

Goudhurst Parish Council

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Review Officer (Tunbridge Wells)

LGBCE

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Submission by Goudhurst Parish Council relating to the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council boundary changes

Goudhurst Parish Council wish to register serious concerns relating to the current proposals for Tunbridge Wells Borough;

1. We recognise the reduction of the number of Borough Councillors from 48 to 39, (a decision by the Commission)
2. On the basis of 39 councillors, with a voting regime of one third changing every year, Tunbridge Wells will be split into 13 wards of 7,050 electors in each. Thus 3 councillors in each ward.
3. It was Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, by a narrow majority, who voted for each ward to vote annually, (3 out of 4 years) rather than "all out" every 4 years.

These proposals produce seriously unsatisfactory consequences, especially for the rural parishes. Accordingly, on behalf of our community, Goudhurst Parish Council registers its **OBJECTION** to the current proposals.

The reasons for this objection are:

- The current ward structure in rural areas tends to be 1 or 2 member wards, this pays very close respect to "parishes" and "communities".
- The now proposed 7,050 elector non-community wards may require combining 2, 3 or even 4 different parishes to reach the voter requirement. It is this Council's view that this would break the very close link between councillors and their parish, cutting across historic communities.
- We are concerned that, contrary to Commission Guidelines, it may be impossible to meet the required new ward numbers without splitting some parishes into different Borough wards.

- Most of the rural Parish Councils are apolitical. It is probably only the political parties that will have election capabilities for contesting such large 7,000 voter, multi parish rural wards. This would significantly reduce the opportunity for worthy local individuals to be recognised and elected as Borough Councillors.
- It will also be difficult for individual Councillors (volunteers, without private offices unlike MP's) to be known and personally represent 7,050 electors across several different rural parishes, often with different local issues. Three-member representation reduces individual accountability to their parish or community.
- We have concerns about the likely turnout, voting annually in large wards, in some cases 15 miles across, with unknown candidates to represent artificially created non-community wards. These proposals disadvantage smaller parties and independent candidates.

In the rural areas **community matters**. None of this was anticipated at the first consultation, which is why many voted to maintain the status quo of voting by thirds.

What do we want?

We will be asking all of our Borough Councillors and candidates for election in May 2022 to vote to change the proposed voting system to 'all out' elections every 4 years. This is to ensure, wherever appropriate, wards can have one councillor with c.2,350 electors. Thus our concerns with the proposed, very large non-community rural wards of 7050 electors can be avoided. (We have no objection if towns wish to continue multi member wards.)

If such a solution is not achieved, we will press the Local Government Boundary Commission to relax the 'rule of 3' allowing flexibility in the warding of rural areas to allow for 1 or 2 member wards, not voting at every occasion (just as now).

Finally, we wish to note:

It is also our concern that subsequent to this review, a future review of Parish Boundaries may take place. Any unsatisfactory changes to Tunbridge Wells ward boundaries could be used as a starting point or template for future re-districting, thus circumventing our historic parish boundaries.

This **OBJECTION** represents the view of Goudhurst Parish Council on behalf of our community.

Best Wishes,

Claire Reed (Mrs)
Clerk