

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Personal Details:

Name: Raymond Moon

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Postcode: [REDACTED]

Organisation Name: Raymond Moon Chairperson of Paddock Wood Labour Party

Comment text:

Submission of Paddock Wood Labour Party to the Electoral Review of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council by Mr R P Moon, Chairperson of PWLP 20th March 2022

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Submission of Paddock Wood Labour Party to the Electoral Review of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Paddock Wood Labour Party (PWLP) welcomes the reduction from 48 to 39 councillors but only on the evidence that the changes in the ward boundaries will better reflect the communities of the whole borough and improve the electoral equality without providing any political party with an advantage or disadvantage based on any previous historical election results in the present wards.

PWLP also notes that the aim is to look to all of the wards having 2400 electors per ward which will be extremely difficult to achieve without significantly altering the present ward boundaries and have a major impact on the electoral equality without favouring a particular political party and historical voting patterns in the TWBC.

With the present forecasts for the whole of the electorate of Paddock Wood (PW) as a result of increased housing planned by TWBC the proposed new structure will not fairly represent the Rural Town of PW and the surrounding villages such as Horsmonden, Brenchley, Matfield, Five Oak Green, Capel and Tudeley.

Within this first consultation we would ask the Commission to consider the following observations and suggestions:

1. Any changes in the proposal to have 3 member wards should be driven by a fair and equal representation of that ward and not by a desire to meet a computer based review solely looking at numbers of 2,400 per ward and not considering the electoral consequences of such a change and the representation of those wards.
2. The present ward structure serves the rural communities in the Borough historically and allows the wards to have a unique identity and a close community identification which could be drastically changed with any ward boundary changes. This should be carefully considered by the Commission. Rural communities could be drastically changed by the proposals, especially PW.
3. There are opportunities in the Urban wards such as in Tunbridge Wells and Southborough to change the ward boundaries between nearby roads and not adversely reduce the community identities but this not the same for the rural wards such as PW.
4. The electoral forecasts do not take into account the present Draft Local Plan (DLP) and its proposals to build 4,000 more houses around PW. The present 3 developments in Paddock Wood of over 1400 houses do not logically fit into the 2 present PW West and East wards so there is an opportunity to balance out the wards on electoral numbers but must also be based on community representation. Not an easy task and the figure of 48 - 39 councillors may need to be reviewed as well to meet this future development.
5. Any changes in the number of wards and electoral representation should take into account future development and we consider that the cut off date of 2027 is too short

and should be extended to at least 10 years and consideration made to the new housing proposed in the DLP within that time. Within the Borough PW and the surrounding rural areas will have a far higher new housing allocation and therefore a potential major impact on the present ward structure and any ward changes need to be fair and equal across the borough. There will be no major new housing development in Tunbridge Wells but PW and Capel will have and the present community identities will be greater at risk.

6. The present West and East wards are probably meeting their maximum of representing 2400 residents each in the proposals so there could be merit in providing an additional ward in the Town boundary without losing its historical identity as a railway village to now a town. This would take into account any future housing development. Any adjustments with local communities such as Capel and PW would destroy the present community identities and historical representation on TWBC.
7. In terms of the present East and West wards in the town it suggests an easily recognised split but that even now has a number of roads in the East ward represented by the West Ward. The split was based along the present Maidstone Road that effectively splits PW. There could be value now in looking at 3 wards for PW based on the proposal being submitted by the commission.
8. The present proposals are indeed restricted by using the present parish and town boundary's in the borough and if the proposals presented are to be fair and logical then future boundary changes should be considered along with the ward boundary changes. The present proposed development to the West of the town and to the East of Capel could have a logic to be associated with PW as it is near to all the present facilities in the town including the schools and local surgery.

We do understand the difficulties and challenges to try meet the stated proposals by the commission across the Borough and in particular PW and hope you take into account our views and suggestions in preparing the next stage of the consultation.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Moon

Chair- Paddock Wood Labour Party.