

Maidstone Borough Council

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Maidstone Borough Council Ward Review

West Maidstone

This submission concentrates on the area of Maidstone west of the River Medway as this is a distinct area of the borough. The built-up area stretches out to the borough boundary in the north west and to include Barming Village in the West. Generally in an Urban area we would believe that Wards should Generally be based on three member or 2 member. In exceptional cases in an urban environment there may be a case for a 1 member ward where a local community identity or physical boundaries can demonstrate the need.

The area currently have 5 wards as follows:

1. Allington (3 Councillors)
2. Barming and Teston (1 Councillor)
3. Bridge (2 Councillors)
4. Fant (3 Councillors) and
5. Heath (2 Councillors)

This submission is prepared on the basis that the new Council will have 48 Councillors with each representing an electorate in 2027 of 3,046 +/- 10% so a range of 3,351 to 2,741

If polling district BA Teston is excluded as it is a rural area which has links to Farleigh across the Medway rather than to the urban area of West Maidstone then the remaining area is projected to have an electorate in 2027 of 27,553. Using the baseline of 3,046 electors per councillor then this area would be entitled to 9 councillors as opposed to the current 11.

Consideration in sighting the boundaries has to give recognition to

- New wards should leave each councillor representing roughly the same number of electors as other councillors elsewhere in the authority.
- New wards should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities, and boundaries should be identifiable.
- Consider transport links, community groups and facilities, natural or physical boundaries, parishes and shared interests.
- New wards should promote effective and convenient local government. Consider the number of councillors for, the geographic size of, and the links between parts of the ward.

On this basis there are a number of considerations to look at, Major Roads, the area have two main roads fanning out from the Town Centre Bridges, The A20 London Road and the A26 Tonbridge Road. There are also a number of natural communities in this area noticeably Fant to the south of the Tonbridge Road, Allington to the North and 'Barming Heath' to the west of Hermitage Lane and 'Oakwood' to the south of the Oakwood Park education complex centres on Oakwood Road and Oakwood Park. Therefore the new wards should be based on these long standing natural communities.

Fant – The Fant area of Maidstone has a cohesive community feel stretching from the Town Centre to the edge of the urban area defined as Glebe Lane, Farleigh Lane. Within the area are two local primary schools St Michael's and Jubilee which has strong Fant catchments. Other elements which identify the community are in names such as Upper Fant Road, Lower Fant Road, Fant Lane, Fant Farm, Little Fant Farm (access of the east side of Farleigh Lane) and the Fant Wildlife Nature reserve. There are also Fant community websites and a local community group. Fant is currently represented on Maidstone Council by a co-terminus ward – Fant which returns 3 councillors with a projected 2027 electorate of 7,666. This makes it too large for a 2 member ward and too small for a 3 member ward in the future.

Allington – historically Allington was a separate parish to Maidstone and despite suburban sprawl retains a community feel, based on St Nicholas Parish Church, the Mid Kent Shopping centre and the fact that its core was developed in the 1960s-1980s. It has two primary schools Palace Wood and Allington, a shopping centre and a branch library. Allington currently forms a Ward with 3 members, but with a projected electorate of 6,869 in 2027 is again too large for a 2 member ward and too small for a 3 member ward.

‘Barming Heath’ – This area lies to the west of Hermitage and Fountain Lane and includes Barming village (North and South Streets), its southern part is dominated by generally post war housing and its northern half by recent developments since 2015.

‘Oakwood’ – This is a small clearly defined community consisting of the area between the Oakwood Park Playing Fields and education campus and Tonbridge Road centred on Oakwood Road.

Therefore in terms of building new ward these four neighbourhood areas should form a good starting block.

Starting from the south you have the Fant Community, the Fant Community electorate in 2027 is (based on Polling Districts K and KA) projected to be 7,666. This is clearly too large for a 2 member ward (@6,000) and too small for a 3 member ward (@9,000). There is a case that the Fant identity lessens in Glebe Lane and the West Side of Farleigh Lane. There maybe an argument to transfer this area of KA to a new Barming and Heath Ward. In the West (Farleigh Lane) the boundary has been drawn up to and including Fant Farm and Little Fant Farm in the rural area, as well as recognising the parts of the urban area that identify as Fant rather than Barming.

There is a strong argument to link these two areas including that most of the secondary school pupils in the area attend the three secondary schools in the Oakwood Park Campus (Oakwood Park Grammar School, St Augustines Academy and St Simon Stock Catholic School). Clare Park on Tonbridge Road with its community sports facilities Tennis, Bowling, Playgrounds and Hard standing court is used by both the communities on either sides of Tonbridge Road. The main access to both areas is from Tonbridge Road The ward would thus be a cohesive unit.

Therefore we are recommending that a new ward of Fant and Oakwood be formed. It would have the boundaries as presented by Maidstone Council in their submission and would consist of All Polling district K, most of KA and most of NA. Fant and Oakwood would therefore bring together the two distinct but interrelated communities of Fant and Oakwood together. The boundary would follow these natural communities boundaries and would be quite clear. Starting from the East, the River Medway would form the boundary would from the old bridge as far as the river below The Oast, it would then go inland behind the houses in Half Yoke and then to Farleigh Lane. The boundary will then go north down the centre of Farleigh Lane to its junction with Tonbridge Road, then going the centre of Tonbridge Road to the east as far as Queens Road. The boundary would then follow along Queens Road to the Scrubbs Lane Footpath and then to the rear of the houses in Bower Mount Road following the current Heath ward boundary, finally it would run along the centre of Tonbridge Road from Bower Mount Road to the gyratory and then along the centre line of The Broadway back to the bridge. The has been drawn around the Oakwood Park area as to the east the communities that identify more with the A20 area with an identity more towards the Town Centre than those to the west.

The 2027 electorate of this area as calculated by Maidstone Council will be 8,787 well within the range of 8,100 to 9,900 for a 3 member ward. There maybe a case for including Pembury Gardens a cul-de-sac of half a dozen houses off Bower Mount Road within Fant and Bower as it related more to those areas than others, but the impact would be insignificant in number.

This ward we believe should be called Fant and Oakwood to recognise the two community identifies included.

Referring to the Maidstone Councils proposals for creating a 2 member Barming Heath Ward, a 2 member Palace Wood Ward, 1 member Allington Ward and a 1 member Bridge Ward. Overall we can see that the area’s reflect to some extent the natural communities we referred to.

Barming Heath, we would suggest be better named Barming and Heath to recognise its areas. We would suggest that the this ward would consist mainly of the following polling districts:

- All N Heath - North
- All NA Heath - West
- All B Barming
- Small part of NB Heath – South, the area to the west of Queens Road
- Small part of KA Fant West, the area to the west of a line drawn down the centre of Farleigh Lane as suggested in our Fant and Oakwood proposal above.

This ward would have an element of common identity and would have a 2027 electorate of approximately 5,941 in 2027. Unlike the Maidstone Council proposal it would exclude Teston which is better lined with rural communities such as West Farleigh and Yalding. It would have clear boundaries with a border line along the centre of Farleigh Lane dividing the more low density housing on the west side of Farleigh Lane from the high density housing to the east (Farleigh Court

and Woodford Road estates), then going along the centre of Tonbridge Road between the junctions with Farleigh Lane to Queens Road, then following the centre line of Queens Road to just before Malling Terrace, then going around the rear of the Maidstone Hospital estate.

then going north along the current Heath ward boundary to Giddyhorn Lane which forms the natural dividing line between areas accessed of Queens Road and London Road, there being no road access between the two. The boundary would then go west along Giddyhorn Lane to the borough boundary on Hermitage Lane just to the north of Maidstone Hospital. We would not recommend that it includes Teston, The proposed ward is predominately suburban in nature, whilst Teston is rural in nature with a small village.

In the North of the West Maidstone Urban Area is the current Allington Ward and to the West of the Area is the current Bridge Ward (less Pembury Gardens), these two current wards have a combined estimated 2027 electorate of 12,469 (less Pembury Gardens which only has about 20 electorate) and is sufficient for 4 Councillors. There are two options put forward with equal weightings.

Option 1 To reflect the Allington Community it is proposed to create two 2 member wards Allington and Palace Wood and a Bridge Ward. The logical dividing line between these two areas is the current one. This maintains the historic Giddyhorn Lane as the southern boundary to Allington and Palace Wood which is a natural dividing line. However this creates wards with projected 2027 electorates of 6,890 for Allington and 5,579 for Bridge. Option 2 is to move the boundary along the A20 London Road dividing the area East West with an Allington and Riverside ward to the east and a Place Wood Ward to the East, however this means splitting the Allington Community in two as well as the Bridge area and each would rather lack a sense of cohesiveness.

An alternative would be to have the Palace Wood Ward as proposed by Maidstone Council and then have a 2 member Allington and Bridge Ward, combining the two single member wards proposed by Maidstone Council.