

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

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Organisation Name: Southborough and High Brooms Branch Labour Party

Comment text:

The Southborough and High Brooms Branch of the Labour Party (SHBLP) endorses the comments submitted by Tunbridge Wells Constituency Labour Party (TWCLP). We do not believe the Commission's proposals are acceptable because • they do not sufficiently respect the, often deeply historic, parish and town council boundaries, and • the elector number variances between wards are too great. The proposals submitted by TWCLP build on the best elements of the Commission's proposals whilst better addressing these two issues. They also reflect the constraints and challenges of reducing the numbers of councillors from 48 to 39 and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's current position of maintaining its election by thirds. As a local organisation we want to direct our main comments to the area where we have a direct interest. Southborough and High Brooms Branch Labour Party has existed for nearly 100 years and only covers the geographical area served by Southborough Town Council. Southborough separated from its northern neighbour, Tonbridge, in 1871, becoming Southborough Urban District Council and later Southborough Town Council in 1974. Although the local governance arrangements refer to Southborough, the Town actually comprises two parts: Southborough and High Brooms. This historic association is reflected in the town coat of arms which includes reference to the Southborough cricket ball industry and two sprigs of Broom alluding to High Brooms. As a branch of a major national political party we have been proud of our deeply rooted involvement in the town where we all live and to have successfully supported the election of councillors and civic leaders to our Urban and Town Councils. To this day we are one of the few Town/Parish Councils that still have energetic and politically contested elections. You will have been advised by Southborough Town Council, echoed in the TWCLP submission, about our town's independent spirit and its rich local civic life. We have a new Southborough Civic Centre, well attended churches, strong local schools, arts and community organisations, a well-used and much appreciated library, food larders, and thriving shopping centres with good local transport links. People who live in the town see themselves as a distinctive community which they are proud to live in. And they want to keep it that way. We see ourselves as separate and different from either Tunbridge Wells, or Tonbridge, from whence we came. Our current warding arrangements for the Borough Council currently reflect this. All 5 of our Borough Councillors are well known and only represent Southborough and High Brooms on the Borough Council. It is with this background that SHBLP looked with dismay at your proposals, arbitrarily splitting our warding arrangements so that most of High Brooms becomes annexed to an unparished part of Tunbridge Wells. We understand that you have a difficult job but feel that these proposals would be deeply damaging to our identity as a town and would damage our civic independence. We also feel that your proposals are unnecessary. Our simple solution would be for the town to be split, as now, into two separate Borough Council wards. One of these would be a two member Southborough and High Brooms Ward which would include a substantial part of the existing Southborough and High Brooms Ward. The other would be a two-member ward called Southborough North which would comprise the existing Southborough North Ward plus some of the existing Southborough and High Brooms Ward. A potential knock-on effect might be the creation of a two member Speldhurst and Bidborough Ward within its existing boundaries. There is considerable concern in our town about your current proposals for Southborough and High Brooms and we hope that the suggestion in this, and other submissions you will receive, will be a sensible and practical way to deal with them. Our proposed solution will help to maintain our town's integrity as a cohesive place to live with its own distinctive voice on the Borough Council.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded