member wards. Each of the three parishes would retain its own unique identity and if TWBC did agree to change to all-out elections, there would be scope for three smaller wards based on parish boundaries. There are existing connections between Hawkhurst, Sandhurst and Benenden. For instance, all three parishes are within the same education planning area. Also, the GP practices in Hawkhurst serve residents in both Benenden and Sandhurst. Hawkhurst's junior football teams play their matches at Benenden. There are also links between Hawkhurst and Cranbrook. However, being the two largest population centres in the eastern part of the borough, this would not result in

an appropriately sized 3-member ward. This submission represents the view of Hawkhurst Parish Council on behalf of our community. Richard Griffiths Clerk to Hawkhurst Parish Council

**Uploaded Documents:**

None Uploaded