

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL - LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
(THE 'COMMISSION') - REVIEW 2022-23, SECOND CONSULTATION.

THE COMMISSION'S DRAFT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR A THREE COUNCILLOR LIMPSFIELD &
TATSFIELD WARD - SUBMISSION BY THE RESIDENTS ALLIANCE*

**formerly the 'Independents & OLRG Alliance'*

Key points

1. We don't believe that the two - councillor Limpsfield ward should merge with Tatsfield & Titsey to form a three-councillor ward. No changes have taken place that support Limpsfield not maintaining electoral arrangements that were recommended in the Commission's last review in 1997/8. In our submission of March 2023 we stated that **'...the proximity of Tatsfield is not a factor which eliminates our support for the long standing electoral arrangements in Limpsfield.'** We maintain that view.
2. Our assertion that maintaining the status quo for Limpsfield was tested against the Commission's objectives of delivering electoral equality, community identity and effective and convenient local government. Electoral equality is 'good' (as defined by the Commission) and it exhibits strong indicators of community identity when compared with factors described in the Technical Guidance (sections 4.37 to 4.41). Also, the Commission's 1998 statement that Limpsfield is *'distinct from the built-up areas of Oxted and Hurst Green'* is still valid. In addition, we have not identified any barriers to the achievement of effective local government in Limpsfield as there is no evidence that present arrangements have not succeeded.
3. We have also tested electoral equality in Tatsfield & Titsey and, like Limpsfield, this one – councillor ward also exhibits a 'good' level of electoral equality, a situation that it has maintained for at least the last 25 years. It therefore meets the Commission's relevant statutory obligation.
4. Limpsfield has no perceptible links with Tatsfield & Titsey. Each ward has its own identity with strong, unconnected community groups. Tatsfield & Titsey is a *'relatively self-contained area'* according to the Commission when the last Boundary Review established Tatsfield & Titsey as a separate one-councillor ward. Nothing has noticeably changed since then. Phrases such as *'strong community spirit'*; *'great sense of identity'* and *'physical separation'* often appear in publicly available documents describing Tatsfield & Titsey, which is not surprising given its location and history. We firmly believe that implementing recommendations that don't reflect community interests and identities would fail to meet the Commission's statutory obligation.
5. A combined and enlarged Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey ward would have a road network that would not be internally coherent (section 4.47 of the Technical Guide) and result in material degradation of effective and convenient local government. Combined with no public transport service to speak of, it would discourage residents from involvement in community activities which, in our view, would be a barrier to the Commission fully meeting its statutory obligations.

Commentary and analysis

Legislative and statutory criteria

It is important that we understand the legislation that guides the Commission when it makes its recommendations on boundary changes, so we can respond to recommendations that we believe may be impractical and provide no benefits to those that may be affected by them. Reproduced below is the 2009 Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act, Schedule 2, paragraph 2(3). It says that: 'in making recommendations the (Commission) must have regard to:

- a) the need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of members of the district council to be elected is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area of the council,
- b) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and in particular (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and (ii) the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties,
- c) the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and
- d) in the case of a district council that is subject to a scheme for elections by halves or by thirds, or that has resolved to revert to being subject to such a scheme under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (s.28), the desirability of securing that each electoral area of the district council returns an appropriate number of members of the council.'

Having set out the relevant parts of the 2009 Act in full, the terms 'as nearly as possible' and 'desirability' are conspicuous. We also note from section 2.12 of the Commission's document 'Electoral reviews – Technical Guidance -Updated April 2022 (the 'Technical Guide') that: '**as far as is practicable** having regard to our other statutory criteria, the number of councillors in each ward reflects the council's electoral cycle'. This reflects that part of the legislation set out in section d) above.

Our belief is that there must be an expectation that not all wards (as in this case) are capable of fitting neatly into a pattern of three-councillor wards. However, we know that the Commission worked assiduously to develop three- member wards in 1998. There has been growth in size of the electorate in the north west of Tandridge District but not a great deal of change has occurred elsewhere since that Review, something which we return to in the section on 'electoral quality' below.

Having set out fully and discussed the Commission's criteria above, they may be summarized as follows:

- electoral equality
- community identity
- effective local government.

We have tested our assertion that Limpsfield retains its status as a two- councillor ward against these criteria and this is dealt with in the sections that follow. We have also reviewed electoral equality in the one-councillor ward of Tatsfield & Titsey.

Electoral equality

Our initial proposals to the Commission concluded that, in respect of south Tandridge, ‘**the pattern of wards established at the last Boundary Review (1998) has predominantly served our electorate well. Electoral equality generally improved and, for the most part, been maintained at a good level.**’ We maintain that view which is illustrated in the table below.

This table shows that variances from the average number of electors per councillor have remained reasonably stable overall over the course of the last 25 years in the south Tandridge District, but with a slight trend towards greater negative or lower positive variances which reflects the modest population growth in these wards. The variance outlier in absolute terms is Felbridge, a one-councillor ward which the Commission decided should remain unchanged in 1998.

Note also that the size of the average number of electors per councillor in this part of Tandridge has increased by just 12% over the 25- year period, equivalent to around 0.5% per annum. Very little change has occurred in Tandridge since 1997/8 with the exception of communities in the north- west (for instance, the Caterham area and Whyteleafe) where much of the District’s population growth has taken place over this time. Meanwhile, the size of the electorate and electors per Councillor in Limpsfield has increased by just 4% since 1998.

Existing electoral arrangements compared with 1997 – south Tandridge District

Ward	No of Cllrs	Electorate (1997)	Electors per Cllr	Variance from average(%)	Electorate (2022)	Electors per Cllr	Variance from average(%)
Bletchingley & Nutfield	3	4383	1461	+4	4496	1499	-4
Burstow, Horne & Outwood	3	4399	1466	+5	4855	1618	+3
Dormansland & Felcourt	2	2857	1429	+2	3073	1537	-2
Felbridge	1	1593	1593	+14	1809	1809	+15
Godstone	3	4333	1444	+3	4536	1512	-4
Limpsfield	2	2763	1382	-1	2878	1439	-8
Lingfield & Crowhurst	2	2960	1480	+6	3328	1664	+6
Oxted N. & Tandridge	3	4182	1394	0	4534	1511	-4
Oxted South	3	4249	1416	+1	4739	1580	+1
Average			1399			1567	

Electoral equality for Limpsfield is good. It has been consistently within the bounds of that which the Commission has sought, which is that the number of electors in a ward is within 10% of the average

for the District. The increasing negative variation reflects the essentially rural nature of Limpsfield with slow population growth since 1997 as is the case with several wards, particularly in the south of the District.

We can also see that, since Tatsfield & Titsey emerged as a single – councillor ward following the last Boundary review in 1997/8, it has maintained good electoral equality and has experienced around 5% growth in electors per Councillor over the last 25 years:

	No of Cllrs	Electorate (1997)	Electors per Cllr	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2022)	Electors per Cllr	Variance from Average (%)
Tatsfield & Titsey	1	1485	1485	+ 6	1566	1566	0
Average			1399			1567	

In summary, both Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey demonstrate good electoral quality as stand - alone wards within Tandridge District.

Community Identity - Limpsfield

We believe that the identity of a community reflects the complex interaction between a number of features which can include: natural (landscape and topography); social (people's sense of belonging and activities shared in the community); and infrastructure (structures including housing, roads and other facilities). Identity might be lost for many reasons but change arising from urban development can lead to the lack of uniqueness in a community. In Limpsfield, measures taken to protect the local area (for instance, extensive Green Belt/Area of Great Landscape Value – AGLV - designation and the conservation measures in Limpsfield Village Conservation Area) over the long term have helped prevent major physical change throughout the ward and thereby contributed to its present identity. We have referred to relevant sections of the Technical Guidance (particularly sections 4.37 to 4.41) for advice on community identity.

Ward location & characteristics

Limpsfield ward, in South East Surrey and bordering west Kent, has evidence of settlement from the Paleolithic Age (Old Stone Age) as well as, for instance, from Roman remains. However, its first known written record is in the Domesday Book of 1086 where it is called *Limensfeld* with an estimated population of around 200 people. It now includes the settlements of Limpsfield village and also the smaller Limpsfield Chart, which was mostly developed in the inter-war years but contains an historic 'core'.

The centre of Limpsfield village has been a conservation area since 1973 and includes buildings dated back to the 12th and 14th centuries. However, as stated earlier, the ward is predominantly rural (about 60% of the land is used for agriculture) with areas of well managed woodland, scattered farmsteads and isolated or dispersed settlements. A number of these residences are Tudor manor houses and gothic buildings, some of which have seen service as hospitals or convalescent homes before being converted into substantial houses, often situated on large plots.

Physical barriers

The Commission, in our view, correctly points out (section 4.40 of the Technical Guidance) the impact of *'physical barriers marking the boundary between different communities'*. In the case of Tandridge District, we believe it is correct to identify the presence of the scarp face of the North Downs (which rises to around 270m AOD) and the nearby M25 motorway – located just to the south of the Downs - as barriers between communities to the north and south of these features, and this is a widely held view in the area even though these features don't exactly follow actual ward boundaries. In this context, Limpsfield is situated to the south of these barriers whilst Tatsfield & Titsey lies to the north and on the dip slope of the Downs. Additionally, the M25 has no direct access for either of these wards in the locality and so the motorway offers a very effective barrier between communities.

Community Facilities & Activities

There is a robust and resourceful feeling and awareness of community identity in Limpsfield. The varied, predominantly rural landscape contributes strongly to a cherished environment for the community and supports the sense of identity in Limpsfield. Moreover, helping to care for and support the local environment provides opportunities for joint activity which are staunchly supported by the community and gives another intimation of identity. This appreciation was highlighted in the Limpsfield Neighbourhood Plan (discussed later) when consultation with residents emphasized that Limpsfield's landscape was a *'highly valued and unique characteristic.'*

Limpsfield hosts a number of entities whose aim is to promote, sustain and work for community interests and interactions. Such bodies are located mainly in Limpsfield village and, to a lesser extent, Limpsfield Chart village. Facilities accommodating such interactions include:

- two Churches and a Chapel;
- a Church Hall in Limpsfield village and a village hall in Limpsfield Chart;
- sports facilities (including football and cricket) along with playing fields such as Grub St, Limpsfield Chart cricket pitch and Glebe Meadow in Limpsfield village;
- an infant's school;
- Limpsfield Grange, publicly funded & the only school solely for autistic girls in the UK. It allows residents to use its swimming pool via a local swimming club;
- Limpsfield British Legion social club which has facilities for skittles, snooker and playing boules.

Two facilities have benefitted from injections of capital from local residents when funding was needed and are located on Limpsfield village High Street – The Bull Inn and Memorial Stores, a general store & village post office which is owned by the community. This demonstrates the community's willingness to provide tangible support to needed facilities in Limpsfield. Both these facilities are registered as Assets of Community Value in line with Section 88 of the Localism Act 2011 along with The Carpenters Arms, Limpsfield Chart and Glebe Meadow in Limpsfield village.

Apart from the Churches, an indication of the staying power of local facilities are Limpsfield Chart Golf Club, the fourth oldest golf club in Surrey (established in 1889) and the Limpsfield Club – now

hosting tennis, padel tennis, table tennis, racketball, squash, badminton, bowls and a gym – which also has evidence of its existence dating back to the late 19th century. Other examples of long standing local (albeit non- sporting) activities include: the Women’s Institute, Limpsfield Arts Society and the History Society.

Besides hosting a wide range of social and sporting activities, Limpsfield benefits from a significant number of small – scale local businesses with a wide range of offerings. These include: a plant nursery, coffee shop; car repair & maintenance concern; women’s fashion boutique; ceramic tile retailer, Riding School and Livery, picture framer, etc. In addition, there are professional services firms (including solicitors) and Limpsfield also has many home-based ventures.

Open air Limpsfield

A distinctive feature of Limpsfield is the number of ‘open air’ projects that bring people together and thus promote community interaction which supports identity. These include:

- Limpsfield Community Orchard with its tasting days, ‘Wassail’ in January & working parties;
- Limpsfield in Bloom, a regular medal winner and part of Britain in Bloom;
- Limpsfield Village and Limpsfield Chart fetes;
- Limpsfield Village Food, Drink and Artisan Fair;
- Friends of Limpsfield Common, which helps maintain the predominantly National Trust woodland in Limpsfield. The footpaths and bridleways in the area are also regularly walked on and maintained by members of East Surrey Walkers, a walking club which is based locally;
- Allotments, situated to the east of Limpsfield village and also in Limpsfield Chart;
- Children’s playground, Limpsfield Chart;
- Limpsfield Chart Orchard, a memorial garden for quiet reflection by Limpsfield Chart Cricket pitch.

As well as these activities, an enthusiastic and committed Parish Council organizes the survey, maintenance and repair of what is an extensive network of local public footpaths and rights of way. This work is carried out on a regular programmed basis mainly by volunteers.

More recently, the Limpsfield Way has been developed, a circular path of about 6km. It links Limpsfield village and Limpsfield Chart village, alongside the community cycle route (which is ‘there and back’). It has a need for ongoing maintenance and there is no shortage of volunteers. A slightly shorter walk of around 2km is the Family Activity Trail, a waymarked nature trail on the High Chart, and recently opened Easy Access Trail for wheelchair users and parents with buggies

Communications and publications

With a wide range of activities taking place, letting residents know what is going on (and when) is important. Communications and publicity are provided by websites such as those of Limpsfield Parish Council (Limpsfield.org), the aforementioned Limpsfield Surrey, and Limpsfield Chart Facebook

Group. There is also a very well used community website – www.limpsfieldsurrey.com - and associated social media which provides a business hub and directory for Limpsfield – based businesses, as well as a diary of local events, information on activities, and news and features.

Many parts of Limpsfield have their own Whats App or Neighbourhood Watch groups whilst magazines such as *Limpsfield Parish News* is a useful source of what is going on, and so are *RH8* and *Oxted Local*, which cover both Limpsfield and Oxted.

For those interested in seeing how Limpsfield has developed over the years, a number of books have been (and will be) published and are well received. Shortly to arrive is *Limpsfield Chart in History* but there are also local ‘classics’ such as *Limpsfield Explored*, *Limpsfield Revisited* and more recently *Limpsfield Commons*.

These are good signs of the continuing interest amongst people, particularly the local community, in the history, development and identity of Limpsfield.

Limpsfield Neighbourhood Plan

A core community supported project – and which demonstrated recorded community interactions and collective engagements with Tandridge District Council - is the Local Neighbourhood Plan (the ‘Plan’) which ‘*gives people (in Limpsfield) the opportunity to shape the future of (Limpsfield)*’. It ‘*aims to protect the local countryside and green spaces*’ and is also focused on influencing the ‘*type, scale and location of future development in Limpsfield as well as necessary infrastructure.*’

Limpsfield Parish Council commissioned the Plan at the beginning of 2016. It involved extensive and sustained consultation with (and contributions from) members of the community, as well as the participation of community volunteers in actually producing the Plan. The final Plan went to Referendum in May 2019 so that Limpsfield residents could vote its adoption, for which a large majority – 87% ‘yes’ vote on a 49% turnout - was obtained. These are very high figures for this type of referendum and the Plan was finally adopted on 25 June 2019.

Alongside the Plan is a ‘Heritage and Character Assessment’ which is intended to support the preparation of policies for the Limpsfield Neighbourhood Plan. Subsequently, the Limpsfield Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan was adopted as a supplementary planning document by Tandridge District Council in mid- 2022. This provides a guide to planning decisions in Limpsfield Conservation Area as well as describing actions which can be taken to improve the area.

Community Identity – Tatsfield & Titsey

Tatsfield & Titsey has no perceptible links with Limpsfield. Each ward has its own identity with strong unconnected community groups covering a wide range of activities. We would expect the local community to provide the Commission with an insight into the full extent of these activities should it take part in this consultation.

Tatsfield is a ‘*relatively self – contained area*’ according to the Commission in 1998 when the last Boundary Review established Tatsfield and Titsey as a one-councillor ward. It was separated from Chelsham & Farrleigh Tatsfield as part of an exercise in improving electoral equality.

Phrases such as ‘*strong community spirit*’; ‘*great sense of identity*’ and ‘*physical separation*’ often appear in publicly available documents describing Tatsfield & Titsey, which is not surprising given its location and history. However, whilst we can’t speak for the Tatsfield & Titsey community, our insight

into local democracy interactions more generally leads to no evidence that having a single councillor in Tatsfield & Titsey has been a barrier to engagement with either residents, Parish Council or District Council.

Effective local government

Only one 'A' road crosses Limpsfield which is the A25 which goes from from East to West in the ward, and is situated just to the south of the entrance to Limpsfield village High St. In addition, there is no 'A' road in Tatsfield & Titsey. The majority of local road access is by 'B' roads, minor roads and residential streets in both wards.

Current situation

Overall, the ability of our two councillors to get round Limpsfield ward - which is reasonably extensive at about 19 sq.km in area with a relatively low population density - and interact with and represent the people of Limpsfield is not compromised by the state of transport links or access constraints despite there being only minor roads in most part of the ward. Similarly, the activities of and interactions with the local Parish Council do not place undue pressure on councillor time. However, the need to support the Parish Council in dealing with planning applications prior to determination by the District Council can be challenging if there are a number to deal with simultaneously.

Transport links in Limpsfield ward are such that electors do not currently have to travel through an adjoining ward to engage in the affairs and activities of Limpsfield. Ward boundaries are contiguous with the long -standing boundaries of Limpsfield parish and so there is no need to adjust the boundaries of what we believe should remain as a two – councillor ward.

Limpsfield combined with Tatsfield & Titsey

Combining Limpsfield with Tatsfield & Titsey would, we believe, degrade local government effectiveness and convenience. A much larger ward (the combined area would increase by around 70% to about 32 sq. km when compared with a stand- alone Limpsfield) would naturally result in a significantly larger network of minor roads. This inadequate road network is at odds with the concept of internal coherence (section 4.47 in the Commission's Technical Guide). It would deter some residents from taking part in community activities across the combined ward and this, in our view, would not be supportive of the Commission's statutory criteria.

Looking at the detail of local public transport, between Limpsfield village and Tatsfield & Titsey there are only five bus services on week days to connect these wards. The service is reduced to four buses a day on non-school days and it doesn't appear at weekends or on Public Holidays. At present, the first departure from Limpsfield village to Tatsfield & Titsey is 0941hrs and the last departure is 1756hrs and this seems, in our view, far from being useful or beneficial.

However, looking at Limpsfield in its entirety (i.e. not just the buses from Limpsfield village), there is nothing that could be described as a public transport service between Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey. For a combined enlarged ward, this would mean no direct service whatsoever from the south to the north of it. Putting it another way, there would be no public transport system connecting all parts of an enlarged ward.

[Please note: The public transport situation between Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey contrasts starkly with that from Tatsfield village northwards towards Biggin Hill and onwards to New Addington

tram stop. From Tatsfield village there is a half hour service which starts at 0610 hours and finishes at 0100 on weekdays. This means 33 departures daily from Monday to Friday, as well as 28 on Saturday and 17 on Sunday. The tram at New Addington goes directly to Croydon where it connects with railway services to London, the South Coast and the Midlands, etc. We've included this information as it illustrates the strong public transport links between Tatsfield & Titsey and communities to the north. These have a whole range of benefits including shopping, employment and entertainment. It also provides a reminder of the weakness of linkage between Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey.]

Conclusion

We remain convinced that bringing Limpsfield together with Tatsfield & Titsey to form a three – councillor ward would not be beneficial to these communities. Whilst each ward has no electoral equality issues, they do not share the same interests and concerns and they display distinct and separate identities.

Further, the current acceptable level of effective and convenient local government will be degraded as residents and councillors have to use a less than internally coherent road system in an enlarged combined ward. Additionally, people will endure an unfit for purpose public transport service with no connecting coverage throughout practically all of a combined ward.

In contrast, maintaining the status quo would respect the interests, concerns and identities of each ward, and conserve the current levels of effective and convenient local government. As a consequence, given there are no electoral equality issues, the Commission's statutory obligations would be fully maintained.

We thank you for the opportunity to let the Commission have our views on the draft recommendation to merge Limpsfield with Tatsfield & Titsey in Tandridge District.

Tandridge

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: Residents Alliance, Tandridge District Council. (Representative of a local organisation)

Comment text:

Dear LGBCE,

Please find attached a representation on the final consultation about electoral arrangements for Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey (Tandridge District). Please could you acknowledge receipt of the document.

Many thanks,

Best regards,

Ian Booth

On behalf of the Residents Alliance, Tandridge District Council.

Attached Documents:

- RA Boundary Commission.doc