

## **TONBRIDGE & MALLING**

**Cllr Matt Boughton**

Borough Councillor for Medway Ward, Tonbridge

## **BOROUGH COUNCIL**

15 Whitefriars Wharf  
Tonbridge, Kent  
TN9 1QP

19 June 2021

The Review Officer (Tonbridge and Malling)  
Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
PO Box 133  
Blyth  
NE24 9FE

Dear Review Officer,

Please take this letter as my response to the current stage 2 consultation run by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on the electoral review of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. This letter is sent in my capacity as one of three Borough Councillors for Medway Ward, Tonbridge, which I have represented since May 2019. I will focus fully on the boundaries for the area I represent and not any other part of the Borough, as I know the Council will be making a submission of its own, as will my political party.

I fully accept that either the number of Borough Councillors representing this area, or the external boundaries of the ward, will have to change with the Commission inviting representations for warding arrangements to accommodate 43 councillors. All of the existing Medway Ward falls in the unparished area of Tonbridge.

This letter will focus purely on community interests and identities within the current Medway Ward, along with a suggestion about how to ensure best and most effective representation for residents in a council with 43 members. I should also say that I live within the current Ward boundaries as well and will utilise some of my own experiences as a local resident myself to inform this proposal.

At present, Medway Ward consists of two Polling Districts (TLA and TLB) which are divided by the Tonbridge-Paddock Wood railway line. Between the two main residential areas, south of the railway line and north and close to the River Medway, there is a large industrial estate, mainly occupied by businesses.

In recent years we have seen the growth of this area, especially around Cannon Lane, with greater residential and retail activity which makes it a greater draw for local residents for facilities. This growth has introduced shops such as Aldi, B&M Bargains, Home Bargains and M&S at Tonbridge Retail Park. It has contributed towards a change in shopping patterns for residents across the town and the greater use of this area by residents. For residents in both parts of Medway Ward, these shops are now their most local and convenient.

Accessibility towards this retail area is helped by the A26 road, which runs through Medway Ward from north to south. From Hadlow Road in the north it directly connects to this main, newer, retail area and heading south it meets residential development south of the railway line at Lodge Oak Lane. The nature of the road means it is well used by residents, avoiding the alternative of Tonbridge High Street.

The ability for vehicles to get to A26 Cannon Lane from Medway Wharf Road and Cannons Wharf also means that residents living around the River Medway can easily access these shops too, as their nearest larger supermarkets. The presence of Public Right of Way MU93 and MU33 south of the River Medway provides a clear and direct link here.

Public footpaths are an extremely important for many residents in Medway Ward. Being a town centre location, many recent developments have been built without much outside space and places to park, meaning that public transport and walking is increasingly important. In addition to Public Right of Way MU33 which links Cannon Lane with Medway Wharf Road at Townlock, MU35 which connects Strawberry Vale with Tonbridge Town Centre is essential for many residents in south east Tonbridge for their community facilities. The western end of MU35 is at Botany, extremely close to residential developments here as well as supermarkets Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Iceland and the community hub which the Angel Centre is.

Currently there is only one small convenience store on Lodge Oak Lane which acts as a location where residents can access facilities in the south east of town. Therefore, the connections with both Cannon Lane through the A26 and Tonbridge Town Centre through Public Right of Way MU35 are essential for residents living here to access a greater range of goods. They are well used and over the past two years representing this area we have spoken with many residents about the importance of this. Indeed Kent County Council have recently repaired the bridge over Botany Stream as recognition of its importance, making it wider in the process, while we are working with Network Rail to make the underpass between Vale Road and Priory Road more appealing.

It is important here to draw the distinction between south east Tonbridge, around Lodge Oak Lane, Hectors Road and Goldsmid Road and other areas of Tonbridge south of the Tonbridge-Paddock Wood railway line. Those areas, located west of Lavender Hill, primarily look towards the Quarry Hill Parade shops for their nearest conveniences. However the nature of this footpath means that residents east of Lavender Hill are quicker using the cut through and MU35 to access facilities further north, shared with residents accessing these from homes north of the river Medway. As a result, I would strongly argue that the Tonbridge-Paddock Wood railway line is not an identifiable boundary for this community.

Tonbridge is lucky to have some excellent schools, which are well valued by local residents. In south east Tonbridge both Weald of Kent Grammar School and Hillview School for Girls are popular with local residents. Both schools take pupils living in north of the River Medway because of their accessibility, and many of these students walk to and from school. This, I feel, demonstrates the close connection across the railway line between this part of Tonbridge.

In addition, I would also argue strongly that the railway line isn't a suitable boundary for the purpose of Primary School provision. Both Bishop Chavasse Primary School and Royal Rise Primary School are located south of the railway line, but the latter takes students who live north of the railway line due to its proximity and easy pedestrian access through the footpaths described earlier.

The existing boundary of Medway Ward runs down the High Street for its duration. Although there are a number of services remaining on Tonbridge High Street, the presence of national chains on Tonbridge Retail Park means that residents living close to the High Street no longer solely rely on services on it alone. Indeed, the type of housing varies significantly on each side of the High Street and I would support retaining this boundary as it is. To the west, both The Slade and Barden Road areas include some of the older housing stock in Tonbridge. The vast majority is pre-war and terraced. To the east, the historic industrial area

of Tonbridge, much of the housing is newer and indeed are predominantly flats. In recent years historic roads such as Lyons Crescent and East Street have seen a number of conversions to flats, including but not limited to the Old Methodist Church, Croft House, Surety House, Ronnie's Wharf and Harry's Wharf (formerly the site of The Wharf pub).

These have a clear shared interest with those developments south of the River Medway, much more than those west of the High Street. Like the developments on Lyons Crescent and East Street, Riverbank House, The Bank House and Whitefriars Wharf have been converted into flats over the past couple of decades. Sovereign House is now the 197 flat Waterside Reach development, while Cannons Wharf has become highly residential. This trend is growing on both sides of the river, shown by construction currently taking place at the former R. Allen site at Lyons Crescent, plans to convert the former West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group offices at Wharf House, Medway Wharf Road, into residential use, and a long-term aim by SGN to demolish the Gasholders east of Cannons Wharf.

Consequently, I would request in the strongest possible terms that it is in the best community interests for Tonbridge High Street to remain a ward boundary. As a resident in Whitefriars Wharf myself, my interests are much more aligned with fellow flat residents north of the river than residents living in a predominantly older home to the west of the High Street.

This is exemplified by the many dealings with management companies that I have had on behalf of residents in flats since serving Medway Ward. Often these issues are similar, around parking, quality of service and cleanliness, and access to communal bin stores. We have a shared interest in all larger flat developments because of the different waste arrangements, for example. Having the same Councillors representing all of these areas is essential in order to ensure these matters can be resolved quickly.

I would also ask that the Commission pays close attention towards the need to ensuring that Waterside Reach and Somerhill Green are kept in the same ward. These are two large, if very different, developments located just east of the High Street and in the south east corner of Tonbridge respectively. Although the nature of their concerns can vary, they both have the same management company, Trinity Estates. These are both two of the larger developments that Trinity Estates manage and indeed the only two in Tonbridge, and the Regional Manager and Property Manager are the same for both. Being able to liaise on behalf of both these developments is extremely efficient for representing residents concerns on both developments, and we have been able to resolve a number of problems relating to both as a result. There is no doubt that although the community interest between the two developments is not visible to those who do not live there, the shared interest between the two, large, new developments is extremely strong.

As mentioned at the very start of this letter I do recognise that changes to the existing Medway Ward will be necessary but would suggest this is achieved by the addition of neighbouring areas which share the community identity of existing residents. For the reasons already articulated I do not consider it appropriate to use the River Medway or Tonbridge-Paddock Wood railway line as a natural boundary, and that the High Street should remain a ward boundary. However, by keeping the current boundaries along with the addition of some neighbouring areas, I believe we can ensure a ward that better reflects community interests as well as electoral equality.

First, the current southwestern boundary of Medway Ward is mainly the Tonbridge-High Brooms railway line. From north of Pembury Road this travels in a tunnel and is not visible to anyone on Pembury Road or nearby. Therefore we have a handful of homes in Pembury Road which fall in Medway Ward at the moment, and I would suggest increasing this number.

My suggestion would be to extend the ward boundary west from the tunnel over the railway line to the junction of Lavender Hill to the north, and Deakin Leas to the south. This is marked by a zebra crossing ensuring that both sides of the road have good connections with each other. It would mean a total of around 110 current electors moving but would better reflect the nature of Pembury Road, ensuring a balance for residents in terms of whether they access their community facilities at the bottom (west) or the top (east).

In addition, I would also like to recommend that both The Ridgeway and Yardley Park Road are added into this ward, in addition to roads off these, namely The Haydens, Haydens Mews, Cheviot Close, Chiltern Way, Dernier Road and Rowan Mews off Yardley Park Road, and Wells Close, Ely Close, Exeter Close, Town Acres, Rochester Road and Ridgeway Crescent off The Ridgeway.

These two roads currently have major junctions with A26 Hadlow Road, which falls within this existing ward. The major issue for residents living along A26 Hadlow Road is road safety considering the volume of traffic and, sadly, there have been a number of accidents at each of these junctions. In order to best resolve this and find a solution we would strongly argue that it is essential that The Ridgeway, Yardley Park Road and A26 Hadlow Road south of Higham Lane are all included in the same ward.

This would be a change from the existing arrangements where both roads are in the same wards as communities on or around its western end at Shipbourne Road. However, the A26 Hadlow Road is much more of an arterial road than A227 Shipbourne Road, demonstrated by the fact that the former was excluded from Kent County Council's trial 20mph speed limit for Tonbridge, while the latter was included within it. Congestion at the Hadlow Road end of both roads is much more significant than the Shipbourne Road, showing that many residents use this much more than the other end of the roads.

In addition, I feel this would have common community facilities and interests with the rest of the existing ward. This is because the main retail area at Tonbridge Retail Park remains the closest place for amenities for both of these areas, and the 208 bus serves part of The Ridgeway. This is one of the main routes through Tonbridge and serves Goldsmid Road, Hectorsage Road, Lodge Oak Lane and Tudeley Lane in the south of the existing Medway Ward, the only route which does so. As a result, there would be a defined public transport route between the far north and the far south of the proposed ward.

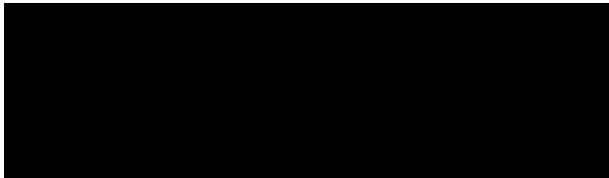
We would also highlight the connections between The Ridgeway and Yardley Park Road themselves, as well as Hadlow Road. Public Right of Way MU11 connects The Ridgeway and Town Acres with Dernier Road as a clear cut through for residents living here, and Public Rights of Way MU19 and MU20 connect The Haydens off Yardley Park Road with A227 Hadlow Road. This then has a controlled crossing over towards the Mill Stream area, which borders Tonbridge Retail Park. The nearest accessible countryside, outside of the built up area of Tonbridge, for the Hadlow Road, The Ridgeway and Yardley Park Road area is all east of the A26 using Public Right of Way MU32 and Tanyard Farm, while Swanmead east of A26 Cannon Lane remains the nearest open space for all of the Hadlow Road community south of Higham Lane, and those communities living off it.

In conclusion, I would argue strongly for the retention of the current Medway Ward boundaries in addition to further homes on Pembury Road, The Ridgeway and the roads named above off it, and also Yardley Park Road and the roads named above off it too. This would ensure that a 3 member ward could be retained which would better reflect community identity and interests.

Finally, I know that this part of the consultation also asks for submissions on ward names. The existing name, 'Medway', can be extremely confusing for residents because the

borough of Tonbridge and Malling borders Medway Council in the north, a long way away from this ward. In addition, the River Medway also flows through the borough again before entering the Medway Council area, so we would ask that this name is not retained. As a town of its own, I would like to suggest that the Commission gives serious consideration to the name 'Tonbridge East'. This would avoid any further confusion for residents while also recognising that the proposed ward takes in those areas in the east of Tonbridge, ensuring that the name of the town is in the ward name.

Best wishes,



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