

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Green Group proposals for new ward boundaries for the unparished area of Tonbridge

Submitted by April Clark, Group Leader

Please see maps at end of this document for more detail, Appendix I & II

New Higham Wood

Higham Wood has several features which bring its community together as a cohesive entity:

- The Methodist Church hosts a huge number of activities including the thriving Scout and Guide Group, The FEAST Community Foodbank and of course the Church congregation itself
- The whole community identified in the proposed new boundary send their children to Woodlands School, which, alongside the Methodist Church and the groups operating from it, is the glue that unites this community
- The parade of shops at Martin Hardie Way is the primary shopping area for North-East Tonbridge and serves not only the current footprint of the Higham Ward but also the extended proposed ward

It is important to note that when the last boundary review took place we understand that many residents were very unhappy to be transferred into Cage Green Ward and they would welcome a return to a ward which makes more sense to them. The community either side of Whistler Road consider themselves to be in Higham Wood rather than Cage Green or Trench Wood.

New Trench Ward

The Trench Ward is a well established community brought together by:

- The Baptist Church in Darenth Avenue
- The Six in One Club in Northwood Road
- The parade of shops at York Parade which serves the whole ward

The inclusion of the estates on the eastern side of Shipbourne Road from Cage Green ward makes sense as they use all of these facilities already.

These roads which are not linked by connecting streets to the rest of the current Cage Green ward and are populated predominantly by elderly residents who use the same buses and services such as the North Tonbridge Library as the community on the west side of the Shipbourne Road. This group of houses is pretty self-contained as are the social housing estates to the north of Darenth Avenue and around Trench Road and Bishops Oak Ride, Similarly the housing estate around Willow Lea and Elmshurst Gardens are very similar in feel all the way until the current parish border.

Northern Town Ward

This newly proposed central ward combines parts of the existing Castle Ward, Medway Ward and the remainder of Cage Green. This is a largely residential area dissected by a series of East-West arterial roads including Dry Hill Park Road, Yardley Park Road and The Ridgeway. The community in this area is brought together by:

- Characteristically larger properties (other than the estate east of Cage Green Primary school)
- Cage Green Primary School, where most children in the ward will attend
- Parish churches at St Saviours and St Philips which play important roles in these communities
- The community in Castle Ward closest to Hildenborough Is included as it is very similar to the housing elsewhere in this new Ward especially in Long Mead Way, Welland Road, Cheviot Close and either side of the Ridgeway

Note that in order to enable the ward of Hildenborough to be preserved, and to avoid it being forced to join the Parish of Shipbourne within a new ward (a move that residents oppose as it dilutes the otherwise distinctive character of the village), it is proposed to transfer the houses in Correnden Road, Stacey Road, Seabrook Road out of the existing Castle Ward into an enlarged Hildenborough Ward. This would mean a minor exception to the preference to leave untouched the existing parish boundary between the Parish of Hildenborough and the unparished area of Tonbridge, by allowing a small addition (in contrast to the proposal put forward by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, which clearly overwhelms the parish and creates a clear and unacceptable divide between the unparished and parished parts of their proposed ward).

New Judd Ward

The existing Judd Ward is a self-contained geographical area neatly grouped into three interconnected communities linked by Sussex Road School so dividing it in any rearrangement is completely unacceptable. Community building should be a fundamental role of any local authority and this boundary review should endeavour to retain Judd ward intact but enlarged, to include the communities which most closely resemble the existing ward. In addition, the ward should attempt to contain the schools, services, shops and recreation areas which are predominantly used by that community. The current footprint of the ward manages to include almost all of these components with the exception of the Racecourse Sportsground, and our proposal of adding the Slade and Lyons Crescent / Mill Crescent area means the proposed extended ward would include all the communities which use this important amenity facility as their primary recreation area.

The new proposed ward includes a number of elements that bring together similar communities to the existing ward while extending it to justify a whole number of Members. These include:

- The whole of Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground, which is used by residents from across the whole town, but predominantly those in the existing Judd ward and Castle South

electoral boundary – the effect of this addition would mean the ward is extended to an area around the various channels of the River Medway.

- The communities in Barden, Meadow Lawn, The Molescroft Estate and along Brook Street/Haysden are well established and cohesive. The proposed additional communities in the Slade and Lyons Crescent/Mill Crescent also have established community organisations including the Slade Area Residents Association so they are a natural fit.
- The areas at greatest risk of flooding in Tonbridge are almost all in the same ward as they would include the developments at Town Lock and Blossom Bank which match the flats in Barden along Avebury Avenue more than any other area in other proposed wards
- Judd Ward is currently linked by a comprehensive network of footpaths and served by three arterial roads, Barden Road, Brook Street/Upper Haysden Lane and Waterloo Road/Douglas Road. The area is linked by the 211 bus service which also runs through Lyons Crescent in the current Medway Ward. The overwhelmingly residential community is within the Parish of St Stephen's Church which sits in the middle of the ward which has a preschool used by many residents.
- There are community groups across Judd including the Barden Residents Association which has over 500 members and another around Molescroft Way and more have been created in the past two years for Meadow Lawn and the Brook St Estate. All the parts of Judd Ward send their children to Sussex Road and Slade Schools which are also centrally located within the new enlarged ward and are an important part of the fabric of these communities.
- Of all the Wards in Tonbridge Judd is the most cohesive as demonstrated when preparing for the challenges of Covid 19. The Judd Ward Support Group organised a volunteer for every road. If the ward had to be extended the most practical additions would be the properties to the north of the Botany Stream extending across the Big Bridge and the properties to the west of the High Street and including the Slade and all properties south of London Road.
- Bringing the whole central retail area into one ward rather than having it split between three wards by the High Street and River Medway makes perfect sense. There are so many crossing points across the branches of the river that it is not a significant barrier between communities and has never been previously been treated as such by boundary reviews.

Ruling out a possible One Member Ward

We had considered a two member ward enlarging Judd to include Castle South (The Slade) and creating a single member ward for the communities living to the East of the High Street but north of the London to Paddock Wood railway line but we understand that single member wards in urban areas are not preferable – especially in an unparished area where local Members are required to also cover the responsibilities that a Town Council might normally cover.

The reason that we rejected this option was that the communities close to or overlooking the River Medway at Waterside Reach and Whitefriars Wharf and Crabapple Road in the current Medway Ward are matched well with those in Avebury Avenue in a very similar situation in

Judd and those in New Wharf Road and River Walk. There are very few examples of this kind of accommodation in any other parts of Tonbridge.

New Vauxhall Ward

The existing Vauxhall Ward is characterised by the predominance of red brick Victorian and local authority built housing on the hillsides overlooking Tonbridge and the Castle and river from the South. It is characterised by the tight-knit communities either side of Pembury Road, Goldmid Road, Hectorage Road and the new development at Baker Lane.

The proposed ward consolidates all the communities in South East Tonbridge into one ward inside the borough border with Tunbridge Wells, and the hard border of the London to Paddock Wood railway line and encompassing all residents either side of Quarry Hill Road which are distinct from nearby Judd Ward as they are not connected by through roads other than at the Brook Street Roundabout. The only exception is the small cluster of houses in Vale Road which are proposed to be brought into Vauxhall Ward. Factors bringing these communities together include:

- The communities here predominately send their children to the schools at Royal Rise and the Bishop Chavasse School. The proposed new ward extends to include Hectorage Road, Lodge Oak Lane and the Somerhill Park development and these communities are mirrored elsewhere in the ward by the council estate around Baltic Road and the relatively new development around Silver Close and Hilltop. The ward is brought together around the collection of schools at Tonbridge Grammar Hillview and Weald of Kent and the arterial routes of Quarry Hill Road, Pembury Road Tudeley Lane/Lodge Oak Lane and Goldsmid Road. The ward is almost exclusively residential other than that group of Girls Schools.
- During the recent pandemic the Vauxhall Covid Support Group was one of the best supported of the groups in Tonbridge reflecting its cohesive community.

Additional notes: Arguments against the proposal submitted by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

It is worth noting that the proposal from the Borough Council did not have the support of a single opposition Councillor. It is fundamentally flawed in that it seems to have its foundation on preserving the least cohesive ward Medway at all costs, and also forces the creation of a completely unsuitable cross-parish ward of Hildenborough and Tonbridge which is contrary to the guidance provided at the start of this process.

Medway Ward/Tonbridge East

Currently Medway Ward is the least cohesive of all the Tonbridge wards consisting of the parts of Tonbridge which do not fit easily with other communities. There is little to tie the communities in Baker Lane/Dowgate Close/Lodge Oak Lane/Hectorage Road with residents at Mill Crescent/Lyons Crescent or the apartments at Medway Wharf Road.

The communities are disconnected, there is no single unifying community hub, residents do not send their children to the same primary schools. Placing all the communities south of the Paddock Wood bound railway line in Vauxhall ward is sensible and meets all the requirements of the Boundary Commission maintaining the current arrangement is illogical. If the Boundary Commission started from scratch there is almost no chance that two communities divided by such a huge expanse of industrial estate would be combined in one ward.

Having such distinct communities either side of the Industrial Estate cannot be justified. This objectively not the same as being united by a shared amenity space such as the Racecourse Sportsground or Tonbridge Farm Sportsground. The trading estates divides the current and proposed ward in two nothing about it brings the two halves of this ward together. Residents use different schools, pubs, shops and buses.

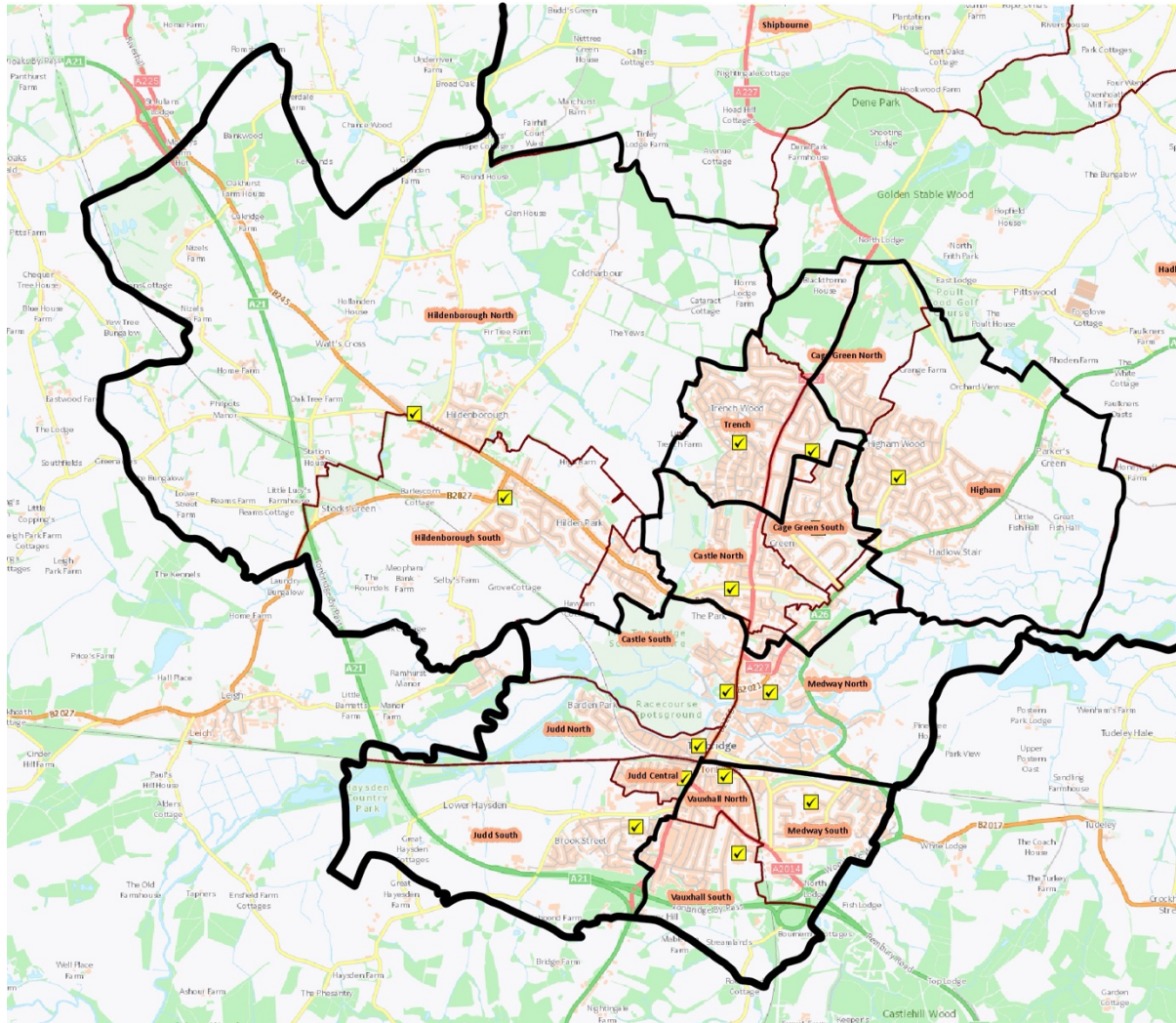
Hildenborough and Tonbridge West

This proposed ward drives a coach and horses through the Boundary Commission's preference not to interfere with Parish Boundaries. Hildenborough in a separate and cohesive community served by its own Parish Council and by its own schools, Hildenborough Primary School and Stocks Green School. The village is pretty well self-contained with a Village Hall and St John's Church and has a well established group of community groups and clubs entirely separate from those in Tonbridge. People in Hildenborough identify as villagers, they do not believe they live in a town.

Families living in the present Castle Ward do not travel to Hildenborough, they drive through it to go elsewhere, they have no need to shop there or send their children to schools there. Tonbridge has a very strong identity which was why earlier proposals suggesting that Higham be extended to Hadlow were completely rejected by all members at the earliest and subsequent meeting of the TMBC Electoral Review Working Group.

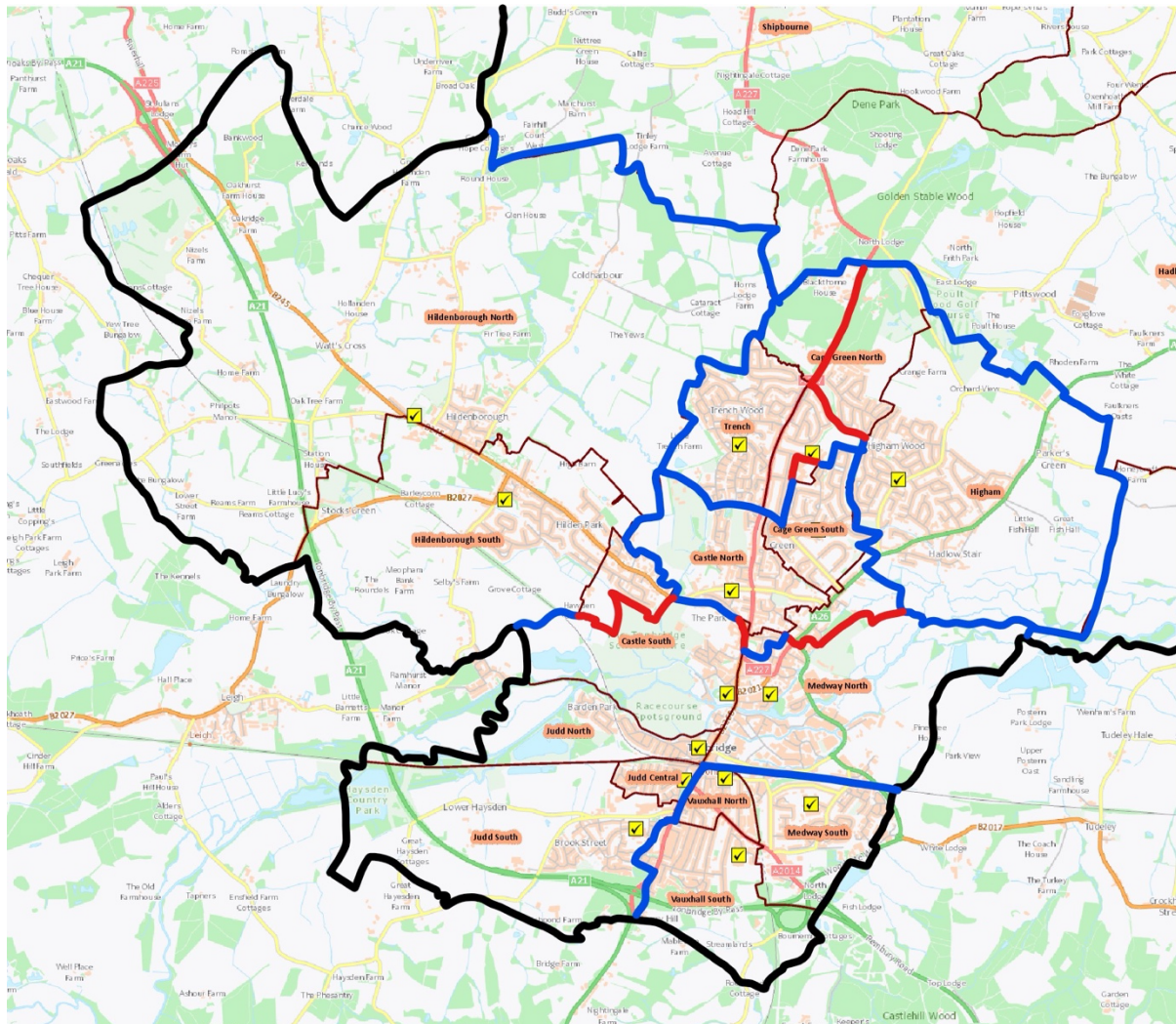
Appendix I:

Proposed new ward boundaries for the unparished area of Tonbridge



Appendix II:

Proposed new ward boundaries for the unparished area of Tonbridge (existing electoral boundaries in blue (not necessarily contiguous with existing ward boundaries) and proposed boundaries in red.



Ward Proposals

		43 Councillors			
	District	Description	2021	2027	Var - 2021 Var - 2027
New Vauxhall					
	TNA	Vauxhall North	1397	1466	
	TNB	Vauxhall South	2515	2659	
	TLB	Medway South	2470	2643	
		Total Electors	6382	6768	
No of councillors		3	6861	7452	-7.0% -9.2%
New Judd					
	TJA	Judd Central (Meadow Lawn)	1223	1302	
	TJB	Judd North (Barden)	1363	1419	
	TJC	Judd South (Molescroft)	1342	1416	
	TLA	Medway North	2902	3065	
	TCB	Castle South	1465	1585	
Less:	TCB	Hilden Park East	-565	-612	
Less:	TCB	Portman Park	-105	-113	
Less:	TLA	Hadlow Rd in Medway	-486	-514	
		Total Electors	7139	7548	
No of councillors		3	6861	7452	4.1% 1.3%
New Trench					
	TMA	Trench	3530	3802	
	TBA	Cage Green North (South of Frog Bridge)	617	652	
	TBA	Cage Green North (West of Shipbourne Road)	101	107	
		Total Electors	4248	4561	
No of councillors		2	4574	4968	-7.1% -8.2%
New Higham					
	TGA	Higham	3653	3926	
	TBA	Cage Green North (North of Frog Bridge)	1208	1278	
Less:	TBA	Cage Green North (West of Shipbourne Road)	-101	-107	
		Total Electors	4760	5097	
No of councillors		2	4574	4968	4.1% 2.6%
New Cage Green					
	TLA	Hadlow Rd in Medway	486	514	
	TCA	Castle North	2048	2193	
	TBB	Cage Green South	1789	1905	
	TCB	Portman Park	105	113	
		Total Electors	4428	4725	
No of councillors		2	4574	4968	-3.2% -4.9%
Expanded Hildenborough					
	THA	Hildenborough (Rural)	1616	1701	
	THB	Hildenborough (Town)	2140	2299	
	TCB	Hilden Park East	565	612	
		Total Electors	4321	4612	
No of councillors		2	4574	4968	-5.5% -7.2%