

Grove Green and Vinters Park proposed Ward

In the report to the Democracy and General Purposes committee various ward proposals were presented including the new Grove Green and Vinters Park Ward:

Grove Green and Vinters Park – 3 Members – 8,347 (-9%)

Grove Green and Vinters Park share a commonality of being areas that have similar proximities to the Town Centre, and access to the out-of-town retail to the north. The ward is centred around the school complex and green space. Consideration was given to splitting these areas into two distinct wards as both Grove Green and Vinters Park have their own strong sense of identity. However, this would both create an incongruous shaped ward and not be within tolerance on electoral equality. Mote Park to the south serves many parts of Maidstone as such a large park in an urban area, but has been included in this ward for reasons of electoral equality.

Within the three tests for the proposal of new wards it appears that this ward is an adherence to the first over electoral equality rather than the second of shared community interests and identities. Far from these communities being centred around the school complex and green space it is seen as a very clear line of demarcation between two communities with very distinct and different identities and needs. In addition, the inclusion of sections of what is presently High Street Ward is as is admitted with Mote Park a route to achieve electoral equality rather than cohesive community identity.

A potential alternative

It is somewhat difficult to propose an alternative without access to the estimated number of voters being used to plan these wards, however using existing voters and current levels of development, e.g. Vinters Park estate is developed and as such cannot expect much if any new housing without knocking existing housing down, so voter numbers are likely to remain steady, it maybe possible to redraw the proposed boundaries not only to allow greater community cohesion amongst wards, but also to improve the balance of electoral equality.

To achieve this I propose the following:

- Creation of a new single member ward for Vinters Park
This would be bounded on the north side by the M20, east side by the nature reserve, west side along the proposed boundary, and on the south side by the A20/Ashford Road (including the “roundabout” created by the A249 and the A20).
This would with current voter numbers create a ward with approximately 2966 voters, within electoral equality tolerances and with room to grow over time to stay within tolerances to the north of the proposed ward.
- Increase the proposed Central Maidstone with the voters presently proposed to be in Grove Green and Vinters Park South of the A20/Ashford road (excluding Mote Park)
The proposed Maidstone Central Ward stands at an estimates 8,488 voters which has a variance of -7%. There are approximate 547 voters presently in the section of the proposed Grove Green and Vinters Park ward who are presently part of the High Street Ward and have little identity shared with either Grove Green or Vinters Park. Increasing Maidstone Central by including these voters will not only reduce the variance in electoral equality is also would be in line with the community identity.
- Creation of Detling Village and Grove Green 2 member ward

Grove Green is presently split between Boxley Ward and Detling and Thurnham Ward, neither of which has a cohesive identity with the scattered village communities in these wards. By centring around two distinct communities (the more remote parts of Detling Parish would remain in the Boxley Downs proposed ward), it reduces that lack of cohesiveness substantially. Whilst the M20 is a physical barrier across the proposed ward Detling is a community that relies on car usage through its rural nature, that it has the A249 running through it and very little public transport. The estimated voting numbers for this ward are 2,967 again with very little variance on electoral equality, and there are already established polling districts for parish councils.

- Boxley Downs Ward changes

With the transfer of Detling village from Boxley Downs ward it changes from a 6,270 / +3% variance to a 5,720 / -4.7% variance. However this area is a focus for proposed development in Maidstone (e.g. Lidsing and Binbury developments to name two), that if granted permission would remove the negative variance.

If the new developments are granted permission this ward will suffer from severe electoral imbalance over time; the proposal for Lidsing is 2,000 houses and Binbury 1,750. Using the existing approximated (it's hard to follow the exact boundaries from the PDF), voters of 5,818 and a ratio of 1.5 voters per development once all developments are populated it would increase the ward size to an estimated 11,443 voters, so starting with a negative variance will keep relative equality for longer.