

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 19 July 2021 20:05
To: reviews
Subject: Electoral Review of Tonbridge and Malling

Categories: [REDACTED]

For the attention of Tom Rutherford

Dear Mr Rutherford,

I refer to the above review and having thought about it feel I should submit some views of my own.

I am currently councillor for the Larkfield North ward but apart from an 8 year gap have been a borough councillor since Tonbridge and Malling was formed in 1974. And before that the member for Larkfield for the last two years of the former Malling RDC. I was Leader of the Borough Council for 8 years under a Liberal Democrat administration with Labour support. I have lived in Larkfield all my life and know the Malling area well especially the eastern Medway Gap area.

After the existing council came into office Larkfield was represented by three borough councillors of which I was one. It was only split into two wards when the numbers then deemed it was entitled to four members due to the extra housing built in the area and the boundary was chosen to follow the M20 creating a Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards. Larkfield South includes the local centre of Martin Square and also the whole of the original village of Larkfield either side of the London Road (A20)

At the last review there was a proposal to place the houses on the south side of London Road into East Malling but there was public objection supported by the parish council. To get some measure of equality between the two wards a part of New Hythe Lane north of the M20 including Sheldon Way and Mercer Close were taken out of Larkfield North and put into Larkfield South. Although it looks odd on a map this has worked reasonably well and as the test of seeking electoral equality makes perfect community wards difficult was accepted.

The Borough Council is now proposing given the overall reduction in cllrs, which I voted against, to go back to having the whole of Larkfield in one ward with three members and I wish to support that.

I do though recognize that their proposal also includes as happened with New Hythe Lane last time in respect of Larkfield that in order to achieve a two member East Malling part of Lunsford Lane and Willow Road be transferred from Larkfield to East Malling.

Like the previous New Hythe Lane division this does look odd on a map but I feel that if it allows East Malling to continue with two members then it is acceptable. It is not ideal but I feel in the balance between electoral equality and community links it is not possible to achieve perfection. So do not wish to reject in favour of an unobtainable goal.

It would mean the overall parish boundary would not be breached and being in the same parish the transferred Larkfield residents would still be represented by the same parish council which locally provides amenities such as village halls, playing fields, open spaces; three areas of allotments open to all across the parish; and the public toilets in Martin Square. In all the period I have been a councillor there have been generally strong links between the parish council and its borough cllrs who are often also members of the parish council like the two current local East Malling members or come to the monthly meetings. The change would not affect that and would support local good governance.

I have looked at other alternatives for linking East Malling with surrounding areas but feel they all have drawbacks so that the best solution is for East Malling to continue to have two councillors based as far as possible on its existing boundaries.

David Thornewell
Borough Councillor for North Larkfield.