

Maidstone Borough Council

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Submission in respect of the existing Loose Ward/Parish south of Maidstone, Kent and the proposals made by Maidstone Borough Council. The Boundary Commission' has recently requested comments on the Ward boundaries in the Maidstone area. Having read the submission document from Maidstone Borough Council itself, we would like to submit the following in respect of the Loose area of Maidstone. My wife and I have been residents of Loose for over thirty years and we are both involved with the Parish Council. The proposals made by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) for splitting the existing Loose Ward between new Wards of North Loose and Tovil, and Boughton Monchelsea and Loose, seem to be based purely on 'number crunching' to achieve the appropriate Ward sizes. They seem to pay little heed to the guidelines in the Boundary Commission's PABR document on Reflecting Community Identity. The points below aim to explain why there are better 'fits' for the new enlarged Ward than the one suggested by Maidstone Borough Council. It is appreciated that the existing Loose Ward, with boundaries which match the existing Parish boundary, and with a single councillor is something of an anomaly. We recognise that, in the light of the MBC plan to reduce the number of Ward Councillors by increasing the electorate in each Ward, there must be a bigger Ward involving Loose. However, as already stated, the MBC proposals do nothing to preserve Loose as a community. As a Parish councillor, in recent weeks, following discussions with representatives of neighbouring parishes and community organisations, two emerging options, both retaining Loose Ward 'as is' are suggested: The option favoured by the Parish Council involves combination with the ward area of Linton Parish Council to create the numbers required for the larger Ward – the MBC proposal links Linton with Marden and Hunton, some distance away. A second option, more recently emerging in the light of new information on available Ward Councillors, is to create a new Ward consisting of the existing Loose Ward/Parish, but with the boundary extending north to the junction of the A229 & A274 ('The Wheatsheaf'). This area is currently part of the Maidstone South Ward but at 'parish' level, the North Loose Residents Association (NLRA) fulfils many of the functions of a parish council save for having a precept! Under this proposal, the area of South ward from the Wheatsheaf towards Maidstone and Tovil would help create the larger Tovil Ward required. The credentials of the NLRA are well respected and it was one of the first communities in Maidstone to complete a Neighbourhood Plan. Furthermore, at many levels residents and representatives in these two areas are already working together on matters of mutual interest: The problems of infrastructure on the A229, liaising on matters of development and planning and, as the Loose Parish Pavilion and Playing Field is close to the LPC/NLRA boundary, co-ordinating local community events such as the annual Loose fete. This is an example of the community interaction which section 5.6 of the Commission's guidelines seeks to see. Our arguments for this new enlarged Loose Ward are summarised as follows; The splitting of the Ward in the manner suggested by MBC threatens the future of the existing Loose Parish Council when the next tier of Parish-level consultation comes to be undertaken. The splitting of the Ward also means that, unfortunately, major properties owned by Loose Parish - its Pavilion and Playing Field - and also Loose School itself, would be lost to the actual Loose village. A previous redrawing of boundaries in 1925 saw these assets becoming located at the Parish edge. The Parochial church boundaries, however, remained the same, as they do today, (co-incidentally covering much of the area of the suggested NLRA and Loose Parish Ward combination). MBC Ward proposals sees the assets lost and in an impractical location in respect of the North Loose/Tovil Ward, which has YMCA sports facilities as one of its assets. From the Boughton Monchelsea/Loose point of view the main community meeting place is Boughton Monchelsea's own hall, some distance from Loose and not easily accessible by public transport or those without a car. Although Loose Village and Boughton Monchelsea have liaised on some matters, notably planning and development issues, they are disparate communities with their own ethos and interests. One councillor running a Ward composed of these two villages faces potential conflicts, as well as perhaps not having the ground-level local

knowledge of one or other communities. Again, MBC seems to pay little heed to the individuality of the village communities, claiming, in a two-line justification of the Ward that 'there is a strong link... on issues faced and shared travel connections'. Obviously no-one at MBC has ever had to catch a bus from Loose/Maidstone to Boughton Monchelsea! Finally, it will be noted that in its proposals for new Parliamentary boundaries, the subject of a previous consultation, the northern boundary for the new constituency of the Weald of Kent in respect of the south of Maidstone lay along Lancet Lane, essentially the same northern boundary currently used by both the Parish and Ward of Loose. The Commission must have had some reason for setting this boundary, hopefully recognising the community and integrity of Loose Village and its surrounding area. We urge the Commission to take a more reasoned approach to the creation of Ward boundaries than that taken by the Borough Council.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded