

Maidstone Borough Council

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Organisation Name:

Comment text:

Boundary Commission Response. Please find below my response to the Boundary Commission Consultation for Maidstone, under three main headings, (1) Baseline Data Assumptions; (2) Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) Response; (3) My Preferred Approach. My comments focus on the impacts of any changes to the existing Ward Area for Lenham and Harrietsham, which is the area in which I've lived and raised my young family over the last 10 years. 1. Baseline Data Assumptions:- Given that the new Ward Boundaries are expected to take effect in 2024, I would like to question the suitability of the electorate data for which MBC and the Boundary Commission are using for this assessment. To reflect fairly distributed Ward Boundaries, the data used to determine the appropriate size of a ward should (at the very least) account for all development sites which are under construction and have an approved planning permission. Further to this, it is not clear from what year the electorate data has been used to support this boundary commission process. There has already been a significant number of large development sites along the A20 corridor covering Harrietsham and Lenham over the last 5-10 years, and we must ensure the electorate data from these sites have been included in any boundary assessment. However, I would also argue that current development sites in construction and those planned as part of the current Lenham Neighbourhood Plan (and other formally accepted plans) should also be taken into account, in order to judge what is a fair and proportionate both now, and in 5 years' time. Without this, the revised ward boundaries which come in force in 2024 will quickly become out of date, and it would undermine this whole process to try and get a fairer representation of the electorate within the local political system. In particular, it would become unfair on those areas with the greatest development, such as in Lenham and Harrietsham, who could end up with significantly less representation at MBC, proportionate to the size of our growing communities. 2. Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) Response:- Lenham is an interconnected rural community, linked by social ties, community groups, transport networks, one local neighbourhood plan and a strong independent network of local businesses. I therefore strongly object to MBC's proposal in response to the Boundary Commission to place a Ward Boundary through the middle of Lenham along the railway line. This clearly cuts our existing community, where significant new development sites lie on the South side of the Railway, as well as the existing Parish communities of Sandway, Lenham Heath and Platts Heath. There is clearly no justification for this, particularly when based on the Boundary Commission criteria to maintain "the need to reflect local community identities and interests, and provide for effective and convenient local government". I can only assume MBC are motivated to split our 'Lenham' community in order to pursue their own commercial and political interests within our area. This proposal would clearly dilute the democratic voice of our community and simply isn't supported by any justifiable reason or evidence, particularly given the uncertainties surrounding the baseline data I've outlined in Paragraph (1). The Boundary Commission should not only discard MBCs proposals for the Lenham Area, but should question their competence and motives, when they should be undertaking a fair, transparent and evidence-based assessment in support of localism and fairness. 3. My preferred approach to Lenham and Harrietsham As it has been suggested by Lenham Parish Council, I would support a new boundary for the existing Lenham and Harrietsham ward which includes parts of the current North Downs Ward including Wormshill, Frinsted, Otterden and Wichling. These other communities are closely linked to Lenham and Harrietsham, both geographically and through shared infrastructure and local business. Yours faithfully, [REDACTED]

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded