

Goudhurst Parish Council

Chairman of the Council

Cllr Antony Harris
The Oast House
Curtisden Green
Cranbrook
Kent TN17 1LL
Telephone: 01580 211329
antony.harris@goudhurst-pc.gov.uk



Clerk to the Council

Claire Reed
The Hop Bine
Risebridge Farm
Goudhurst Cranbrook
TN17 1HN
Telephone: 01580 212552
clerk@goudhurst-pc.gov.uk

<http://.goudhurst-pc.gov.uk>

FURTHER SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF GOUDHURST PARISH COUNCIL (GPC)

TO THE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND (LGBCE)

FOR TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL (TWBC) DATED

22 AUGUST 2023 (THE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. INTRODUCTION

On 07 October 2022 GPC provided the LGBCE with its response to the Draft Recommendations. On 14 December 2023 TWBC voted by a majority, to change the current voting system to all out elections every four years. However the vote fell short of the necessary 2/3rds majority and therefore the thirds election system is to be retained.

During the debate in this matter widespread concern was expressed by a number of contributors, both councillors and members of the public who spoke and attended, about the adverse impact of the Draft Recommendations on the parish communities of TWBC.

The parishes represent 58% of the population of TWBC and almost unanimously those who spoke on behalf of the parishes were concerned about the democratic deficit between town and parish if the Draft Recommendations were to be implemented.

GPC's submissions to TWBC dated 22 November 2022 in this regard are attached at Appendix 1 for your information.

GPC's Response to the Draft Recommendations submitted to the LGBCE on 07 October 2022 are also attached at Appendix 2 for ease of reference.

The decision of TWBC to maintain the system of yearly elections reinforces GPC's concerns about the impact the Draft Recommendations will have on the Goudhurst Parish and, in particular, the proposal to split Goudhurst and Kilndown despite the close and deep links which have subsisted between them since before Saxon times which endure today and the wish of the people of Goudhurst and Kilndown who in an electronic survey voted by 97.5%-check to oppose the Draft Recommendations.

2. THE PRIMARY CONCERNS

GPC set out its detailed concerns in Appendix 2 and these are summarised here:

- The balance of meeting the three statutory objectives of improving electoral equality, reflecting community, and supporting effective and convenient local government can only be met by keeping Goudhurst and Kilndown together,
- GPC's proposal for Kilndown to become part of the Rural Tunbridge Wells (RTW) ward would achieve the principal outcomes of reflecting community and supporting effective and convenient local government,
- If Kilndown were to become part of the RTW ward this would result in an electoral variance of +15 %. GPC believe that this is an acceptable variance given the variances accepted elsewhere in the Draft Recommendations given the overwhelming impact of keeping Goudhurst and Kilndown together,
- Goudhurst and Kilndown are only two miles apart.
- Goudhurst and Kilndown's historic links go back to Saxon times,
- Goudhurst and Kilndown's historic links are as strong today, with shared Churches, a shared school, a shared doctor's surgery, shared shops and hostelrys and a vast array of shared community groups.
- Goudhurst and Kilndown have close transport links whereas Kilndown has few, if any, transport links with Hawkhurst, Sandhurst and Benenden (HSB),
- Kilndown has no community links at all with HSB,
- Kilndown residents fear that if they become part of HSB they will not be effectively represented and will effectively be disenfranchised by the current proposals.

3. DEPARTING FROM THE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

At para 23 of the Draft Recommendations the LGBCE say that they will only move away from their recommendations if they receive *“compelling evidence that an alternative pattern of wards would better reflect our statutory criteria”*.

GPC believe that the arguments in favour of keeping Goudhurst and Kilndown within the same electoral ward are so compelling that the LGBCE would be failing in its statutory duties if it were to maintain its current proposals in this regard.

GPC cannot state strongly enough how concerned the residents of Kilndown are about the Draft Recommendations and the consequences for the shared community if the Draft Recommendations are implemented.

Should the LGBCE feel it would assist for there to be a site visit to include an opportunity to meet with Kilndown residents, so that they have an opportunity to speak directly to the LGBCE, please contact the Clerk to the Parish Council at Clerk@Goudhurst-PC.gov.uk so that the necessary arrangements can be made.

27 March 2023