

Review Officer (Maidstone)
LGBCE,
PO Box 133,
Blyth,
NE24 9FE

3rd April 2022

Dear Sir,

Local Government Boundary Commission – Maidstone Consultation

I wish to express my dismay over the suggestion from Maidstone Borough Council that Harrietsham and Lenham ward is significantly altered – and that some of the ‘outlying’ hamlets south of the railway line will transfer to Headcorn.

The suggestion includes enlarging the ward in one direction while cutting it off in another. Such an approach would be entirely illogical and would actually and physically make representation for me significantly further away. While you will note that the address above lists ‘Grafty Green’ (a village which is outside the Lenham Parish boundary) the actual road is within it. The road actually forms part of that boundary.

To make Elmstone Hole Road part of the Headcorn ward would effectively make what is currently a 2.6mile distance into community representation some 4.9miles distant – virtually twice as far away. There can be no logical thinking behind removing local knowledge and representation and replacing it with something so distant that the receiving parish and ward members will have no knowledge (or interest) in small rural hamlets.

One might suspect that there are ulterior motives behind such a proposed boundary change – potentially to make other (more difficult politically motivated issues) easier to push through perhaps?

What is clear in such a move is that our access to the community we have been part of for nearly 20 years is being stripped away.

While I understand the need for MBC to reduce the overall numbers of members, and for there to be a consequential review of the wards to ensure there is balance in the numbers of people each member represents, I am wholly against this sort of arbitrary line drawing on a map which makes no account of the effect on the ground, the access to representation, and the knowledge of ‘elected members’ to the places they are supposed to represent. It is impossible for a member from Headcorn ward to know our road in the same way as our current members do. How is it progress therefore to make such a change? Representation, even in local government (at a parish and borough level) is very important and should not be stripped away to satisfy a calculation at the expense of effectiveness and local knowledge/experience.

Further comments on the current position:

Lenham and Harrietsham ward is presently served by two elected Members at Maidstone Borough Council.

In my view this works well in terms of community building as the two parishes, Lenham and Harrietsham, sit on the eastern boundary of Maidstone borough distinct from the other major settlements, such as Headcorn 6 miles to the south, and share much common infrastructure in terms of services, for example:

- Both have been designated in the 2017 Maidstone Local Plan as Rural Service Centres

- Both are in the same Kent County Council Member Division and are served by the same KCC councillor
- Both are covered by the same County Council Community Warden
- Both form part of the same Kent Police area and so are served by known and shared Police Community Support Officers
- Both are covered by Len Valley Practice, the part of the Ridge Primary Care Network, with the primary surgery at Groom Way Lenham and a secondary surgery at the Glebe Medical Centre in Harrietsham

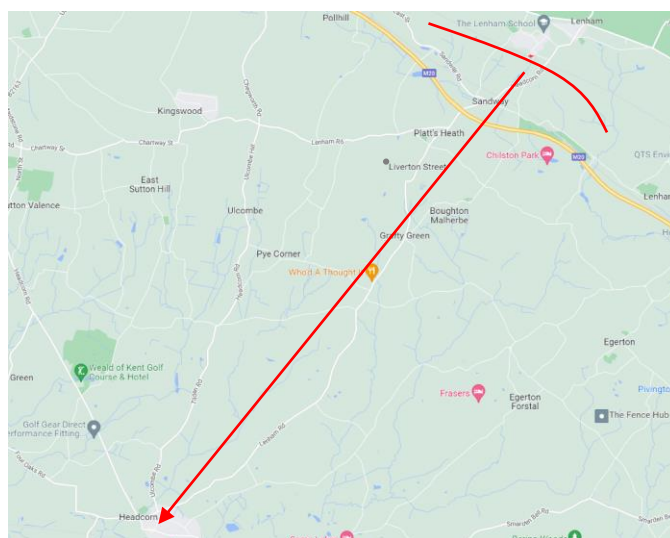
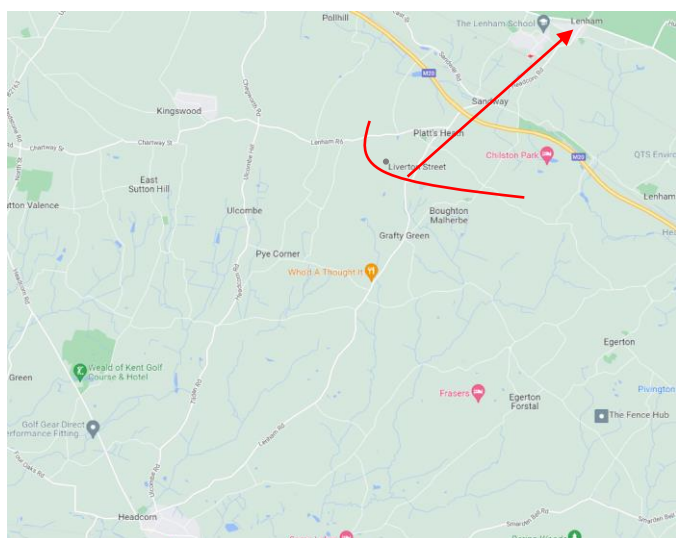
Aside from these shared statutory services, which make continuity a strong facet of the distinct communities of both parishes, many of the organisations that run for both young and old, involve residents from both parishes. The football club, the cricket club, Young at Heart, community hub club, Dance club, Ballet School, Scouting and Guiding movement are but some of the examples of joint enterprises.

Additionally, the one secondary school serves both parishes and beyond, including pupils from Maidstone and Ashford.

The current elected members are completely integrated within the fabric of the ward they represent – this cannot be emphasised enough. Their knowledge and experience of this area is second to none – which has been highlighted as MBC seeks to push certain decisions on the area – actions that have been resisted thanks to the depth of the knowledge of the ward members and their passion for the area. As an example of their integrated part - when the COVID situation emerged they were there, organising local volunteers to deliver food and help people get their medication under lockdown. That is but one recent example of how they constantly strive to serve this part of the borough.

Geography & distance:

Reference to the screen grabs below will illustrate the point on location and logic – with the grey pin (near ‘Liverton Hill’) being the location of Elmstone Hole Road and both Lenham and Headcorn shown. It is plain to see and clear with even the smallest amount of logic that including this area and up to the railway line which serves Lenham in the Headcorn ward while adding other areas to the Lenham and Harrietsham wards is entirely nonsensical.



As a Lenham Parish Councillor – I fully endorse the submission made by the LPC on this matter. I also support the suggestion made by LPC that parts of North Downs Ward adjacent to and north of Lenham and Harrietsham villages, consisting of the settlements of Otterden, Wichling, Frinsted and Wormshill which are

currently in North Downs Ward, could be incorporated into an enhanced Lenham and Harrietsham ward. These areas adjacent to both villages already associate themselves strongly with the two villages. This change would further align the areas of the AONB from the North Downs into the enlarged ward footprint, providing additional enhancement for tourism and greater cohesion for the communities within them.

As a closing point – I would suggest that the potential for these boundary changes has not been widely advertised. MBC have (in recent weeks) been found wanting on advertising other, extremely important, public engagement sessions. They have employed an external ‘professional’ agency to deliver leaflets which has transpired not to have happened in the vast majority of cases such that now further, costly, consultation events are planned. This noted, it is the belief of many that MBC will not take notice of the position raised by any individuals at those events where those are contrary to the views of the officers or members of MBC. I would have to wonder if there is a similar pattern emerging in this review – ie that the proposals are in the interests of MBC and not the people it is meant to represent. I earnestly hope this is not the case and that the representations and submissions made will be heard and listened too – particularly as they impact on so many people.

Yours faithfully

A G Ratcliffe