

Thanet

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Comment text:

This has to be the most obtuse consultation I've ever seen. The website tells me next to nothing about what I am supposed to be agreeing or disagreeing with. I've worked out that you've already made the decision to change the number of councillors and ward boundaries so obviously no point in disagreeing with those options. But there is no indication at all of any 'proposals' that might be agreed or disagreed with. I eventually found some questions on a promotional poster I would not have expected to look at as a member of the public using your page. I've found the rather technical electorate figures document isn't exactly user friendly for a non-technical person. And I have now discovered that I am about to run out of word count for commenting. I'm left with the view that you don't actually want to know what the public thinks and this consultation is just whitewash. Due to the minimal word count here all my comments regarding the various areas of Thanet relating to actual boundaries are on the attached document.

Attached Documents:

- ward-boundaries-feedback.pdf

Ward boundary review - Thanet

Given how ridiculously few words the main website allows, I have had to put my comments on the ward boundaries in a separate document.

New ward boundaries should not cross existing town boundaries. Not just Ramsgate, Broadstairs and Margate but also Westgate and Birchington, and the integrity of their boundaries should be maintained.

This is important to support the existing towns and parishes the lowest tier councils also serve. These include Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Minster, Cliffsend (in Ramsgate) as well as others such as Westgate.

There is a disaster of an industrial style 'out of town shopping' area that is known as Westwood Cross that straddles the borders between Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs. There is the original shopping centre containing mostly low end High Street clothing brands where M&S stands out as a luxury brand and some other inconsequential stuff. A small extension has a few more stores such as a Hobbycraft superstore and Mountain Warehouse. There is an industrial style 'entertainment' area off to one side with a barely used cinema complex and a few chain-store type restaurants (Ask, Nandos, that kind of thing). Sprawling out from there and sort of 'linked' are three mini trading estates with the likes of Halfords, Currys, Matalan, The Range, Pets at Home, Wickes, Pizza Hut and an Aldi. You get the picture. Attached to one of these mini trading estates is a Tesco Extra store with its own large car park and a sort of entity in itself. The other side of this sort-of area, also attached but disconnected to the other side of the original open air shopping precinct known as Westwood Cross, is a similarly sized Sainsbury's. It's all loosely connected with busy roads and roundabouts and you take your life in your hands if you want to navigate the area by walking. The main bus route manages to pass straight through the middle and is useless for navigating this shopping area so it is very car dependent.

Westwood Cross is ridiculously called a 'town centre' by the council but none of the people who live in Thanet have accepted this as a town centre, despite it having been there for 20 years now, and it having effectively set in train the death throes of our real town centres. Now there are tons of houses being built up around this complicated, disconnected, out of town shopping 'complex', so if you are drawing new boundaries you could consider lumping them all together because they don't belong anywhere else, even though it will make the town and parish boundaries around that area a bit weird. If you try and link these new estates to anything else you will find the new ward chopped up by the sprawling attempt at creating a new so-called town centre.

I have no idea where the exact town boundaries are in Westwood Cross. Its official address is Broadstairs but as you travel along the Margate Road from Ramsgate to Margate you pass two signs saying welcome to Broadstairs and then welcome to Margate with Westwood Cross off to one side of that main road. I think it's probably doable to retain the integrity of the actual town boundaries and that is what I would recommend.

Although fairly close to Westwood Cross, the new Haine Road estates are probably best linked in with either Cliffsend or Nethercourt.

Newington in Ramsgate is a good solid community and should not be broken up in any way, nor really will it benefit from being lumped together with any of its surrounding areas. It either needs to be half of something else or remain on its own. In reality, given what's around it, I'd say the latter. Unless you can get away with shoving it in with whatever Westwood Cross gets called. That might work.

Nethercourt estate and the Southwood area are also quite distinct areas, currently forming Nethercourt ward. Whether they remain in the same ward or not any new boundaries should not cut through the middle of either of those areas. The same goes for the Wimpey Estate in Broadstairs.

Needless to say, as a resident of Northwood nearest to Westwood Cross I don't fancy being shoved in with the horror that is Westwood, although given my proximity to it I guess that is a risk. To do that would also break the integrity of the town boundaries, which I have already said I do not think is a good idea.

The rest of Northwood contains two distinct council/former council areas that would be best kept together. Highfield is the smallest and closest to Westwood Cross. It has its own identity. The other is the rather more sprawling area that includes mixed housing but basically extends to cover Coleman Crescent, Allenby Road, Nixon Avenue and Whitehall Road. Again it has an identity that works and will be best retained.

Currently Pegwell is in with Cliffsend (Ramsgate) as one ward, but it probably wouldn't matter if they were separated.

Keep everything from the back of the Cemetery that fronts on to Cecilia Road, past Prestedge Avenue and into Vine Close together. It's an old council estate that still retains an identity and cutting it up will not help those who live there.

The current boundary between Central Harbour and Eastcliff runs straight down the middle of the High Street and Harbour Street. Oddly this works as the pressure of dealing with town centre issues is shared between councillors from two wards and as long as they are able to communicate and work together that helps alleviate the pressure. The worst of the problems of the impact of the 'night time economy' in the area falls to Eastcliff but still there is some crossover and support available for the councillors in both wards. Between them they have one of the highest proportion of households in private rented accommodation (c.40% compared to the national average of 19%) with very little in the way of social housing.

In Margate, the area known as Millmead was one of the original mixed housing experimental developments back in (if I recall correctly) the 1970's, if not a little earlier. Its boundaries will benefit from being retained or expanded but not cut across.

Cliftonville's current division between East and West reflects an existing wealth / cultural division with one side mostly private estates and the other containing mostly private rented homes due to the loss of the tourist trade in the 60's and the closure of the old big hotels, now converted into flats. Be mindful how you play with their boundaries.

Thanet has a dearth of community centres so don't you probably don't need to bother trying to work out where they fit in.

All in all I would prefer to see 2 or 3 councillor wards over 1 councillor wards.

For context, I have experience as a local councillor and a social worker working in Thanet, as well as having grown up and lived in or been associated with Thanet all my life. That is why I am not just commenting on the specific area where I live. And that should not be enough information to identify me. There is a lot of housing development going on at the moment, particularly around the edges of the main urban areas, which are causing a public backlash with assumptions being made that these properties are all being bought by wealthy Londoners or London councils to send their own homeless to. These comments can most easily be found through the online newspaper Isle of Thanet News. There may well be a grain of truth in that but the biggest issue is the social dissension these assumptions are brewing. Watching the developments going up near me I suspect that the way these developments are boundaried will make it difficult to use the ward boundaries as a means to promote community cohesion.