

Proposal

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is conducting a review of electoral arrangements for Tandridge District Council with a view to creating larger three councillor ward groups across the District. The draft proposal is for Felbridge as a single councillor ward to join with the existing two councillor ward group of Dormansland & Felcourt.

Consideration of Options

Felbridge Parish Council (FPC) have carefully considered the options available to meet the criteria presented by the LGBCE Draft Proposals document. Initially, a link with neighbouring Burstow, Horne and Outwood was considered but it was acknowledged that this is already an established three ward group. FPC then considered a link with Dormansland & Felcourt. However, Felbridge has little in common with Dormansland & Felcourt.

In the Minutes of the Dormansland Parish Council meeting of 7th June, it is recorded that "Full Council agreed that Felbridge would not be the right ward to join with Dormansland" The Independents & OLRG Alliance (now known as the Residents Alliance) is the largest political group at Tandridge District Council (TDC) and both Dormansland & Felcourt Ward Councillors are members. In paragraph 40 of the LGBCE document it is recorded that this group "rejected any proposal to place Felbridge Parish in Dormansland & Felcourt ward" Against this level of opposition, Felbridge residents could not be confident that their individual needs and concerns would be met within the proposed three councillor ward group. FPC were unaware that such opposition existed prior to the draft proposals being published. While acknowledging that individual Ward Councillors will change, such strong opposition from the largest political group at TDC to Felbridge joining with Dormansland & Felcourt raises much wider and longer term concerns.

At the time of the initial consultation, FPC councillors did not consider they had sufficient accurate or reliable information in order to submit an informed response. The current Felbridge Ward Councillor did not brief FPC and submitted their own response which wasn't shared with FPC. The option to remain a single ward was not included in the briefing session attended by the FPC Clerk.

Reflecting Community Interests and Identities

Felbridge's profile, character and needs are unique within the Tandridge District. The District/County border runs both alongside and across the busy Crawley Down Road within the built up area of the village. Felbridge Primary School, Village Hall, Village Shop, Playgroup and playground are on Crawley Down Road along with the football, tennis and bowls clubs. The border also runs alongside the busy A22/A264 Star Junction nearby. This creates some very specific issues and necessitates regular communication with East Grinstead Town Council and Worth Parish Council - both in Mid Sussex. Planning applications for these councils are an agenda item for all full FPC meetings and our Clerk regularly monitors such information and liaises with both councils.

Major issues for Felbridge relate to roads and developments by MSDC on the District/County border. The main roads which run through Felbridge also run through East Grinstead or Worth. While Felbridge has a strong individual identity and a wide range of well supported local groups (including an active History group), it relies on East Grinstead rather than other areas in Tandridge for essential facilities including doctors, dentists, library, leisure centre, pharmacy, supermarkets, restaurants, cinema, post office and a wider range of shops.

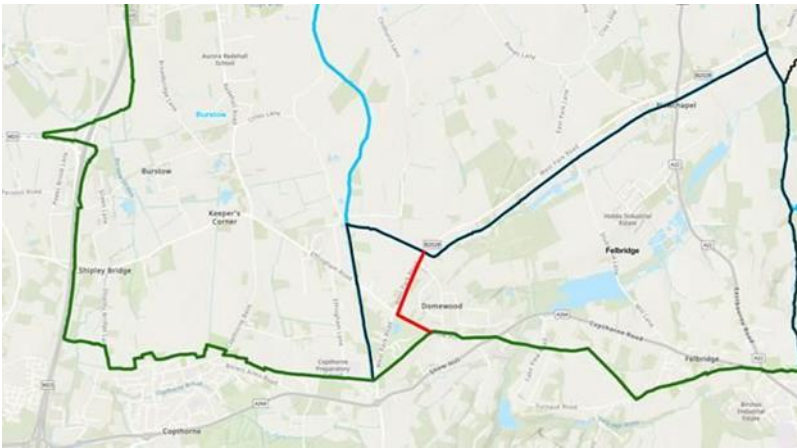
For the past ten years, FPC have been fighting cross border over-development. Councillors and the Clerk have had to familiarise themselves with Planning procedures and systems at MSDC in addition to TDC; with West Sussex Highways as well as Surrey Highways and to develop working relationships with Mid Sussex and West Sussex officers and councillors. The previous District Councillor, and the Chairman of FPC presented evidence at a number of appeals and representations to Planning Inspectors on developments on the Felbridge border in Mid Sussex. Our current Planning Chairman provided a substantial amount of evidence to the Inspector during the MSDC Site Allocations DPD hearings in 2021.

Providing for Effective and Convenient Local Government

Due to the particular issues specific to Felbridge, FPC see a risk that councillors in a three ward group with Dormansland & Felcourt could not reasonably be expected to engage on behalf of Felbridge residents to the same degree as a single Felbridge councillor. Proceeding with this proposal could lead to a failure for Felbridge's community interests and identity to be adequately addressed which would not provide for effective and convenient local government for Felbridge residents.

Equality of Representation

Under the proposed new boundaries, the forecast variations for equality of representation for other wards range from -8% to +11%. At +16%, Felbridge's single ward forecast is not excessively higher than other areas. The figure for retaining Dormansland & Felcourt as a two ward group would be -1% so again is not an issue. While acknowledging that purely from a statistical perspective combining Felbridge with Dormansland & Felcourt might appear suitable, it is important to note that 'equality of representation' is just one of the three criteria to be considered. However, if the LGBCE wish to see a lower average for Felbridge, this could be achieved if properties on Effingham Road, West Park Road (west of Haskins) and south of Snow Hill Lane were allocated to Burstow, Horne and Outwood. Doing so would reduce Felbridge's current electorate by about 100-120 leaving an estimated electoral figure of +9% compared to the TDC average (i.e. within the main pack of deviations). Burstow, Horne and Outwood would then be about +8% (vs +3% in the current future state). This area of residents strongly align themselves to Copthorne (Burstow) as there is a very significant rural gap between them and Felbridge Village, whereas they are within easy walking distance of Copthorne Village. (See image below with suggested boundary marked in Red)



This proposal has been shared with the Clerk to Burstow Parish Council who has in turn shared it with their Ward Councillors.

Conclusion

Felbridge Parish Council have carefully considered the content and proposals put forward in the LGBCE document. With their considerable local knowledge and experience of the long-term issues facing Felbridge residents, FPC councillors are well placed to understand and advise on what is best for Felbridge. A willingness to consider different options has been demonstrated, addressing the criteria of equality of representation; reflecting community interests and identities and providing for effective and convenient local government. Having done so, Felbridge Parish Council conclude that the only option which delivers against the three criteria is for Felbridge, like Woldingham, to remain a single councillor ward.

Tandridge

Personal Details:

Name: Mrs Patricia Slatter

Email: [REDACTED]

Postcode: [REDACTED]

Organisation Name: Felbridge Parish Council (Representative of parish/town council)

Comment text:

Related subject: Felbridge Ward

Please see the uploaded document for Felbridge Parish Council's full response to the latest proposals.

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www.felbridge-pc.org.uk

Attached Documents:

- FPC Response to LGBCE July 2023 Final.pdf

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