

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Personal Details:

Name:

E-mail:

Postcode:

Organisation Name:

Comment text:

I wish to register my rejection of the recommendations for the proposed Warding arrangements for Southborough and High Brooms and the way in which it ignores the very real and established community identity and the geographical boundaries of our town that have endured for hundreds of years. I was born in Tunbridge Wells and have lived in the Southborough for most of my life. I attended Southborough Primary School, where my daughter now attends, and I am member of the St Thomas's church and I have served on my local Town Council for over ten years, including as Mayor where I was able to work directly with our faith groups, schools and community groups. Our town council is the largest within the borough and is the successor to the Urban District Council. We maintain Southborough Common (of which STC are Lords of the Manor) our cemetery, playing fields and our new Civic Centre which opened in 2021 at a cost of £13m. Our town's demographic should not to be confused with those in other parts of the borough ; areas of High Brooms suffer from high levels of social deprivation, compared to more affluent Tunbridge Wells. Before our council housing stock was transferred to TWBC in 1974 Southborough had the highest percentage of social housing in the South East outside of London. Town elections are energetically contested and political parties have persisted despite the 1974 reorganisation of local government. A recent Town Meeting in August that I called with the our Mayor resulted in over 250 residents and businesses attending at a few days' notice to register their disapproval of the threat of TWBC to withdraw free car parking. In 2017 a petition to save the Royal Victoria Hall (the first municipal theatre in England) from demolition gained over 5000 signatures and public protests. Both of these examples serve to show the strength of feeling that residents have for their town; its history and amenity. Residents of Southborough and High Brooms are fiercely independent – rightly suspicious of those who pretentiously claim to live in Royal Tunbridge Wells (that's the town not the borough) and maintain that TWBC regard us as the 'poor' relation. Despite the claim otherwise in the BC report no one is in any doubt about 'where Southborough ends and RTW starts'. Southborough and High Brooms are quite obviously separated – by the demarcation of Power Mill Lane in the south and the climb up to Bidborough Ridge in the north. Southborough Town Council in have always supported the Local Plan designation that maintains the green buffer that separates us from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. A BTL comment from a recent Guardian review of Southborough's excellent Tallow restaurant, said only half joking. "Do not, I beg you, say that Southborough is actually just Tunbridge Wells, or its residents will revolt Would someone from Tunbridge Wells similarly revolt if the two places are conflated? I'd imagine so as by reputation they're disgusted by most things." Unlike the wards within central Tunbridge wells where one areas bleeds into the next, Southborough and High Brooms is a clearly defined geographical area. We have a distinct local identity with vibrant community organisations, faith groups, The Southborough Society, Scouts and Guides, our Twinning Association, two football clubs, Southborough Cricket Club, Barnet's Wood High Weald Project, two community larders, The Working Men's Club, 2 x Archaeology Societies and a great deal more besides. Southborough high street functions as a self-sufficient group of shop and traders with a higher proportion of the occupancy than Tunbridge Wells. We have our own traders association, Southborough Street, and excellent links between the council and businesses. In short I believe that the current proposals would undermined local democracy arbitrarily annexing part of our town for the convenience of making up the numbers in other wards. It would dilute the links between councillors and residents and discourage local residents who may want to represent the town that they live in. Our local borough councillors are champions for their residents and able to advocate on their behalf because they live alongside then and understand them. When faith in national politics is at an all-time low why would we do anything that further erodes this connection? We do not wish to see Southborough and High Brooms represented by councillors who do not live in our town – have no communication with our council or lack an understanding of local issues. For these reasons

I would ask that you consider our Southborough and High Brooms to be an exception to the borough and treated instead as a 2 x 2 member ward.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded