



**Boundary Commission
London.**

3rd April 2022.

Dear Sirs

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL (MBC) 2022

Submission from Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council

We refer to the electoral review of Maidstone Borough Council which you are currently undertaking and submit the following proposal for your consideration.

1) COUNCIL SIZE.

We note that the Commission is currently mindful to agree a Council size of 48 councillors representing a reduction of 7 compared with the existing number of 55 councillors. We would request the Commission to reconsider this position as it results in an average number of electors per councillor of 3046 by 2027.

This ratio is extremely high when compared with the other Kent Local Authorities which the Commission is currently reviewing and has stated that it is mindful to agree to the following.

- Tonbridge and Malling - Average Councillor/Elector ratio 2428 electors by 2027.
- Tunbridge Wells - Average Councillor/Elector ratio 2179 electors by 2027.
- Gravesend - Average Councillor/Elector ratio 2205 electors by 2027.

There are no demographic or other issues that are notable in making Maidstone so different from these other Kent authorities to warrant the Commission confirming such a high average ratio for Maidstone. Interestingly Guildford a county town like Maidstone which is also currently being reviewed by the Commission, the Commission is mindful to agree an average councillor/ elector total of 2463 at 2027 some 600 less electors compared to the 3047 for Maidstone that it is mindful to accept. If accepted this would have a detrimental impact on the representative role which councillors play in Maidstone.

Maidstone's history of having no one party in overall control reflects the importance which electors place on the representative role performed by its councillors. Fewer councillors could result in councillors finding it difficult to manage casework to a high standard in line with the expectations of local people. We therefore strongly recommend the Commission agrees that Maidstone should keep the 55 existing

number of councillors which would result in an average 2658 electors per councillor at 2027.

The submission which follows is based on the assumption that the Commission will confirm a reduction of councillors for Maidstone to 48 members.

2) WARD SIZE

Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council see no advantage in moving from a one-member ward to a two or three member ward.

Since reorganisation of Local Government in 1974 the ward has been a one-member ward represented since then by only 4 councillors all residing in the ward of which during this period it has Independent councillors with no political affiliation for 40 years. This reflects the importance which the current ward electors put on the representative role where they expect a hands-on approach to handling issues raised by local residents and responding to questions in a thorough manner. This is best maintained by Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton remaining a one-member ward.

Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton have clear and long-established alliances having worked together in a single member ward very successfully for almost 50 years and are committed to continuing to provide an electoral ward that reflects the special needs and expectations of our community.

Our current ward reflects the common community interests which Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton have together, the main ones being:

- Schools (for many years the Boughton Monchelsea / Chart Sutton community shared a primary school and still share a secondary school)
- Agricultural activities and links. The agricultural businesses overlap both parishes with workers traditionally from each parish and working across the two parishes
- Shared transport and travel issues
- Environmental planning and actions
- Co-ordinated flood emergency measures / plan
- Long established social and business links between the two parishes
- Residents from both villages belong to the same community groups such as the Community Choir, Bowls Club and children from both villages attend the Play Group.

The current ward arrangement provides reliable, efficient and effective local government that delivers for the electorate and in turn the residents across all age groups respond with a very high voter turnout that supports our proposals that the current ward boundary should form the basis for the ward boundary going forward as a one-member ward.

3) PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY.

If the Commission confirms a Council size of 48 members then we strongly recommend that the current ward boundary for Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton should form the basis of a new one member ward thereby securing the bonds and relationships which have been built up within the existing ward BUT with the following changes.

The new residential developments of the Joywood and Furfield Park estates consisting of some 500 to 600 electors are currently in the Park Wood ward and it is appropriate for them to come into the Boughton Monchelsea/Chart Sutton ward. This would then give the new Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton ward just over 3000 electors which is within the Commissions 5% tolerance and for Park Wood ward will reduce its expected electorate for 2027 to some 6500 electors and for a two-member ward would also be within the Commissions tolerance.

More importantly Joywood and Furfield Park estates are within the Parish of Boughton Monchelsea and their electors affinity and loyalty is with Boughton Monchelsea which they view as their “natural home” not Park Wood. This is supported by the following evidence.

- A referendum in the early 2000's showed that the residents of these developments considered themselves to be residents of Boughton Monchelsea.
- Residents from both new estates are Parish Councillors.
- A country park adjoining Furfield Park is managed and maintained by the Parish Council and is enjoyed by residents of both estates.
- Residents from the two estates look to Boughton Monchelsea's local and social organisations to join rather than Park Wood organisations such as the Play Group and have leading roles to the Scout Group, Community Choir.

Maidstone Borough Council's submission recognises the challenges the existing Parkwood members face serving the diverse nature of the Parkwood ward community. To help address this in part and for completeness it would be entirely logical for the Joywood and Furfield estates to join the Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton ward, thus lifting some of the burden from the Parkwood ward..

4) CONCLUSION

We would respectfully request that the Commission give our proposal its full consideration as we believe that the arrangement to maintain a single member ward for Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton to include additionally the new estates of Joywood and Furfield Park provides electoral equality and continued efficient and effective local government.

We very much hope that you give this letter due and proper consideration and not just as a process which the Commission has to go through to rubber stamp Maidstone Borough Council's recommendations which have been determined by the largest political party on the Council and not by reason

Yours Faithfully,

