



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

19 July 2021

The Review Officer (Tonbridge and Malling)
LGBCE
PO Box 133
Blyth
NE24 9FE

Dear Review Officer,

Tonbridge and Malling parliamentary constituency covers much, but not all, of Tonbridge and Malling borough. Having represented Tonbridge and Malling parliamentary constituency since 2015 I have worked very closely with Borough Councillors in all areas, and write in support of the submission by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in response to the Warding Arrangements consultation by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in its electoral review of Tonbridge and Malling. I have also been consulted on the submission by the Conservative Group of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and agree with its justification for proposed Warding Arrangements. As I do not represent the whole of Tonbridge and Malling Borough, my comments are limited to that area which I have represented since 2015.

East Malling

I am very pleased to support the proposal which keeps a total of 5 Borough Councillors in the East Malling and Larkfield Parish. Although I only represent the area covered by East Malling parish ward, this is a clear and defined village, with a very strong sense of community. While I recognise that the Commission will look at whether parts of Larkfield should join in the East Malling ward, even though it would be under the variance I would encourage the Commission to strongly consider retaining its two members under the current boundaries. If the Commission considers that the electoral equality here is too great then I would resist any attempts to include it within the same ward as West Malling, which has a significantly different identity.

West Malling

I am pleased to support the expanded West Malling ward which includes Birling, Ryarsh and Offham in addition to West Malling, Leybourne and Leybourne Chase. This would ensure that all the communities closest to West Malling would be included within the same ward. In addition, I am pleased that the link between West Malling and Leybourne is retained as these share fundamentally similar catchment areas. For example, West Malling Group Practice is due to close its West Malling branch surgery and residents will be asked to travel to Leybourne instead. In addition, the shared management company of the Leybourne Chase and Ryarsh Park developments means it is appropriate they remain in the same ward.

In recent years I have been closely involved in petitions relating to a potential quarry in Ryarsh, as well as one many years ago against car parking charges in West Malling. These issues transcended parish boundaries and exercised the minds of residents across the immediate area. The data I received from respondents to each of these petitions shows that

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the overwhelming majority of those concerned about both proposals live within the proposed West Malling ward. Therefore, I consider that this suggestion best reflects community interest and identity in the area.

Kings Hill

The community of Kings Hill is extremely strong and close-knit. It continues to grow and its history as the former RAF West Malling brings it together. I am very pleased that this will remain a ward of three Borough Councillors and am very happy to support this.

Mereworth and Wateringbury

The unification of Mereworth parish into the same ward is very welcome and I am pleased that this is possible. The village shares very similar characteristics with Wateringbury, especially around highway matters with the A26 running through the heart of both parishes. I have been liaising with residents and both Parish Councils for many years in relation to road safety on the A26 and other issues, and being represented in the same ward would assist in finding a solution.

East Peckham

I am very pleased to support East Peckham becoming a single member ward, based on the same boundaries as the Parish Council. This would best ensure both electoral equality and also community interest and identity. The history of the village is that it has emerged out of several hamlets to create the community of East Peckham, and given its location on the east of the borough it is appropriate this remains.

Bourne

This ward covers a series of rural parishes north of Tonbridge brought together by the River Bourne, so I am happy to support this name for the ward. In recent years the establishment of the Bourne Partnership has brought together close educational links between Hadlow and Shipbourne especially, in addition to the shared rural interest of each of the four parishes proposed to be in the ward. The village of Hadlow retains many important services and would be the largest settlement in the ward, lying close to the centre as well.

Pilgrims

The villages of Addington and Trottiscliffe have many similarities in terms of both identity and interest with neighbouring Wrotham and Stansted especially, and also Ightham. Therefore this ward would bring together 5 similar parishes to ensure effective and convenient local Government, one that I am happy to support.

Borough Green and Platt

The communities of Borough Green and Platt are close neighbours and share many services, especially around transport. The A25 runs through both villages and its current closure shows how much reliance there is on the infrastructure that serves both settlements. It is therefore appropriate that both remain in the same ward and I am happy to support this proposal.

Hildenborough and Tonbridge West

The community of Hildenborough is parished but there is no doubt that residents look much closer to Tonbridge for services than any other community. Therefore, given electoral variance prevents it remaining as a two-member ward I support proposals to include parts of Tonbridge in the ward as well. By way of example, just in the past few weeks I have been helping residents in Hildenborough with issues relating to flooding which is shared with residents in Tonbridge, the impact of trains coming from Tonbridge and also speed and cleanliness on the B245, a major road which would go through the heart of this ward and connects communities on both sides of the road. In addition, in recent years there have been large public campaigns which have sought to retain the link between Tonbridge and Hildenborough, such as that which resulted in the reinstatement of the 200s bus connecting Tonbridge with the rural lanes in the north of Hildenborough. Consequently, I strongly support the connection with Tonbridge as being most appropriate to ensure electoral equality in the village.

Tonbridge South

Historically Tonbridge has seen a split between the north and south of town, and indeed the south of the town was the part to develop first in its history on the advent of the railways. Bringing together the communities of Barden, Meadow Lawn and Vauxhall, all of which share similar housing stock, into the same ward would clearly reflect community identity. This would ensure that St Stephen's Church and Quarry Hill Parade sat in the heart of the ward as places where residents look most strongly for their services.

Tonbridge East

Recent growth in Tonbridge around the river and on the industrial estate has seen more residents use the area to both live and also access services. Retaining a ward which is exclusively east of the High Street would make sure these links are reflected in warding arrangements too. With the A26 cutting through the ward to the east this unites all communities living off it, including the community around Hillview School in the south east of town. This area is much more accessible to the retail offering around Cannon Lane than the High Street, and therefore I support retaining this within the Tonbridge East ward

Tonbridge North West

The Trench community in Tonbridge is extremely strong and community facilities such as the Six in One Club help give it a clear sense of pride. The main retail area of York Parade has become busier in recent years following the introduction of a pedestrian crossing over Shipbourne Road, and this has also brought a closer connection with the community east of Shipbourne Road. Subsequently I would be supportive of extending the ward boundary to the east to retain York Parade at the centre of the ward

Tonbridge North East

The other main retail area in north Tonbridge is Martin Hardie Way, and with Woodlands School also acting as the centre of the local community I would be happy to support this proposed ward. The extension of the boundary west from Woodlands Walk brings all communities who use this as their nearest public open space into the same ward.

The proposals put forward by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council clearly reflect community identity across the area and I am happy to support them.

Best wishes,



TOM TUGENDHAT