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From: Valerie Severn, EM&L Parish Council [REDACTED] >
Sent: 18 July 2021 20:01
To: reviews
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Electoral Review of Tonbridge and Malling Borough (Kent)
Attachments: Electoral Review of Borough .docx

Categories: [REDACTED]

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council's submission in respect of the above.

Regards

Val Severn
Clerk to East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council

East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council

Introduction.

1. I am making this submission as Clerk to East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council in respect of the future warding arrangements for the Borough of Tonbridge and Malling in Kent.

Council Size.

2. The submission is made on the basis the Commission is minded that there should be a reduction in the number of Councillors from 53 to 43 which was the figure proposed by the Borough Council itself. This response is based on that number although we wish to record that with all the planned new housing development in the area we would have preferred to have kept the existing number. This would have made it easier to reflect existing community ties especially in the parished areas which it everywhere except Tonbridge.

Background.

3. We have taken into account in preparing this document your Guide for Councillors document; the papers relating to the Boroughs meetings in private of the Electoral Review Working Group of the 10th and 28th June with the officers various suggested ward patterns; and the revised warding proposal moved at the General Purposes meeting on 13th July followed by the full council that same evening. It is as a result of these two meetings the parish has had access to the earlier papers as background documents.
4. The Chairman and some Councillors were also able to attend the virtual meeting of 9th June which was helpful and we have also looked back to your report of October 2012 especially paragraphs 65 onwards when the last exercise was undertaken.

Brief Description of the Parish.

5. The Parish has existed on roughly its current boundaries since parish councils were established in 1894 and a unit of local government for a very long time before that. Until 1962 it was called East Malling parish but in that year the name was changed to East Malling and Larkfield to reflect the development taking place and planned north of the A20 London Road. This is put on record as sometimes it is thought it is two parishes put together but that is not the case.
6. The Parish stretches from New Hythe on the River Medway in the north to East Malling Heath and Oaken woods in the south. It includes the areas of New Hythe, Lunsford, Larkfield (originally a village straddling the A20); East Malling village centred on St James the Great Church; Four Acres, Well Street and Broadwater. In the 1950s onwards the former parkland between the village and the A20 was developed mainly by local authority housing. The followed on the area of land between the A20 and the route of the M2) including more local council houses and Martin Square shopping centre; and then from the 1970s and 1980 the new private housing between the M20 and Leybourne Way. More recently north of Leybourne Way the former gravel pits have become Leybourne Lakes Country Park owned by the Borough council with The Lakes housing development adjoining and part of the former paper

mill site as a result of an appeal decision known as Leybourne Park. Though neither it nor the country park are in Leybourne.

7. The parish is a quite cohesive area with recently after a gap since 1949 the Anglican church parish that was then split between East Malling and Larkfield reuniting with the Vicar of St James the Great once again being Priest in Charge of Holy Trinity in New Hythe Lane.
8. Beside the Parish Council covering the whole area with its offices in New Hythe Lane, Larkfield people see the Local Centre as the shops along the A20 including Morrisons with the cut through to Martin Square where there is also the local doctor's premises and library. This area is within walking distance of the estate south of the A20 in East Malling and may do walk there.

Larkfield Wards.

9. Given the overall reduction of councillors it is clearly not possible for Larkfield to have four Councillors split between North and south wards. It is our view Larkfield is a single place and we support the borough councils proposal there should be a single 3 member ward called "Larkfield". There was such a three member ward when the Borough Council was first formed and it worked satisfactorily. The two wards are linked by New Hythe and Lunsford Lanes despite being split by the M20 and there is also the Redwing Close footbridge over the motorway linking the two current wards. This gives those in the south pedestrian access to the playing fields and village hall north of the M20 and those north of it to the allotments to the south as well as Martin Square, and the nearby primary schools.
10. We should record we are aware from the past and your records may show there was a proposal to link Larkfield North with part of Snodland and this was in one of the Borough officers options. With that background we did after your presentation of 9th June liase with Snodland Town Council and our Chairman attended one of their full Town Council Meetings. Like us in Larkfield and their case they accepted a reduction of one of their Councillors from 5 to 4 but as before they like us consider each place is a separate community warranting its own separate Borough Councillors. Snodland is self-contained as a small town on the borough boundary and separated from Larkfield by the country park, Abbey Meads and Snodland Common. Whilst there are rural footpaths through these areas there is no direct road link.
11. In the light of the above we support the borough Councils proposals that Larkfield forms a single three member ward and Snodland is reduced to 4 members. We do not make any view on how Snodland should be divided as we feel that should be a matter for their local decision.

East Malling Wards.

12. In respect of East Malling we consider it desirable that East Malling continue as a separate two member ward as proposed by the Borough Council in its submission. But we do comment on other options that have been considered and the detail.
13. We are aware by reducing the number of Councillors overall, East Malling has too many electors to form a single member ward and arguably not enough to justify two members on its own.

14. We have looked at other possible links and especially Ditton to the east; Kings Hill to the south; and Watringbury. We have obviously not had time to liaise with these parishes which would have liked to have done.
15. In the case of Kings Hill there is in fact no public road link between East Malling and that community built on the former airfield. It was planned as a separate community with its own shopping centre, community centre and schools. It was a policy decision that all access should be from the West Malling By Pass upgraded to the A228 with its link north down to junction 4 of the M20. No access was allowed out eastwards to the Watringbury Road and it would seem contrary to the Commissions guidelines to create any sort of linked borough ward. We think that Kings Hill is a separate community and should have its own Borough Councillors.
16. Looking to the east a link to Ditton, even if the numbers worked, would not be right. The built-up part of Ditton is separated from East Malling by the grounds of Bradbourne House and East Malling Research Station with only private roads with locked gates running through. There is a rural lane link via Sweets lane and Kiln Barn Lane but these are narrow minor roads with passing places. We also consider there are no community ties between Dittton and East Malling.
17. We have looked at the boroughs proposals including a link between Ditton and Aylesford which would seem to work in both numbers terms and community ones. The built-up area of Ditton east of its New Road runs into that part of Aylesford at Holt Wood. In reality it is one development and the parish boundary between the two is not obvious on the ground. We do not know either of the affected parish council views but the proposal would seem to meet the electoral quotas including the knock on situation for the rest of Aylesford parish
18. We have also looked at combining East Malling with Watringbury. They are linked by Watringbury Road. We realise Watrinbury is too small to continue as a single member ward and being on the edge of the district the options are limited. It does run into Nettlestead but that parish is in Maidstone. If not linked with East Malling then one can only look westwards to Mereworth along the A26. Both parishes are in the Green Belt so there is little scope for more development unlike East Malling as set out below. We perceive Waterinbury would prefer the link to Mereworth and might think it would be dominated by East Malling.
19. An alternative that appeared in the officers options to the Electoral Review Working Group was to form a three member ward of East and West Malling plus Watringbury. We perceive Watringbury would have the same fears of dominance and it is a big area though we accept there is some connectivity between the two Mallings. We note it would be 8.7per cent above the mean and this is apparently without taking into account the recently approved development sites in East Malling.
20. The Boroughs proposal addresses the lower electorate issue for a stand alone East Malling by adding a part of Lunsford lane and Willow Road to East Malling from Larkfield. It is accepted this is a potential way forward and the development of the 250 houses south of the A20 at Forty Acres plus 9 houses on the corner of A20/Winterfield Lane would make a more continuous built-up area between the two. And it would respect the parish boundary and benefits from the cohesion that exists.

21. However, the parish council feels the current proposals do not fully take into account the recently approved new housing areas in East Malling which are very likely indeed to increase its electorate by 2027. There are as follows:

- a. PARKSIDE off New Road, East Malling. Permission was granted on 20th May under reference TM/18/03008/OA and Condition 2 requires approval of reserved matters by the LPA before the expiration of 2 years from the date of permission so that is by May 2022. The parish council have met the developers who are keen to proceed and a series of detailed applications have been made and approvals issued. A sign advertising the development has recently appeared at the entrance. So we contend the 110 houses should be including the projections for the electorate.
- b. FORTY ACRES. This site west of Winterfield wholly in East Malling was given permission on appeal on 22nd March, 2021. The developers Wates gave evidence at the Inquiry they were anxious to proceed and the Inspector has included a condition that they should apply for approval of all reserved matters before the expiration of 18 months from the permission. So that is by November 2021.
- c. WINTERFIELD DEPOT. Lastly this smaller site on the corner of Winterfield Lane/A0 opposite the southern part of Lunsford Lane, Larkfield was approved for 9 dwellings under TM/20/02779/OA On 18th June, 2021.

22. Taking these three sites into account at a figure of 1.8 electors per dwelling (which we think is low for these developments) we get:

Parkside 110 dwellings x1.8 equals	198 electors
Forty Acres 250 dwellings x1.8	450 electors
Winterfield 9x1.8	16 electors
TOTAL	664 new electors.

We should add in addition there are a steady flow of one or two dwelling approvals across East Malling as we are not covered by Green Belt or similar designations so infills and so on are being permitted as the borough does not have a 5 year residential building land supply as required by central government. Most of the district to the west is covered by such Green Belt and Area of outstanding Natural Beauty national designations so those wards are unlikely to see the extra houses East Malling is experiencing.

23. We have also considered altering the boundary between East Malling and Larkfield by taking the centre line of the A20 so the houses to the south of the road including Walnut Tree court were put into East Malling or indeed the whole of London Road plus Larkfield Road and Larkfield Close to help the case in numbers terms for a two member East Malling. Arguably it would look a better boundary than the borough is proposing but it would go against the views of local residents on the south side of the A20 last time who wanted to remain in Larkfield voting at the polling station in New Hythe Lane and not splitting off part of what was the original Larkfield village straddling the A20.

CONCLUSION.

We therefore ask the Commission to create a single 3 member Larkfield ward and a two member East Malling ward based on the above considerations.

