

Boundary Commission,
50 Victoria Street, London.

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29th March 2022

Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Electoral Review of Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) 2021/2

I refer to the electoral review of Maidstone Borough Council which you are currently undertaking and submit the following for your consideration. I have three areas of concern, comment and / or proposal; ward member numbers, ward size and ward boundaries

Ward member numbers

I note that you are minded to support reducing the number of ward members by 7 to 48. Prior to March 2022 I have not seen any notification of MBS's intention to propose this change and indeed cannot understand the logic behind it. Bearing in mind that MBC is delivering 17,500 new homes in its current 'plan' and will be expected to add a further 7,500 in the next update of its 'plan' this appears to be opposite to our future needs. I fear this is a political move and not one that best serves the Maidstone community ! Furthermore, I question why we were not given the opportunity to comment on this proposal which was drafted in 2021 without input " ... from the public ".

Ward size

I note that the proposed number of residents per ward is aimed at 3,000 + or – 5%. This number does not align with other similar boroughs in our locality where the ward size is based on numbers between 2,000 and 2,500 ! These other boroughs include Tunbridge Wells - 2170 residents and Gravesend, 2205. The average for our area of Tunbridge & Malling is 2428 by 2027. Why the difference ? and how does this support " delivering electoral equality for local voters ... " when we have 20 to 40% more residents per ward.

Ward boundaries

If you are still minded to proceed with the above arrangements I submit the following proposal for your consideration

Since the reorganisation of Local Government some 50 years ago Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton have been linked as a one-member ward. Throughout this time Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton have had clear and long-established alliances having worked together very successfully and both are committed to continuing to provide an electoral ward that reflects the special needs and expectations of our community. Indeed our current ward reflects the common community interests which Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton have together, the main ones being :

- Schools (for many years the Boughton Monchelsea / Chart Sutton community shared a primary school and still share a secondary school)
- Agricultural activities and links. (Agricultural businesses overlap both parishes with workers traditionally from each parish and working across the two parishes).
- Shared transport and travel issues.

- Environmental planning and actions.
- Co-ordinated flood emergency measures / plan.
- Long established social and business links between the two parishes.
- Residents from both villages belonging to the same community groups (such as the Community Choir, Bowls Club and children from both villages attend the Play Group.

The current ward arrangement provides reliable, efficient and effective local government and in turn the residents across all age groups respond with a very high voter turnout that supports our proposals that the current ward boundary should form the basis for the ward boundary going forward as a one-member ward.

I strongly support that the current ward boundary for Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton should continue to form the basis of a new one member ward BUT with the following change. The new residential developments of the Joywood, Furfield Park and Roman Way estates consisting of some 500 to 600 electors are currently in the Park Wood ward and it is appropriate for them to come into the Boughton Monchelsea / Chart Sutton ward. This would then give the new Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton ward just over 3000 electors which is within the Commission's 5% tolerance. For Park Wood ward this will reduce its expected electorate for 2027 to some 6500 electors which for a two-member ward would also be within the Commission's tolerance. More importantly the Joywood, Furfield Park and Roman Way estates are within the parish of Boughton Monchelsea and their electors' affinity and loyalty is with Boughton Monchelsea which they view as their "natural home", not Park Wood. This is supported by the following evidence :

- A referendum in the early 2000's showed that the residents of these developments considered themselves to be residents of Boughton Monchelsea . Indeed their postal address is, and always has been, Boughton Monchelsea
- Residents from these estates are Parish Councillors
- A country park adjoining Furfield Park is managed and maintained by the Parish Council and is enjoyed by residents of the three estates and the wider parish
- Residents from the three estates look to Boughton Monchelsea's local and social organisations to join rather than Park Wood organisations such as the Play Group and have leading roles in the Scout Group and Community Choir.

Maidstone Borough Council's submission recognises the challenges the existing Parkwood members face serving the diverse nature of the Park Wood ward community. To help address this in part and for completeness it would be entirely logical for the Joywood, Furfield Park and Roman Way estates to join the Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton ward, thus lifting some of the burden from the Park Wood ward. In conclusion, I would respectfully request that the commission give my proposal its full consideration as I believe that the arrangement to maintain a single member ward for Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton to include additionally the new estates of Joywood, Furfield Park and Roman Way, provides electoral equality and continued efficient and effective local government.

Yours faithfully,

R. J. Martin