



## LOOSE PARISH COUNCIL

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### **Submission to Local Government Boundary Commission for England for Maidstone Borough Council Warding Arrangements**

Loose Parish Council have considered the ward boundary proposal and wish to make the following comments.

Loose Parish Council considers the division of the parish between two wards is not in the best interest of the parish. Reasons are put forward for Loose to remain as a whole and join Linton Parish Council to form a ward with one Borough Councillor. There are mounting concerns that Loose will be lost given the forthcoming two boundary reviews.

#### **Background to Loose**

The village of Loose has recorded origins from before the Norman Invasion in 1066, its name being derived from an Anglo Saxon term for a place for keeping pigs. The village grew up around the Loose Stream which, due to its rapid fall was able to power a number of mills along its route some of which remain today converted to homes. Locally quarried ragstones have been used in many historical buildings in London, e.g. the Tower of London. Loose is synonymous with history and scenic beauty.

The greater part of the parish is still in use for agriculture and forestry. Whilst there are no more hop gardens or cobnut plantations left there are still many orchards across the parish producing apples, pears, cherries and plums.

The beauty of Loose and its surroundings are well known and the village sees many tourists throughout the year. In 1970 Loose became one of the first places in England to be designated a Conservation Area under the 1968 Civic Amenities Act, more recently the area has been extended to include parts of the Upper and Lower Loose Valley.

When Civil Parishes were first created in 1889 the northern boundary of Loose was set at a point on Loose Road near to what is now the South Maidstone Ambulance Community Response Post, at that time the area being largely occupied by nut plantations and orchards. In 1925 it was moved about 0.75 miles south to its present location, this in anticipation of new building in the area. The Depression and World War Two slowed the growth and it was not until the mid-60s that new development reached the parish.

The developments that have taken place in the northern part of the parish are for the most part of "village scale", being very low density, well landscaped and without street lighting. Residents feel their identity is with the Loose Valley and village to the south. Of the ten parish councillors, eight live in the northern, to be annexed, area. This indicates support and affinity from the northern to the southern area and with Loose as a whole.

Another result of the boundary change was that Loose Primary School, King George V playing field, and the parish pavilion, previously in the centre of the parish are now at the northern boundary. In 1962 Loose, along with Hunton, East Farleigh and Linton lost part of its area for the creation of the new parish of Coxheath. Since then the only boundary changes have been minor moves for administrative purposes.

It should be noted that the bit of Loose that would be lost to Tovil, under the current proposals, would include Loose school and the pavilion/playing field. Major losses, these assets would be in the wrong place with respect to Tovil. Keeping the existing north boundary to Loose makes a lot of sense regarding these issues.

Estates agents will confirm that Loose is a desirable address. Loss of such an address could initiate a material loss for property owners.

### **Loose Neighbourhood Plan issues**

In 2019, the Loose Neighbourhood Plan was formally approved and adopted. The plan covers the whole parish and defines policies on movement, landscape and design quality, the sub title or strap line for the Plan being *"a place apart.."*

Any changes to the boundary of Loose ward which is also the boundary of the Loose Neighbourhood Plan may well have implications to the objectives of the plan.

By definition the plan reflects the wishes (within planning regulations) of the Loose community. Many years of voluntary effort and fundraising went into preparing this plan. To divide this plan between wards would lead to conflicts of interest. This would particularly be the case should Loose parish be subjected to changes in the planned parish council boundary review. Residents of any new wards or parishes inheriting a section of the Loose Neighbourhood Plan area would consider they have not had an input into it and it is "not their plan". It may be, in the event of boundary changes new wards could encompass several Neighbourhood Plan areas thus leading to lack of uniformity within a ward.

The necessity to implement the Neighbourhood Plan area as a whole supports the recommendation that the Loose plan/ward area should remain as an unchanged entity albeit that it may be incorporated into a larger ward.

### **Linking with Linton Parish option**

- The population of a ward formed from the two parishes at the 2011 Census would have been 2,857 which allowing for the developments in Hubbards Lane, Well Street and at the bottom of Linton Hill would be close to the 3,046 number now required.
- The two villages have a long, straight east-west common boundary along the Heath Road
- The parishes sit astride the Greensand Ridge and have most of their land in agricultural use. The major road A229 runs through the centre of both parishes

providing links by public and private transport. There are common objectives for addressing safety issues on this major road.

- Both parishes contain Conservation Areas. These would benefit from the uniformity of a single administration. It is noted the northern boundary of the proposed Boughton Monchelsea ward largely follows the northern boundary of the Loose Conservation area. It is considered that an area to the north of this boundary is kept sympathetic to the Conservation Area and does not detract from it. A division here would not facilitate this.
- The elongated north-south geographical shape of the proposed ward would mirror that of its adjacent neighbour Boughton Monchelsea.
- Both villages are in the same County Division and the same Parliamentary Constituency and will both be in the new Weald of Kent constituency.

### **Some alternative possibilities.**

Keeping Loose Parish as a single ward is the paramount object as aforementioned. It would not be objectionable were it joined as a whole with Boughton Monchelsea as another alternative. Again, the creation of a two councillor ward with Boughton Monchelsea and Linton could work well.

North Loose, commencing from the Wheatsheaf, and Loose could join to create a two councillor ward. Loose already works with NLRA and we both have neighbourhood plans and common links such as transport, doctors and amenity areas. The Loose Federation School provides education for residents of Loose and North Loose. To create this amalgamation is a far better proposal than dividing a well-established parish in two.

### **Summary**

The borough of Maidstone has many lovely villages, of which Loose is one. We are not just the jewel of the borough; we are a community. A community that works together to sustain a good standard of living with care and respect to all its members, young and old. The current proposal from Maidstone Borough Council will literally rip us in half and then we will be lost to the two adjoining areas, Tovil and Boughton Monchelsea. The parish council boundary review in 2023 will likely run with the current ward boundary proposal, if agreed, which will see the loss of Loose as we know it. There are many ways Maidstone Borough Council could have redefined the ward boundaries without such a devastating loss to Loose, the people of Loose and indeed all the other disillusioned parishes that have not been consulted by the borough council in this process.