

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 31 July 2021 18:29  
**To:** reviews  
**Cc:** Bob Lane; Bob Lane  
**Subject:** Gravesham Ward Boundary Review Consultation Submission  
**Attachments:** Gravesham Ward Boundary Review Submission.docx; Gravesham Ward Boundary Review Submission.pdf

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Dear Sir

I attach my Gravesham Ward Boundary Review consultation submission, in Word and PDF format for convenience.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Bob Lane

**CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:**

The contents of this email and any attachments are intended solely for the addressee(s) and may contain confidential and/or privileged information. The contents of this email are sent in my personal capacity as an elected Councillor, and not on behalf of the Council. If you are not the intended recipient, please alert the sender and delete this message and any attachments. Please note that I may retain your contact details for correspondence and other lawful purposes.

*Cllr. Bob Lane*  
*Member for Shorne, Cobham, and Luddesdown, Gravesham Borough Council*  
*Chairman, Shorne Parish Council*

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By email to [reviews@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk)  
And via consultation website portal

The Review Officer (Gravesham)  
Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
PO Box 133  
Blyth  
NE24 9FE

31<sup>st</sup> July 2021

Dear Sir

**Gravesham Ward Boundary Review Consultation Submission**

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<b>Organisation 1</b>	District Councillor	(Gravesham Borough Council)
<b>Organisation 2</b>	Parish Councillor	(Shorne Parish Councillor)
<b>Organisation 3</b>	Member of the public	(Resident of Shorne/Gravesham)
I agree to you contacting me about the outcome of the consultation and the review.		

**1. Introduction**

I am submitting this response in my personal capacity as one of the two existing Gravesham Borough Councillors for Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown Ward. I am also Chairman of Shorne Parish Council, and a resident of Shorne.

I am aware that Gravesham Conservative Party will also be submitting a more comprehensive Borough-wide response, to which I have had some input. Gravesham Borough Council and Shorne Parish Council will also be submitting responses. The comments I have given below are intended to supplement these submissions, and to provide alternative suggestions where appropriate.

However, I request that my response is given sufficient weighting to reflect my elected capacity as Ward Councillor for Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown, and as Parish Councillor for Shorne Parish Council, equal to any other submissions.

My primary response is focussed on **Shorne**, and on **Cobham & Luddesdown**. I have also commented on **Riverview**, **Chalk**, and **Westcourt** as adjacent Wards.

However, before focussing on these wards, I feel obliged to raise my concerns about the source and accuracy of the forecast elector numbers for 2027 included in LGBCE's consultation spreadsheet, and in particular how they are reflected across individual wards.

## 2. Elector Numbers

Name of ward	Electors 2000*	Electors 2021*	% increase 2000 to 2021	Electors 2027 Forecast*	% increase 2021 to 2027
Central	4,552	5,005	9.95%	5,333	6.55%
Chalk	1,786	1,773	-0.73%	1,797	1.35%
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Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown	3,247	3,286	1.20%	3,471	5.63%
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Woodlands	4,604	5,238	13.77%	6,109	16.63%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>70,312</b>	<b>76,069</b>	<b>8.19%</b>	<b>85,994</b>	<b>13.05%</b>

(\* Note: The numbers of electors in 2000 are taken from Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Gravesham dated May 2001. The numbers of electors in 2021 and the forecast for 2027 are taken from the Gravesham Borough Council Electoral Data spreadsheet published as part of the current LGBCE consultation.)

In the 20 year period between the previous boundary review in 2001 and the current boundary review in 2021, the number of electors in Gravesham increased from 70,312 to 76,069, an increase of 8.19%. But in the 6 year period up to 2027, the number of electors is forecast to increase by a further 13.05% to 85,994. There is nothing in our demographics which would suggest that the number of electors is likely to increase by almost 10,000 in the next 6 years, and I therefore must question these forecasts. I would suggest that an increase of 5% in the number of electors between 2021 and 2027 is a much more realistic forecast, making a total of around 79,872 electors.

Of particular concern is how this forecast has been applied to individual wards. As an extreme example, it is forecast that the number of electors in Meopham North ward will increase by 46.52% in the next 6 years. The number of electors in Meopham North has remained static, even falling slightly over the past 20 years. Since there are no new major housing developments in the pipeline, why should the number of electors be forecast to increase so dramatically over the next 6 years?

The boundary review has far-reaching consequences for the voters (and councillors) of Gravesham, and the results will be set in stone for the next 20 years. It is therefore essential that the forecasts on which the number of councillors and the ward boundaries are determined are realistic and accurate. **I call upon the LGBCE to investigate the source and validity of the forecasts as a matter of urgency.**

### **3. Councillor Numbers**

I am not overly concerned about the proposal to reduce the number of Councillors from 44 to 39, provided that there is no unfair electoral advantage given to any one of the main political parties, and provided that the balance between urban and rural representation is maintained. The whole reason for carrying out a boundary review is to ensure that there is equality of representation for electors, and that the wards accurately reflect community links. It is only fair and proper that electors are equally represented, and that if the majority of electors in any particular ward vote for a candidate representing a political party, then that candidate should be elected.

However, it is equally important that if the majority of electors in the Borough vote for candidates representing a particular political party, then that political party should be the controlling group of the Council. In a ward system, this is not always achievable. Nevertheless it is extremely important to ensure that the ward boundaries are not artificially manipulated to give an unfair advantage to any political party. This is particularly important when the number of councillors are being reduced (or increased). The resulting ward boundaries should reflect the communities they represent, and not manipulated to produce an inbuilt majority or electoral advantage for any particular political grouping.

It is always a concern, real or imagined, for the opposition group to worry that the Council's submission may be unfairly influenced by the group in control at that time. The LGBCE should therefore be seen to be diligent in ensuring that there can be no such suggestion. It is therefore important that the views submitted by the opposition group are given equal weighting and consideration to the views of the controlling group and indeed the Council.

### **4. Elector to Councillor ratios**

As stated in sections 1 and 2 above, I have serious concerns regarding the validity of the forecast voter numbers for 2027, and the absence of any reason or justification to explain how this dubious increase in numbers is applied to individual wards. In view of this, I do not consider it appropriate to use the forecast voter numbers as a sound basis for establishing the electoral balance for the wards.

**I have therefore used the 2021 electoral numbers as a baseline**, since at least this number is real. This provides an ideal balanced number of 1,950 per councillor (76,069 divided by 39 councillors), with a range of plus or minus 10% (1,755 to 2,145). Based on a realistic 5% increase in elector numbers, this would give a balanced number of around 2,050 per councillor in 2027, with a plus or minus 10% range between 1,845 and 2,255. Unless there are known major developments in the pipeline, the forecast percentage increases for each ward should be similar. Since there are no known major developments planned for the wards discussed below, the current 2021 elector numbers can be assumed to be reasonable baseline, and any growth in numbers will be proportionate.

The elector numbers given in the Gravesham Borough Council Electoral Data spreadsheet published as part of the current LGBCE consultation are broken down into polling areas only. I have used an anonymised version of the electoral roll to estimate the number of electors for individual streets. However, this information has not been provided on the LGBCE website, and is not readily available to members of the public. This puts members of the public at a serious disadvantage when proposing wards or determining the impact of transferring a street or streets from one ward to another. It would be helpful to all parties if this information was provided on the consultation website.

### **5. Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown**

It is to be noted that until the Boundary Review published in 2001, Shorne and Cobham & Luddesdown were two entirely separate single-member wards. However, during that 2001 review, it was noted that Shorne had around 2,000 electors, and the elector/councillor ratio was 28% higher than the average and was in fact the most under-represented ward in the Borough. Cobham & Luddesdown, on the other hand, had only 1,200 electors, and the elector/councillor ratio was 24% lower than the average and was in fact the most over-represented ward in the Borough.

Against some opposition, it was decided to merge Shorne Ward and Cobham & Luddesdown Ward to form a single 2-member ward. This was a purely artificial grouping, created solely to achieve numerical balance for elector to councillor ratios.

Whilst I accept that rural communities such as Shorne, Cobham and Luddesdown (and indeed other rural communities) will have some common characteristics, they have few shared facilities, communications, or community links. Shorne and Cobham are separated by the A2 trunk road and HS1 railway. The edge of closest populated part of Shorne is 2.6 km from the closest populated part of Cobham; Shorne village is over 5km from the closest populated part of Luddesdown, and over 11 km from the furthest part of Luddesdown.

The combined electorate of Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown is 3,286, based on 2021 data. With the reduction in Councillor numbers from 44 to 39, and the consequent increase in the elector/councillor ratio to something of the order of 1,950 based on 2021 data, it is difficult to see how Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown can continue to warrant 2 councillors.

However, with an electorate of 1,981 in 2021, Shorne can support a single member, and should do so.

**I therefore recommend that Shorne reverts to being a single member ward.**

### **5.1 Shorne**

It is noted that during the 2001 Boundary Review, there were suggestions that Shorne West (CE) should be detached from Shorne and added to Riverview ward. These suggestions were not adopted, and the reasons for rejecting this proposal and for keeping Shorne and Shorne West united under one distinct ward remain valid. The boundaries of Shorne parish are long-established, and it is important that the administrative boundaries of Shorne Parish Council are respected.

However, during the 2015/16 Kent County Council boundary review, Shorne Parish was in fact split across different Divisional boundaries, with Shorne and Thong (CD) remaining in Gravesham Rural Division whilst Shorne West (CE) was transferred to Gravesham East Division. This has not been administratively beneficial from a Parish Council perspective.

Shorne Parish is now represented by 3 different County Councillors spread across 2 electoral divisions. Different County Divisions and indeed County Councillors have different and occasionally conflicting priorities. The Parish Council has no contact or interaction whatsoever with the 2 County Councillors representing Gravesham East, who obviously have other priorities, and understandably so. We cannot accept a similar situation arising with the District Wards. Shorne Parish Council is a long-established local government administrative body and must be kept intact, and remain within one single ward.

The 2021 elector numbers for Shorne (CD and CE) are 1,981 and are well balanced, and well suited to reverting to a single-member ward, and this would be my preference.

However, in the event that the LG BCE decided to split Shorne West away from the rest of Shorne, for example to merge it with Riverview ward, this would result in the transfer of some 728 electors from Shorne which would then be seriously unbalanced and could no longer be represented by its own Councillor. This would have serious implications for the administration of Shorne Parish Council, and would result in strong opposition from the local community.

If this should happen, it could be argued that Shorne has more community links with Higham than Cobham or Luddesdown. Shorne and Higham share the A226 and the Lower Road as the main communication links to Gravesend, and at their closest point residents of Shorne and residents of Higham face each other across the road. Any major road, traffic, or bus problems are likely to affect both Shorne and Higham, though less so for Cobham or Luddesdown.

However, although Higham is currently over-represented with two councillors and 3,173 electors, the addition of 1,253 electors from Shorne (CD) would make it seriously under-represented, some 13.5% above the ideal ratio of 1,950 electors per councillor.

In any event, if Shorne Parish is divided between Riverview Ward and a new Shorne/Higham Ward, this would be an administrative nightmare for Shorne Parish Council, having to deal with 2 councillors from Higham and 2 councillors from Riverview, each with their own priorities and political views.

**My strong recommendation would be for Shorne to remain intact and to revert to being its own self-contained single-member ward, closely matching the parish boundaries.**

## **5.2 Cobham & Luddesdown**

With elector numbers of only 1,305 in 2021, Cobham & Luddesdown would not warrant their own Councillor based on elector numbers alone. However, Cobham and Luddesdown are very distinctive and closely-linked communities, and consideration should be given to making an exception for them.

Geographically, Cobham & Luddesdown stretch for over 10 km south of the A2, covering over 20 km<sup>2</sup> in area, and the population is widely dispersed in places. This in itself creates significant workload for a councillor. Many urban wards are not much more than 1 km<sup>2</sup> in area. In a densely-populated urban ward, a councillor could deliver literature to every property in a day. In Cobham and Luddesdown, it would take several days. Other constituency matters are similarly time consuming given the distances involved, and there is a strong case for Cobham & Luddesdown to have their own ward councillor.

Cobham and Luddesdown are closely-connected rural village communities. If it is deemed necessary to combine them with other communities for electoral balance purposes, they should be kept together to take account of their close community, communications, and shared facility connections.

I am aware that Istead Rise has 2,765 electors based on the 2021 data, and is over-represented with two councillors. Although not an ideal combination, it would create electoral balance by combining Cobham & Luddesdown with Istead Rise to create a new two-member ward. This combination would have 4,070 electors based on 2021 numbers, and would therefore be within 5% of the ideal balance.

## **6. Rural Wards in general**

At the moment, there are 10 councillors representing the rural wards, with just over 21% of the electors of Gravesham. With the proposed reduction to 39 councillors, an overall reduction of 11%, the reduction in rural councillors should be proportionate. Therefore the total number of councillors representing the rural communities should not be less than 9.

This could be achieved as follows:

Shorne	1
Cobham, Luddesdown, & Istead Rise	2
Higham	2
Meopham North	2
Meopham South & Vigo	<u>2</u>
Total	9

If the number of rural seats was reduced to 8 without a proportional reduction in urban seats, this would result in rural residents being seriously under-represented in comparison to urban residents. If it is decided to reduce the number of rural seats to 8, then the overall number of councillors should be reduced to 37. This would achieve a fairer balance, with just over 21% of the total number of councillors representing rural residents who make up just over 21% of the electorate of Gravesham.

## **7. Riverview Ward**

Riverview Ward has close links with Shorne West, and as a previous resident of Riverview Park for 16 years I have a particular interest in and close affinity to this ward.

Riverview Park was built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, virtually concurrently with the adjoining Dorset estate (Dorset Crescent, Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren). Built on the site of the former Gravesend Airport, they formed the first major post-war private housing development in Gravesend. Although constructed by different builders, the two estates are inextricably linked, sharing the same shops, schools, buses, surgeries, etc. Together they form one homogenous community, widely known as Riverview.

The extreme southern fringe of Riverview strayed across the border into Shorne Parish. In the 1990s, a new development was built southwards from Michael Gardens. This development is most definitely not part of Riverview Park, nor are some of the more established properties in Davys Place and the southern end of Marling Way.

The boundary of Shorne Parish was established many years before any housing was developed in this area, and this boundary must be respected. Most residents of Shorne West are very protective of their links to Shorne Parish. This was illustrated some years ago when Kent County Council erected a "Riverview Park" sign at the southern entrance to Marling Way. The local community protested strongly, and the sign had to be changed to reflect its status as "Shorne West". For these reasons, it is essential that Shorne West remains an integral part of Shorne ward.

However there are anomalies adjacent to the north-western part of Riverview Ward.

St Francis Avenue is one of the main thoroughfares into Riverview Park. However, it is currently split between 3 different wards (Singlewell, Westcourt, and Riverview). St Francis Avenue is an integral part of Riverview Park and the associated Dorset estate community, and has no affinity to either Singlewell or Westcourt Wards. It should be fully incorporated into Riverview Ward.

Similarly, The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren were historically allocated to Singlewell Ward. They do not form part of any of the communities associated with Singlewell, and should be transferred from Singlewell Ward and become part of Riverview Ward where their community links are strong.

Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, and Dorset Crescent were historically allocated to Westcourt Ward. They most definitely do not form part of the area known as Westcourt, and have no affinity or community links to Westcourt. They should also be incorporated into Riverview Ward.

Riverview currently has 3,328 electors.

The addition of St Francis Avenue would transfer around 90 electors (40 from Singlewell, 50 from Westcourt).

The transfer of The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren from Singlewell would add around 250 electors.

The transfer of Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, and Dorset Crescent from Westcourt would add around 265 electors.

These additions would result in over 600 electors being added to Riverview, bringing it up to around 3,933 electors based on 2021 numbers, well balanced and sufficient to retain two councillor representation.

(It is worth noting that any proposal to transfer Shorne West to Riverview would add a further 728 electors, making Riverview seriously unbalanced and under-represented.)

## **8. Chalk Ward**

Chalk is a self-contained, single-member ward with distinct characteristics; until 1935, it was a separate parish, and we should look at respecting these boundaries and distinct characteristics.

With around 1,773 electors, there are currently insufficient electors to support a councillor under the 39 member proposals. However, there are neighbouring roads which are in effect part of Chalk, but which have been excluded from the ward for historic political/administrative expediency purposes. This boundary review gives us the opportunity to remedy these past expediciencies.

Rochester Road was built in the 1920s as a bypass for Chalk village. The northern side of Rochester Road to the west of Old Road East is already part of Chalk Ward, but the south side is currently part of Westcourt Ward. There is no community reason for this. Both sides of Rochester Road are within the historic boundaries of Chalk parish, and should be included in Chalk Ward. Similarly, the northern end of Thong Lane was developed in the pre-war years. Again this is within the historic boundary of Chalk parish, and should also be included in Chalk Ward.

The transfer of the southern side of Rochester Road from Westcourt Ward to Chalk Ward would add around 200 electors.

It is estimated that the transfer of the northern end of Thong Lane from Westcourt would add around 190 electors.

This would give Chalk Ward around 2,163 electors based on 2021 data. This is slightly outside the electoral balance, being around 10.9% above the 'ideal' number of 1,950. In view of this, it may be necessary to leave either the southern side of Rochester Road or the northern part of Thong Lane within Westcourt. However, if this area is not expected to experience any major developments in the foreseeable future or any particularly high growth in elector numbers, it may be worth considering accepting this relatively minor imbalance as a transient anomaly.

It is noted that there have been previous proposals to merge the Hoplands estate with Chalk to produce a two-member ward. Whilst on the face of it this appears logical, it generated significant opposition from local communities. Some of these objections were spurious – for example, the decision to join these two communities for electoral representation purposes would have no impact on development proposals. However, these strong community objections should be respected. I would therefore recommend that Chalk Ward remains a single-member ward.

## **9. Westcourt Ward**

The area known as the Westcourt Estate extends from Brown Road in the north to St George's Crescent in the south. It was initially started with the construction of the original school and social housing in Hampton Crescent and Jubilee Crescent immediately before the war. Immediately after the war, it continued with prefabricated houses in Bourne Road and Lorton Close, and then continued throughout the late 1940s and 1950s to produce the large social housing estate now known as Westcourt. The post-war single-storey prefabricated properties in Lorton Close were replaced with brick-built properties in the 1970s, and Medhurst Crescent was developed at around the same time, including local shops. Westcourt has its own Church (St Aidan's), its own doctor's surgery, and until recently its own pub, now a mosque.

Westcourt is currently a 3-member ward with 4,890 electors and is over-represented.

In section 7 above, it is proposed to transfer Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, Dorset Crescent, and part of St Francis Avenue to Riverview, which would result in the removal of around 315 electors.



In section 8 above, it is proposed to transfer the southern side of Rochester Road and the northern part of Thong Lane to Chalk Ward. This would remove a further 390 electors (approximately).

This would leave Westcourt with around 4,185 electors based on 2021 numbers. This would not warrant three members, but it would be reasonably well balanced for two members, being just 7.3% from the 'ideal' number of 3,900.

Consideration should be given to transferring St David's Crescent (69 electors), St George's Crescent (91 electors), numbers 2 to 38 St Hilda's Way (46 electors), and numbers 231 to 281 Valley Drive (50 electors) from Singlewell. These properties were built at the same time as the other post-war houses in Westcourt, and are generally considered part of the same community. However, this may cause electoral imbalance, and may require further considerations.

## **10. Singlewell Ward**

My proposals result in the transfer of approximately 290 electors from Singlewell to Riverview Ward, and potentially 256 electors from Singlewell to Westcourt Ward, based on 2021 numbers. The impact of this on Singlewell Ward has not been considered.

Singlewell Ward is possibly a misnomer. Not all of what currently comprises Singlewell Ward can be accurately described as being part of the community of Singlewell. For example, the main thoroughfare which forms the backbone of what is known as Singlewell is Singlewell Road, and yet it is not part of Singlewell Ward. The ward also contains large parts of Kings Farm, Christian Fields, and Livingstone Road estates. This may be an opportunity to rename Singlewell Ward to one which better describes its locality, and one with which residents can more readily identify.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the following pages I have produced a map showing the existing boundaries of Riverview, Chalk, and Westcourt Wards, together with a map showing the boundaries to reflect the proposals contained in sections 7, 8, and 9 above.

I trust that you will find the comments I have made to be relevant and useful. If you require any clarification or further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

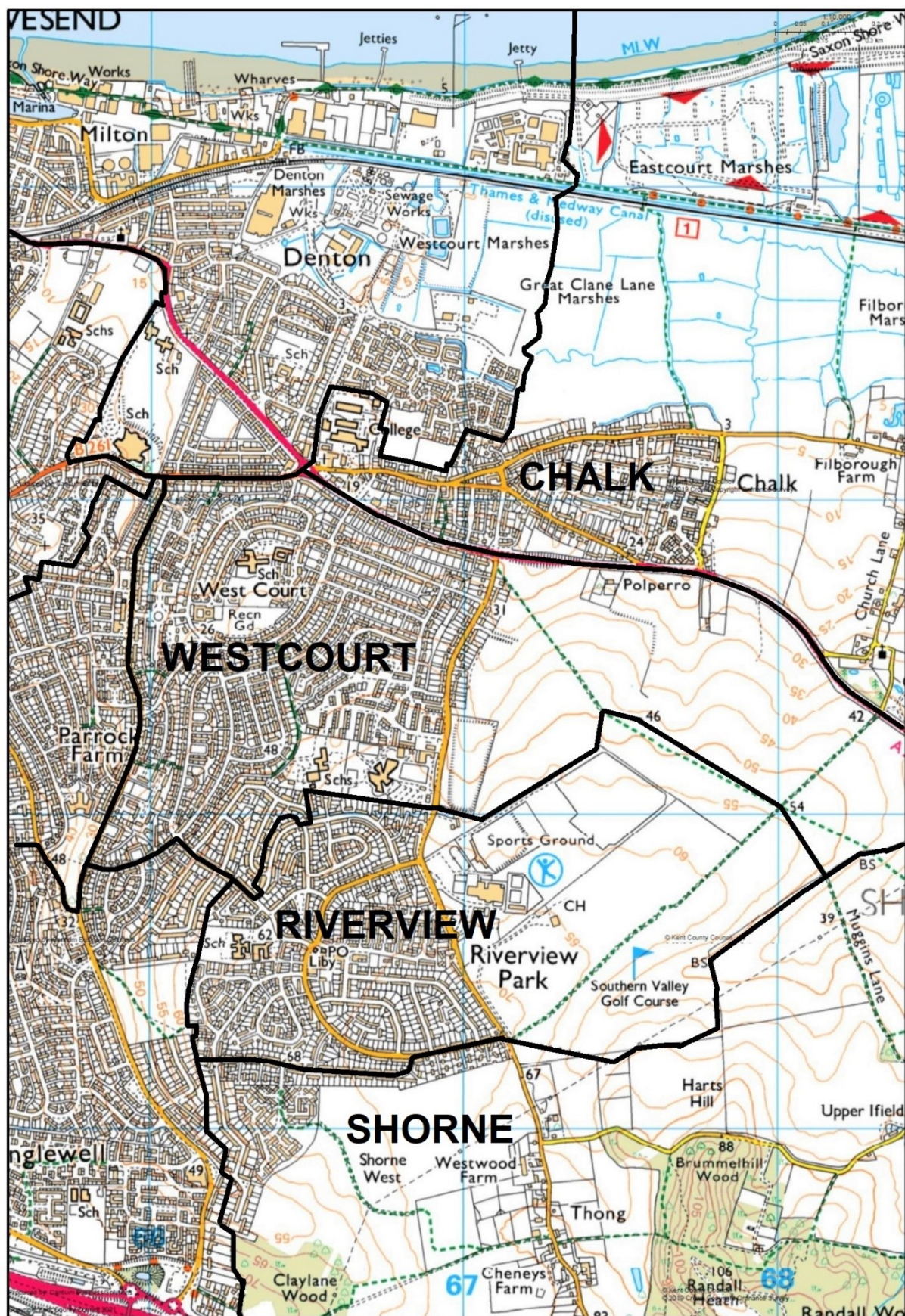


Bob Lane

Attachments:

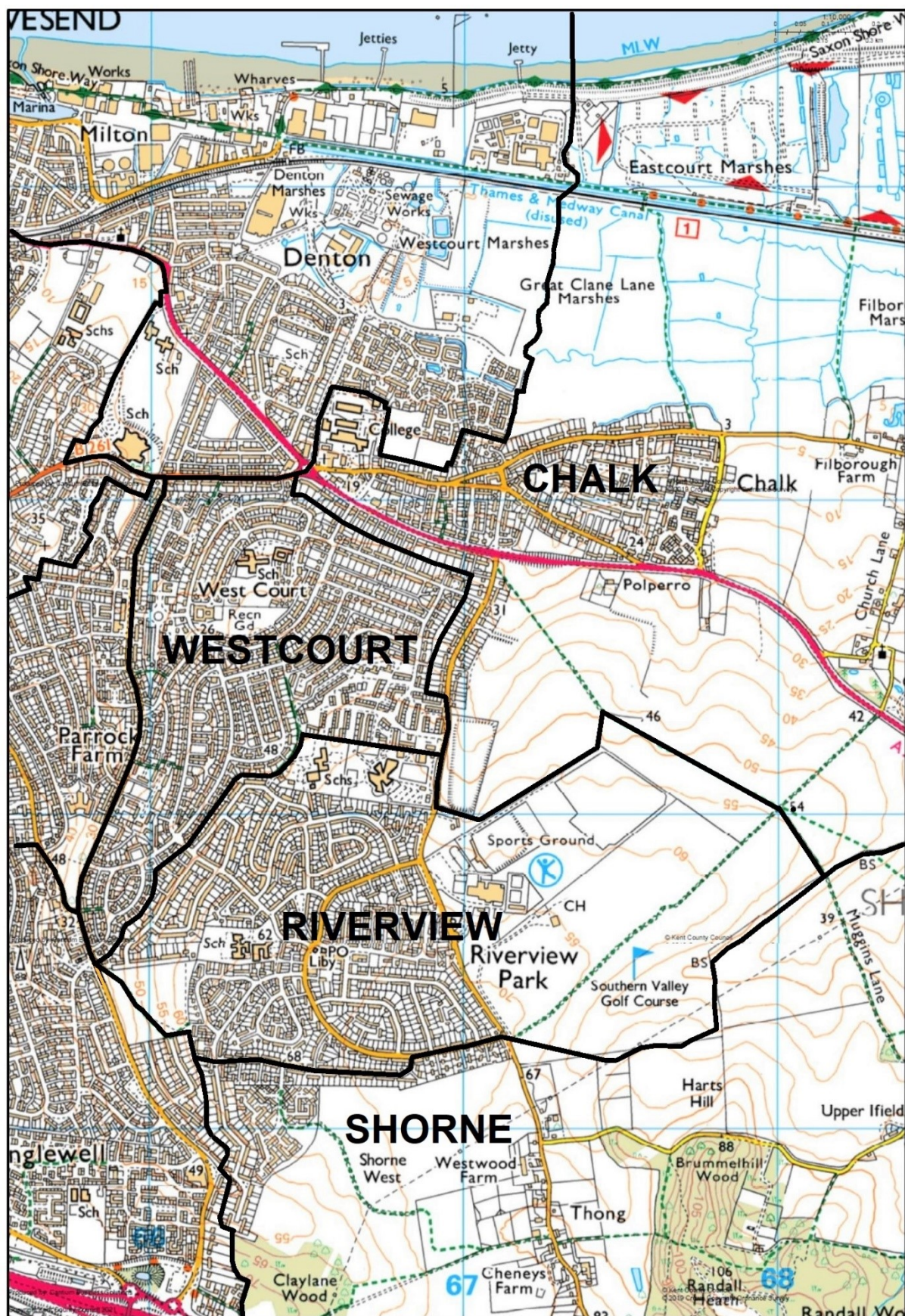


Map showing the existing boundaries of Riverview, Chalk, and Westcourt Wards





Map showing the proposed boundaries of Riverview, Chalk, and Westcourt Wards





*Cllr. Bob Lane*  
*Member for Shorne, Cobham, and Luddesdown, Gravesham Borough Council*  
*Chairman, Shorne Parish Council*

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By email to [reviews@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk)  
And via consultation website portal

The Review Officer (Gravesham)  
Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
PO Box 133  
Blyth  
NE24 9FE

31<sup>st</sup> July 2021

Dear Sir

**Gravesham Ward Boundary Review Consultation Submission**

<b>First Name</b>	Robert (Bob)	
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<b>Organisation 2</b>	Parish Councillor	(Shorne Parish Councillor)
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(\* Note: The numbers of electors in 2000 are taken from Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Gravesham dated May 2001. The numbers of electors in 2021 and the forecast for 2027 are taken from the Gravesham Borough Council Electoral Data spreadsheet published as part of the current LGBCE consultation.)

In the 20 year period between the previous boundary review in 2001 and the current boundary review in 2021, the number of electors in Gravesham increased from 70,312 to 76,069, an increase of 8.19%. But in the 6 year period up to 2027, the number of electors is forecast to increase by a further 13.05% to 85,994. There is nothing in our demographics which would suggest that the number of electors is likely to increase by almost 10,000 in the next 6 years, and I therefore must question these forecasts. I would suggest that an increase of 5% in the number of electors between 2021 and 2027 is a much more realistic forecast, making a total of around 79,872 electors.

Of particular concern is how this forecast has been applied to individual wards. As an extreme example, it is forecast that the number of electors in Meopham North ward will increase by 46.52% in the next 6 years. The number of electors in Meopham North has remained static, even falling slightly over the past 20 years. Since there are no new major housing developments in the pipeline, why should the number of electors be forecast to increase so dramatically over the next 6 years?

The boundary review has far-reaching consequences for the voters (and councillors) of Gravesham, and the results will be set in stone for the next 20 years. It is therefore essential that the forecasts on which the number of councillors and the ward boundaries are determined are realistic and accurate. **I call upon the LGBCE to investigate the source and validity of the forecasts as a matter of urgency.**

### **3. Councillor Numbers**

I am not overly concerned about the proposal to reduce the number of Councillors from 44 to 39, provided that there is no unfair electoral advantage given to any one of the main political parties, and provided that the balance between urban and rural representation is maintained. The whole reason for carrying out a boundary review is to ensure that there is equality of representation for electors, and that the wards accurately reflect community links. It is only fair and proper that electors are equally represented, and that if the majority of electors in any particular ward vote for a candidate representing a political party, then that candidate should be elected.

However, it is equally important that if the majority of electors in the Borough vote for candidates representing a particular political party, then that political party should be the controlling group of the Council. In a ward system, this is not always achievable. Nevertheless it is extremely important to ensure that the ward boundaries are not artificially manipulated to give an unfair advantage to any political party. This is particularly important when the number of councillors are being reduced (or increased). The resulting ward boundaries should reflect the communities they represent, and not manipulated to produce an inbuilt majority or electoral advantage for any particular political grouping.

It is always a concern, real or imagined, for the opposition group to worry that the Council's submission may be unfairly influenced by the group in control at that time. The LGBCE should therefore be seen to be diligent in ensuring that there can be no such suggestion. It is therefore important that the views submitted by the opposition group are given equal weighting and consideration to the views of the controlling group and indeed the Council.

### **4. Elector to Councillor ratios**

As stated in sections 1 and 2 above, I have serious concerns regarding the validity of the forecast voter numbers for 2027, and the absence of any reason or justification to explain how this dubious increase in numbers is applied to individual wards. In view of this, I do not consider it appropriate to use the forecast voter numbers as a sound basis for establishing the electoral balance for the wards.

**I have therefore used the 2021 electoral numbers as a baseline**, since at least this number is real. This provides an ideal balanced number of 1,950 per councillor (76,069 divided by 39 councillors), with a range of plus or minus 10% (1,755 to 2,145). Based on a realistic 5% increase in elector numbers, this would give a balanced number of around 2,050 per councillor in 2027, with a plus or minus 10% range between 1,845 and 2,255. Unless there are known major developments in the pipeline, the forecast percentage increases for each ward should be similar. Since there are no known major developments planned for the wards discussed below, the current 2021 elector numbers can be assumed to be reasonable baseline, and any growth in numbers will be proportionate.

The elector numbers given in the Gravesham Borough Council Electoral Data spreadsheet published as part of the current LGBCE consultation are broken down into polling areas only. I have used an anonymised version of the electoral roll to estimate the number of electors for individual streets. However, this information has not been provided on the LGBCE website, and is not readily available to members of the public. This puts members of the public at a serious disadvantage when proposing wards or determining the impact of transferring a street or streets from one ward to another. It would be helpful to all parties if this information was provided on the consultation website.

### **5. Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown**

It is to be noted that until the Boundary Review published in 2001, Shorne and Cobham & Luddesdown were two entirely separate single-member wards. However, during that 2001 review, it was noted that Shorne had around 2,000 electors, and the elector/councillor ratio was 28% higher than the average and was in fact the most under-represented ward in the Borough. Cobham & Luddesdown, on the other hand, had only 1,200 electors, and the elector/councillor ratio was 24% lower than the average and was in fact the most over-represented ward in the Borough.

Against some opposition, it was decided to merge Shorne Ward and Cobham & Luddesdown Ward to form a single 2-member ward. This was a purely artificial grouping, created solely to achieve numerical balance for elector to councillor ratios.

Whilst I accept that rural communities such as Shorne, Cobham and Luddesdown (and indeed other rural communities) will have some common characteristics, they have few shared facilities, communications, or community links. Shorne and Cobham are separated by the A2 trunk road and HS1 railway. The edge of closest populated part of Shorne is 2.6 km from the closest populated part of Cobham; Shorne village is over 5km from the closest populated part of Luddesdown, and over 11 km from the furthest part of Luddesdown.

The combined electorate of Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown is 3,286, based on 2021 data. With the reduction in Councillor numbers from 44 to 39, and the consequent increase in the elector/councillor ratio to something of the order of 1,950 based on 2021 data, it is difficult to see how Shorne, Cobham & Luddesdown can continue to warrant 2 councillors.

However, with an electorate of 1,981 in 2021, Shorne can support a single member, and should do so.

**I therefore recommend that Shorne reverts to being a single member ward.**

### **5.1 Shorne**

It is noted that during the 2001 Boundary Review, there were suggestions that Shorne West (CE) should be detached from Shorne and added to Riverview ward. These suggestions were not adopted, and the reasons for rejecting this proposal and for keeping Shorne and Shorne West united under one distinct ward remain valid. The boundaries of Shorne parish are long-established, and it is important that the administrative boundaries of Shorne Parish Council are respected.

However, during the 2015/16 Kent County Council boundary review, Shorne Parish was in fact split across different Divisional boundaries, with Shorne and Thong (CD) remaining in Gravesham Rural Division whilst Shorne West (CE) was transferred to Gravesham East Division. This has not been administratively beneficial from a Parish Council perspective.

Shorne Parish is now represented by 3 different County Councillors spread across 2 electoral divisions. Different County Divisions and indeed County Councillors have different and occasionally conflicting priorities. The Parish Council has no contact or interaction whatsoever with the 2 County Councillors representing Gravesham East, who obviously have other priorities, and understandably so. We cannot accept a similar situation arising with the District Wards. Shorne Parish Council is a long-established local government administrative body and must be kept intact, and remain within one single ward.

The 2021 elector numbers for Shorne (CD and CE) are 1,981 and are well balanced, and well suited to reverting to a single-member ward, and this would be my preference.

However, in the event that the LGBC decided to split Shorne West away from the rest of Shorne, for example to merge it with Riverview ward, this would result in the transfer of some 728 electors from Shorne which would then be seriously unbalanced and could no longer be represented by its own Councillor. This would have serious implications for the administration of Shorne Parish Council, and would result in strong opposition from the local community.

If this should happen, it could be argued that Shorne has more community links with Higham than Cobham or Luddesdown. Shorne and Higham share the A226 and the Lower Road as the main communication links to Gravesend, and at their closest point residents of Shorne and residents of Higham face each other across the road. Any major road, traffic, or bus problems are likely to affect both Shorne and Higham, though less so for Cobham or Luddesdown.

However, although Higham is currently over-represented with two councillors and 3,173 electors, the addition of 1,253 electors from Shorne (CD) would make it seriously under-represented, some 13.5% above the ideal ratio of 1,950 electors per councillor.

In any event, if Shorne Parish is divided between Riverview Ward and a new Shorne/Higham Ward, this would be an administrative nightmare for Shorne Parish Council, having to deal with 2 councillors from Higham and 2 councillors from Riverview, each with their own priorities and political views.

**My strong recommendation would be for Shorne to remain intact and to revert to being its own self-contained single-member ward, closely matching the parish boundaries.**

## **5.2 Cobham & Luddesdown**

With elector numbers of only 1,305 in 2021, Cobham & Luddesdown would not warrant their own Councillor based on elector numbers alone. However, Cobham and Luddesdown are very distinctive and closely-linked communities, and consideration should be given to making an exception for them.

Geographically, Cobham & Luddesdown stretch for over 10 km south of the A2, covering over 20 km<sup>2</sup> in area, and the population is widely dispersed in places. This in itself creates significant workload for a councillor. Many urban wards are not much more than 1 km<sup>2</sup> in area. In a densely-populated urban ward, a councillor could deliver literature to every property in a day. In Cobham and Luddesdown, it would take several days. Other constituency matters are similarly time consuming given the distances involved, and there is a strong case for Cobham & Luddesdown to have their own ward councillor.

**Cobham and Luddesdown are closely-connected rural village communities. If it is deemed necessary to combine them with other communities for electoral balance purposes, they should be kept together to take account of their close community, communications, and shared facility connections.**

I am aware that Istead Rise has 2,765 electors based on the 2021 data, and is over-represented with two councillors. Although not an ideal combination, it would create electoral balance by combining Cobham & Luddesdown with Istead Rise to create a new two-member ward. This combination would have 4,070 electors based on 2021 numbers, and would therefore be within 5% of the ideal balance.

## **6. Rural Wards in general**

At the moment, there are 10 councillors representing the rural wards, with just over 21% of the electors of Gravesham. With the proposed reduction to 39 councillors, an overall reduction of 11%, the reduction in rural councillors should be proportionate. Therefore the total number of councillors representing the rural communities should not be less than 9.

This could be achieved as follows:

Shorne	1
Cobham, Luddesdown, & Istead Rise	2
Higham	2
Meopham North	2
Meopham South & Vigo	<u>2</u>
Total	9

If the number of rural seats was reduced to 8 without a proportional reduction in urban seats, this would result in rural residents being seriously under-represented in comparison to urban residents. If it is decided to reduce the number of rural seats to 8, then the overall number of councillors should be reduced to 37. This would achieve a fairer balance, with just over 21% of the total number of councillors representing rural residents who make up just over 21% of the electorate of Gravesham.



## **7. Riverview Ward**

Riverview Ward has close links with Shorne West, and as a previous resident of Riverview Park for 16 years I have a particular interest in and close affinity to this ward.

Riverview Park was built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, virtually concurrently with the adjoining Dorset estate (Dorset Crescent, Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren). Built on the site of the former Gravesend Airport, they formed the first major post-war private housing development in Gravesend. Although constructed by different builders, the two estates are inextricably linked, sharing the same shops, schools, buses, surgeries, etc. Together they form one homogenous community, widely known as Riverview.

The extreme southern fringe of Riverview strayed across the border into Shorne Parish. In the 1990s, a new development was built southwards from Michael Gardens. This development is most definitely not part of Riverview Park, nor are some of the more established properties in Davys Place and the southern end of Marling Way.

The boundary of Shorne Parish was established many years before any housing was developed in this area, and this boundary must be respected. Most residents of Shorne West are very protective of their links to Shorne Parish. This was illustrated some years ago when Kent County Council erected a "Riverview Park" sign at the southern entrance to Marling Way. The local community protested strongly, and the sign had to be changed to reflect its status as "Shorne West". For these reasons, it is essential that Shorne West remains an integral part of Shorne ward.

However there are anomalies adjacent to the north-western part of Riverview Ward.

St Francis Avenue is one of the main thoroughfares into Riverview Park. However, it is currently split between 3 different wards (Singlewell, Westcourt, and Riverview). St Francis Avenue is an integral part of Riverview Park and the associated Dorset estate community, and has no affinity to either Singlewell or Westcourt Wards. It should be fully incorporated into Riverview Ward.

Similarly, The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren were historically allocated to Singlewell Ward. They do not form part of any of the communities associated with Singlewell, and should be transferred from Singlewell Ward and become part of Riverview Ward where their community links are strong.

Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, and Dorset Crescent were historically allocated to Westcourt Ward. They most definitely do not form part of the area known as Westcourt, and have no affinity or community links to Westcourt. They should also be incorporated into Riverview Ward.

Riverview currently has 3,328 electors.

The addition of St Francis Avenue would transfer around 90 electors (40 from Singlewell, 50 from Westcourt).

The transfer of The Drive, The Rise, and The Warren from Singlewell would add around 250 electors.

The transfer of Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, and Dorset Crescent from Westcourt would add around 265 electors.

These additions would result in over 600 electors being added to Riverview, bringing it up to around 3,933 electors based on 2021 numbers, well balanced and sufficient to retain two councillor representation.

(It is worth noting that any proposal to transfer Shorne West to Riverview would add a further 728 electors, making Riverview seriously unbalanced and under-represented.)

## **8. Chalk Ward**

Chalk is a self-contained, single-member ward with distinct characteristics; until 1935, it was a separate parish, and we should look at respecting these boundaries and distinct characteristics.

With around 1,773 electors, there are currently insufficient electors to support a councillor under the 39 member proposals. However, there are neighbouring roads which are in effect part of Chalk, but which have been excluded from the ward for historic political/administrative expediency purposes. This boundary review gives us the opportunity to remedy these past expediciencies.

Rochester Road was built in the 1920s as a bypass for Chalk village. The northern side of Rochester Road to the west of Old Road East is already part of Chalk Ward, but the south side is currently part of Westcourt Ward. There is no community reason for this. Both sides of Rochester Road are within the historic boundaries of Chalk parish, and should be included in Chalk Ward. Similarly, the northern end of Thong Lane was developed in the pre-war years. Again this is within the historic boundary of Chalk parish, and should also be included in Chalk Ward.

The transfer of the southern side of Rochester Road from Westcourt Ward to Chalk Ward would add around 200 electors.

It is estimated that the transfer of the northern end of Thong Lane from Westcourt would add around 190 electors.

This would give Chalk Ward around 2,163 electors based on 2021 data. This is slightly outside the electoral balance, being around 10.9% above the 'ideal' number of 1,950. In view of this, it may be necessary to leave either the southern side of Rochester Road or the northern part of Thong Lane within Westcourt. However, if this area is not expected to experience any major developments in the foreseeable future or any particularly high growth in elector numbers, it may be worth considering accepting this relatively minor imbalance as a transient anomaly.

It is noted that there have been previous proposals to merge the Hoplands estate with Chalk to produce a two-member ward. Whilst on the face of it this appears logical, it generated significant opposition from local communities. Some of these objections were spurious – for example, the decision to join these two communities for electoral representation purposes would have no impact on development proposals. However, these strong community objections should be respected. I would therefore recommend that Chalk Ward remains a single-member ward.

## **9. Westcourt Ward**

The area known as the Westcourt Estate extends from Brown Road in the north to St George's Crescent in the south. It was initially started with the construction of the original school and social housing in Hampton Crescent and Jubilee Crescent immediately before the war. Immediately after the war, it continued with prefabricated houses in Bourne Road and Lorton Close, and then continued throughout the late 1940s and 1950s to produce the large social housing estate now known as Westcourt. The post-war single-storey prefabricated properties in Lorton Close were replaced with brick-built properties in the 1970s, and Medhurst Crescent was developed at around the same time, including local shops. Westcourt has its own Church (St Aidan's), its own doctor's surgery, and until recently its own pub, now a mosque.

Westcourt is currently a 3-member ward with 4,890 electors and is over-represented.

In section 7 above, it is proposed to transfer Cerne Road, Beltana Drive, Dorset Crescent, and part of St Francis Avenue to Riverview, which would result in the removal of around 315 electors.

In section 8 above, it is proposed to transfer the southern side of Rochester Road and the northern part of Thong Lane to Chalk Ward. This would remove a further 390 electors (approximately).

This would leave Westcourt with around 4,185 electors based on 2021 numbers. This would not warrant three members, but it would be reasonably well balanced for two members, being just 7.3% from the 'ideal' number of 3,900.

Consideration should be given to transferring St David's Crescent (69 electors), St George's Crescent (91 electors), numbers 2 to 38 St Hilda's Way (46 electors), and numbers 231 to 281 Valley Drive (50 electors) from Singlewell. These properties were built at the same time as the other post-war houses in Westcourt, and are generally considered part of the same community. However, this may cause electoral imbalance, and may require further considerations.

## **10. Singlewell Ward**

My proposals result in the transfer of approximately 290 electors from Singlewell to Riverview Ward, and potentially 256 electors from Singlewell to Westcourt Ward, based on 2021 numbers. The impact of this on Singlewell Ward has not been considered.

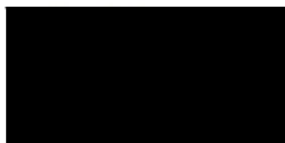
Singlewell Ward is possibly a misnomer. Not all of what currently comprises Singlewell Ward can be accurately described as being part of the community of Singlewell. For example, the main thoroughfare which forms the backbone of what is known as Singlewell is Singlewell Road, and yet it is not part of Singlewell Ward. The ward also contains large parts of Kings Farm, Christian Fields, and Livingstone Road estates. This may be an opportunity to rename Singlewell Ward to one which better describes its locality, and one with which residents can more readily identify.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the following pages I have produced a map showing the existing boundaries of Riverview, Chalk, and Westcourt Wards, together with a map showing the boundaries to reflect the proposals contained in sections 7, 8, and 9 above.

I trust that you will find the comments I have made to be relevant and useful. If you require any clarification or further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

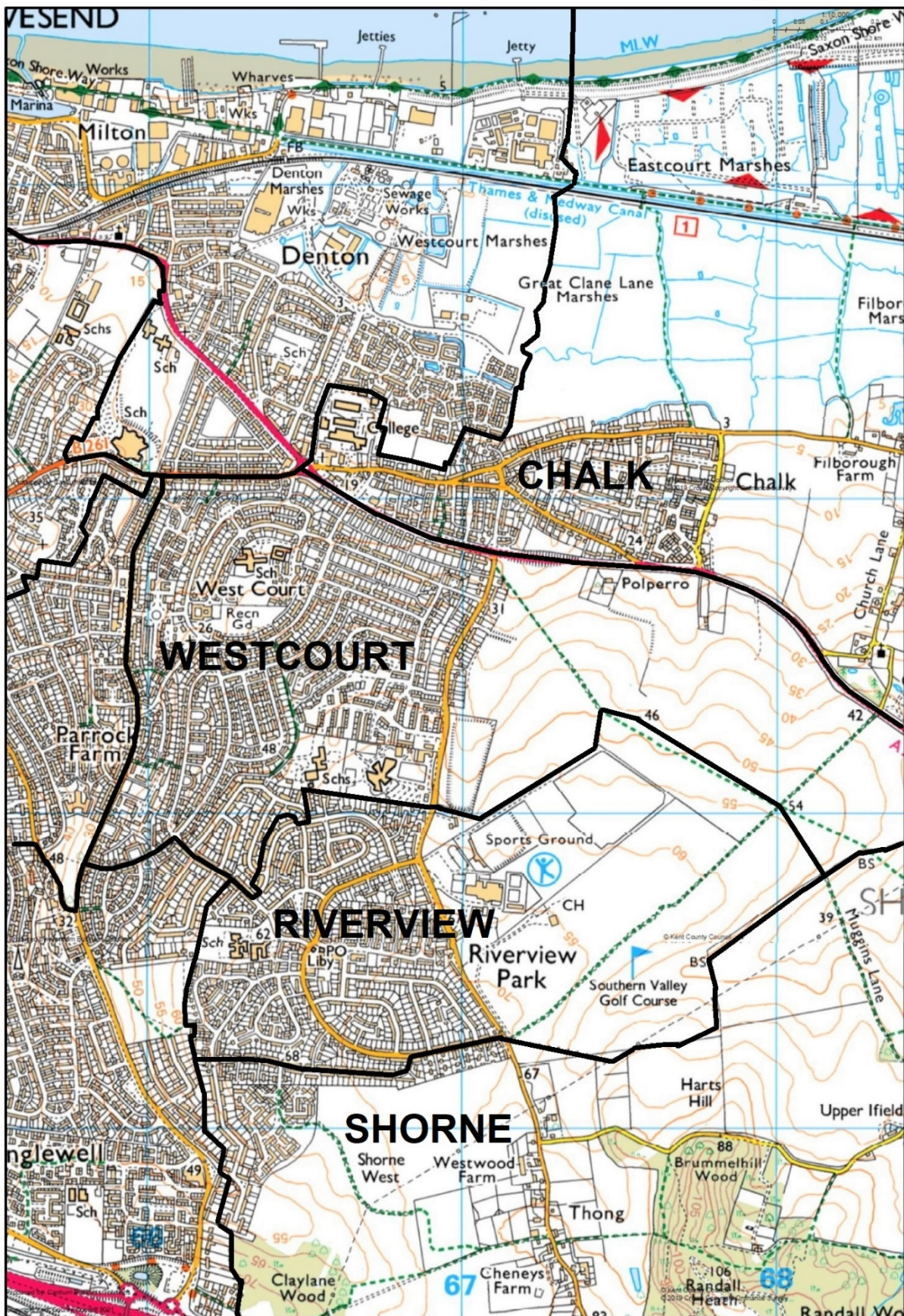


Bob Lane

Attachments:



Map showing the existing boundaries of Riverview, Chalk, and Westcourt Wards





Map showing the proposed boundaries of Riverview, Chalk, and Westcourt Wards

