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From: Kent Conservative Group <westkentconservatives@gmail.com>
Sent: 10 October 2022 16:48
To: reviews
Subject: Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association Response to Local Government Boundary Changes
Attachments: Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association Response to the Boundary Review.docx
Categories: Submissions, [REDACTED]

Dear LGBCE,

Please find attached the Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association's response to the Local Government Boundary changes.

Best wishes,

Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association

Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association

Response to the Boundary Review

Introduction:

The Tunbridge Wells Conservative Association (TWCA) would like to give thanks for all the work done by the Local Government Boundary Commission.

We believe that the time is right to review the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council boundaries due to the current electoral inequality. We agree with the Boundary Commission that the ward boundaries must consider the ongoing housing development. We agree with the Commission that the ward boundaries in Tunbridge Wells must be in the best possible place to help the Council carry out its responsibilities effectively and that the number of electors represented by each councillor should be approximately the same across the Borough.

At the beginning of the consultation, the Boundary Commission asked for a recommendation on the number of councillors. This number was subsequently decided to be 39. TWCA supports this number of councillors and the reasoning behind the decision. The Boundary Commission brought forward a draft recommendation on the basis of the council voting/electing its representatives in thirds, forming 13 wards made up of 3 members.

Point 23 in the recommendation states that: *'As Tunbridge Wells Borough Council elects by thirds (meaning it has elections in three out of every four years), there is a presumption in legislation that the Council has a uniform pattern of three-councillor wards. We will only move away from recommending this pattern of wards should we receive compelling evidence during the consultation that an alternative pattern of wards will better reflect our statutory criteria.'*

We would like to provide compelling evidence that an alternative pattern of wards will better reflect your statutory criteria.

A move away from electing in thirds:

On Wednesday 5th October, a motion was brought to the Council in an extraordinary meeting. The motion that was proposed was:

“Following the receipt of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s (LGBCE) draft warding proposals and briefings on these proposals by the Council, concern is being expressed by Members, Parish Councillors and residents about the size of the proposed 3-Member wards. The LGBCE requirement to have 3-Member wards throughout the Borough stems from the Council’s decision to continue to elect by thirds. Far more flexible warding arrangements including single and 2-Member wards (as presently) could be planned if the Council opted to have all-out elections. Legislation requires consultation on this before the Council may take a decision to move to all-out elections. The Council requests that the necessary consultation is undertaken urgently and the consultation results brought back to Full Council. In the meantime, the LGBCE Officers currently undertaking the review of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council are advised that this is being re-considered.

The Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of this, reaching the two thirds requirement for it to go to public consultation.

We would like to request that the Boundary Commission pauses and stops the current boundary review process and restart on the basis of ‘All Out’ elections.

On the understanding that we will move to all out elections, we would like to submit our proposal for a boundary change which will provide:

- Good electoral equality, with each councillor representing roughly the same number of electors;
- The integrity of community identities and interests maintained, which includes evidence of community links;
- Clear and easily identifiable boundaries;
- A framework for the Council to deliver effective local services that reflect the needs of communities.

Below is a summary table of the wards, each to be justified in order of appearance thereafter:

Ward Names	Number of Councillors
Benenden and Hawkhurst	3
The Weald	3
Goudhurst	1
Horsmonden	1
Brenchley and Lamberhurst	2
Paddock Wood	3
Capel	1
Pembury	2
Sherwood and Ferndale	3
Hawkenbury Parks	3
Royal Tunbridge Wells North	3
Royal Tunbridge Wells East	2
Royal Tunbridge Wells South	3
Royal Tunbridge Wells West	3
Rusthall and Speldhurst	3
Southborough and Bidborough	3

Benenden and Hawkhurst:

The Commission's original recommendation had the current Hawkhurst and Sandhurst ward combined with Benenden (along the lines of Benenden Parish Council) and "South Goudhurst", which split Goudhurst Parish Council in half. This kept the Commission's 'Rural Tunbridge Wells' seat within the variance.

There was large community opposition to the Parish split within Goudhurst, especially from the Parish Council. Although we understood the logic behind it, we disagree that this provided effective ward representation. From one side of the ward to the other would cover 14 miles.

We would like to propose that the proposed Benenden and Hawkhurst seat remain the same but excludes the section of South Goudhurst. The western boundary is

drawn along the Hawkhurst Parish Council boundary. Thus, the ward is solely composed of Benenden, Hawkhurst and Sandhurst Parish Councils.

We estimated the number of electors in Bedgebury Cross and Kilndown to be around 500. Our proposed ward of Benenden and Hawkhurst would be around 6,500, within the variance range, and would also stay within the variance come 2028.

The proposed ward on Benenden and Hawkhurst would provide effective representation and is in the interests of local residents.

The Weald:

Our proposed 'The Weald' seat is identical to the Commission's recommendation of Cranbrook, Sissinghurst and Frittenden, minus the name change.

With the change to all-out elections, we looked at the possibility of splitting this ward into two, with Cranbrook becoming a two-member ward and Frittenden and Sissinghurst staying as a one-member ward. Although we estimated that Cranbrook would have been within the tolerated variance change, Frittenden and Sissinghurst would not be, being around 20% under the variance.

Consequently, we accept the Commission's recommendation for this ward.

Goudhurst:

The first major change in our proposal to that of the Boundary Commissions is the unification of Goudhurst under a one-member seat. We understand the reasoning behind splitting Goudhurst in the Commission's recommendation, however, with a change to all-out elections, a one-member Goudhurst seat is now possible.

The boundary of this ward would be identical to that of the Parish.

This seat would be within the variance range for a one-seat ward. The road connections in this ward are strong between North and South, allowing good connectivity.

In the initial consultation, Goudhurst Parish expressed their objection to the creation of three large councillor wards in the rural areas of the borough, and this proposal adheres to those concerns.

We believe that a split in Goudhurst Parish should not be progressed and instead, a one-member Goudhurst seat is considered.

Horsmonden:

We propose Horsmonden as a one-member ward. This ward would follow the Parish Council Boundaries.

The current electoral numbers of this seat are on the lower end of the average variance, and although we do not have the figures to show the house building numbers for 2028, there is significant residential building taking place at the moment. This would keep Horsmonden in line with the average variance for 2028.

Although there are valid arguments to be made that Horsmonden Parish and Brenchley and Matfield Parish are similar in terms of characteristics, Horsmonden is becoming large enough to warrant its own seat. As the larger of the three villages in the current ward, we saw the logic in the arguments for Horsmonden to have its own councillor.

We considered Horsmonden becoming a two-member ward with Lamberhurst. We also considered having Horsmonden, Goudhurst and Lamberhurst becoming a two-member ward however these would not be within the variance.

The Commission's recommendation had a three-member ward of Rural Tunbridge Wells spread over four parishes which would mean that at least one of the parishes would be without a councillor from its own area. This would not provide good local government representation. The argument for a one-member Horsmonden council seat would provide higher levels of effective local government representation.

Brenchley and Lamberhurst:

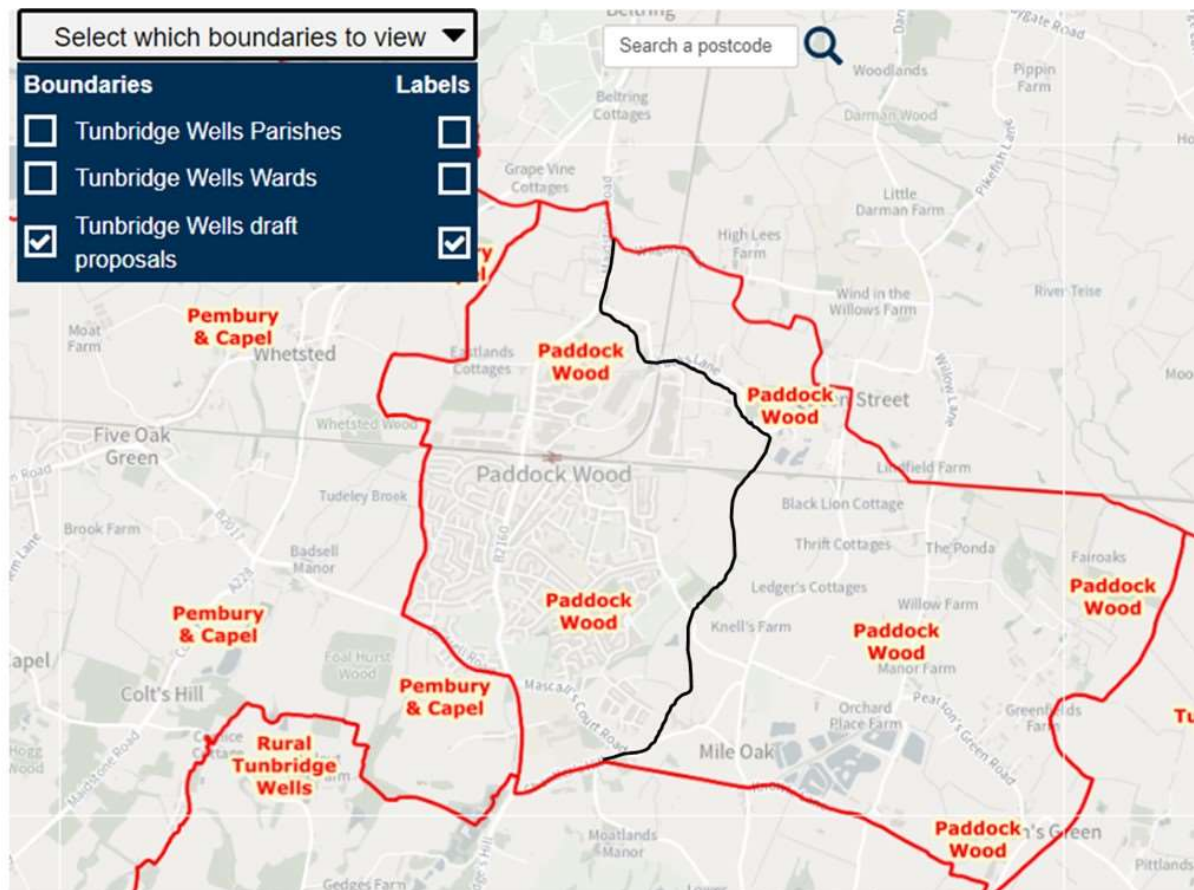
At first glance, there is reasonable logic in having a one-member Brenchley and Matfield seat. According to our numbers, this would have healthy electoral numbers, around 2100. It was also the wish of the Parish to have a dedicated councillor to represent them.

However, this would leave Lamberhurst on its own. Ideally, this would be a one-member ward however this would leave it severely under the variance average tolerable.

We saw the logic in combining Brenchley and Matfield Parish with Lamberhurst Parish. The road connection between the two parishes is strong and can be found through the A21. Both parishes have striking similarities in regard to geographical features, both being particularly rural with small villages, with each being similar in size. This would leave effective counselling at local government level as resident numbers would be roughly equal.

To bring the number of residents up to the variance, we included the residents of the north of Brenchley and Matfield Parish in Mile Oak.

We understand that this goes against our advice on splitting Parish/Town Boundaries. Our justification for this is that this section of Paddock Wood Town Council is rural unlike the rest of the town. Mile Oak and its surrounding rural hamlets would better suit a rural ward and would allow better local governance in both the Paddock Wood ward and the Brenchley and Lamberhurst ward. The boundary would go down the Mascalls Court lane and then follow the River that runs north of the roundup to Lucks Lane and would follow it South until it reaches Maidstone Road and then head north. Our proposal on the boundary line would be as follows:



Please note that our maps do not provide the layout for the new and significantly large housing developments that are being built on the eastern side of Paddock Wood, so we would recommend that the Commission redraw our lines around it if ours go through planned development.

Paddock Wood

This seat would remain the same as the Commission's recommendation minus the changes that were proposed on the rural eastern side of Paddock Wood.

There has been much community dissatisfaction over the housing development being built to the South of Badsell Road not being included in a Paddock Wood seat, as they would be one of the closest residents to the new community centre being built.

However, we understand that the inclusion of the development in Paddock Wood would push it over the three-member variance. We would prefer to have a united Paddock Wood rather than the ward split in two, as is currently the case with the existing boundaries.

Capel

The Commission's recommendation had Pembury and Capel combined. There was discontent from both Capel Parish Council and Pembury Parish Council at this arrangement. Both wards are polar opposites when it comes to geographical features and the Parish of Capel would nearly be the smallest entity in the ward as the Paddock Wood development on Badsell Road was included.

With a switch to all-out elections, we are able to improve local government representation by splitting the proposed ward into two. Capel becomes a one-seat ward.

Capel Parish on its own does not have enough electors to become a one-seat ward, which is why we have included the Badsell Road development. This is to balance out the numbers in this ward as well as in Paddock Wood. Capel ward would have easily identifiable boundaries and would be within variance.

A one-member Capel seat would provide strong local government representation and is in line with the wishes of the residents of Capel.

Pembury

In our proposal, Pembury would be a two-member ward. The seat would be within variance and would provide strong electoral representation as they would be able to focus solely on Pembury. The boundary would be the Pembury Parish boundary, the same as it is currently.

Rusthall and Speldhurst

We would encourage the Boundary Commission to press ahead with the three-member ward of Rusthall and Speldhurst. We would like to emphasise that this is not ideal for local government representation as ideally, the ward would be split to reflect the different communities, however, we realise that this would not be possible due to elector variance.

Southborough and Bidborough:

We agree with Bidborough Parish that Bidborough fits better with Southborough than that of Speldhurst and Langton Green, so we welcome the Commission's proposal to have Bidborough as part of Southborough.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Seats:

With the creation of an extra seat in the rural areas to drastically increase the local government representation and be in line with resident wishes, we needed to decrease the number of seats in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells by one. This we thought was possible and logical, as, in the Commission's proposal, three of the six seats were below the variance come 2028.

Royal Tunbridge Wells South:

We agree with this warding arrangement.

Royal Tunbridge Wells West:

Come 2028, this seat would have a variance of -9%, a figure that we looked at addressing by taking electors from the Grosvenor and Hilbert seat. However, upon further inspection, we came to the conclusion that it would not be possible to create a convincing argument as there was no clear split around Upper Grosvenor Road.

We would like to encourage the commission to try and reduce the size of the existing Grosvenor and Hilbert seat, adding these numbers to Royal Tunbridge Wells West.

Royal Tunbridge Wells North:

We were largely in favour of this ward as it allowed Southborough (and Bidborough) ward to have its own identity.

Being slightly below the variance, we would like to propose a small expansion of this ward, moving the boundary further into the Grosvenor and Hilbert ward. We would like to give two options.

Option one:

Extend the southern border to run along Woodbury Park Road.

Option two:

Extend the southern border to run along the train track/or Upper Grosvenor Road.
(We acknowledge that this option would likely push this ward over variance but we would be grateful if the numbers could be checked).

We place more weight on Option 1, to ensure this seat is not too large in terms of electors.

Option 1 in Blue

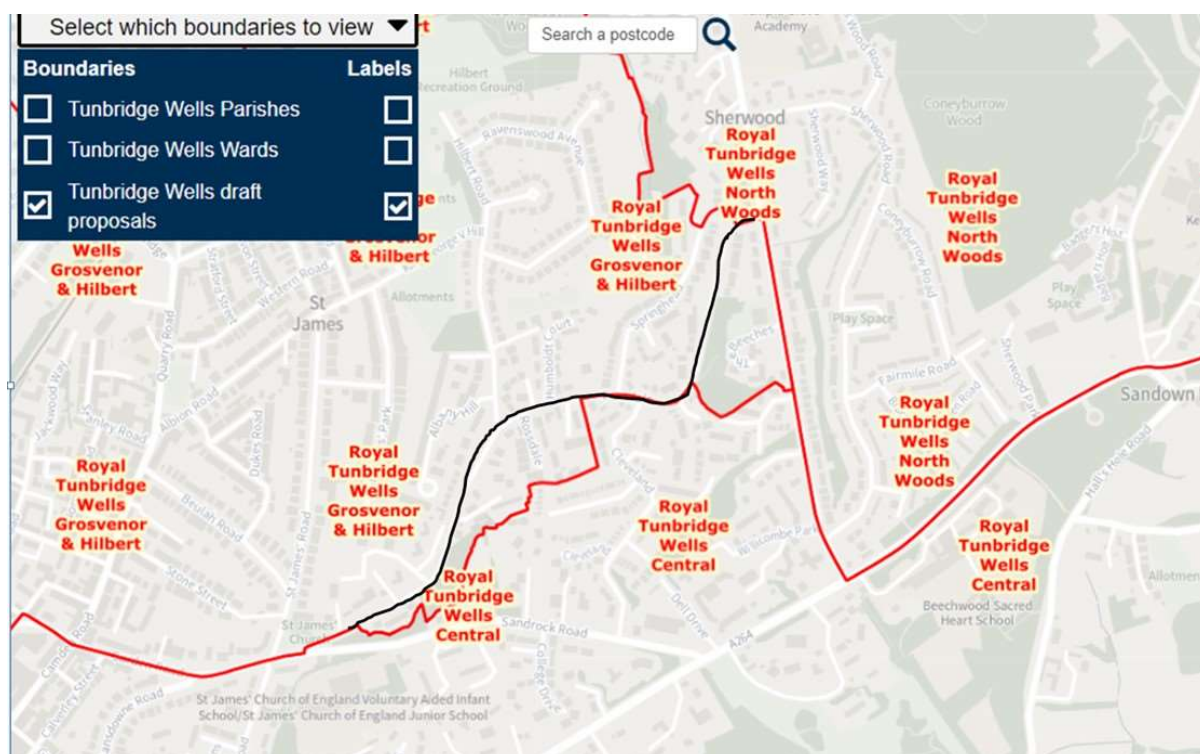
Option 2 in Green



Hawkenbury Parks:

We have renamed the Tunbridge Wells Central Ward to be Hawkenbury Park (this fitting with the area of Hawkenbury and the numerous parks that are within the ward).

We want to extend the northern part of the Central Tunbridge Wells Boundary to the more logical route along Ferndale Road. This gives a clearer idea as to the ward identity and lowers the numbers in Grosvenor and Hilbert. The number of electors should be within the variance in TW Central.

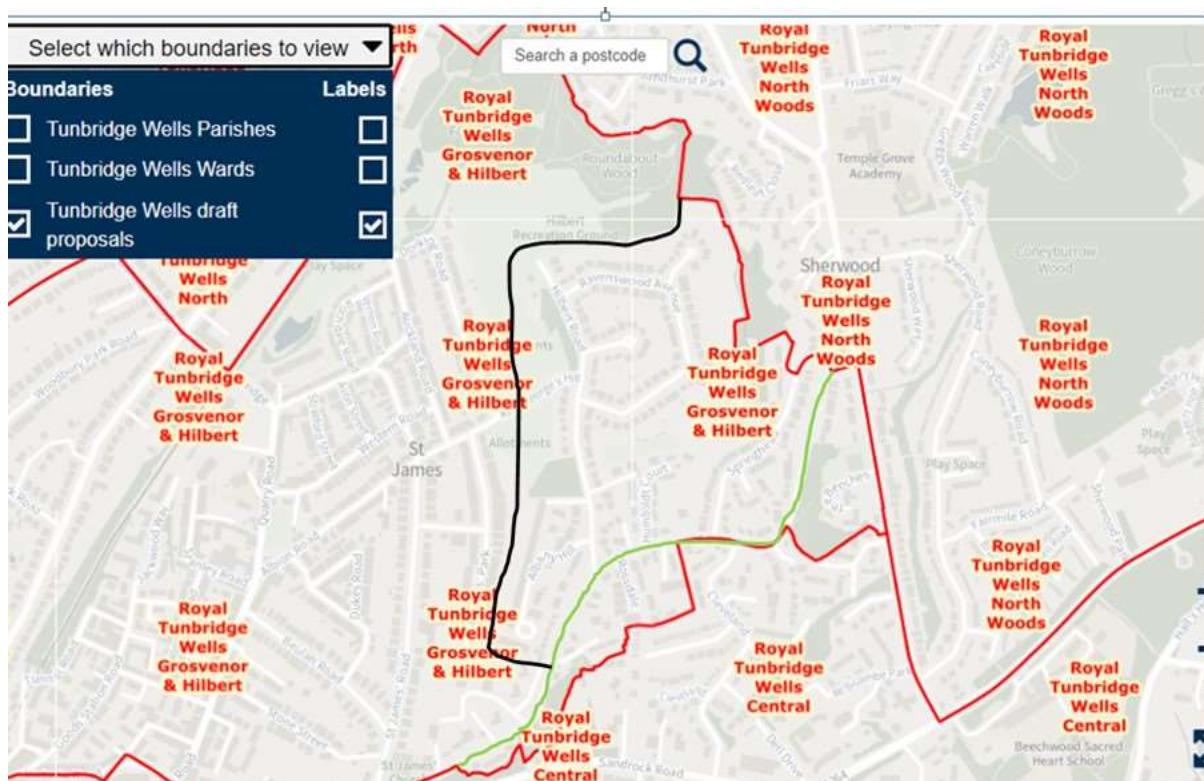


Sherwood and Ferndale:

This seat was -9% below the target number of electors, so we have looked to expand its boundaries. There is little change in the geographical landscape between Sherwood and Ferndale, thus we looked to include Ferndale in with Sherwood. We were happy with the Commission's previous inclusions to the North Woods ward.

This dramatically decreased the numbers for the Grosvenor and Hilbert seat whilst pushing the Sherwood and Ferndale seat to healthy elector variance. The boundary would be south of the Hilbert Recreation Ground, would cut through the allotments, which would be a clear ward boundary mark, and would join Ferndale Road behind Ferndale Close.

Please see below our proposal. We have added the Central boundary change in Green.



Royal Tunbridge Wells East:

In order to bring RTW wards closer to the target number of electors, whilst maintaining the integrities of communities, we have brought the numbers of electors in Grosvenor and Hilbert, down to that of a two-member ward. We have renamed it Royal Tunbridge Wells East. This proposal is the most equitable outcome in terms of keeping wards to the variance and also maintaining the integrity of Parish/Town boundaries across the Borough.

Please find below our boundary for this ward in black, with the changes to the other wards taken into consideration. We have gone with Option 1 for the TWN ward.

