

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Personal Details:

Name: Louise - Capel Parish Council Manager Goldsmith

E-mail: clerk@capel-pc.org.uk

Postcode: [REDACTED]

Organisation Name: Capel Parish Council

Comment text:

See attached document prepared by Capel Parish Council

Uploaded Documents:

Download (https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/download_document?file=draft%2F1643893868_Boundary+commission+review.pdf)

Capel Parish Council's representation to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Capel Parish Council's view is that the parish should continue to have separate representation on TWBC with one member as an exception to the 'three member rule'.

Capel Parish Council request that the process be suspended until the outcome of the Local Plan is known. At present Capel Parish has 939 dwellings the Local Plan suggests another 4160 by 2038.

Failing that the Parish Council has the following observations:

TWBC's projection of 1897 voters by 2027 is woefully short if any of the projected houses are built in the parish, which is at the moment co-terminous with the TWBC electoral ward. At the moment the local plan has 2100 houses in Tudeley and 2040 in East Capel by 2038. If the developers have built fewer than 50 of those by 2027 (as 1897 voters would suggest) then the plan will be in serious trouble. The Local Plan site east of PW (not MGB) is already at pre-app stage, so the two MGB sites in Capel would swiftly follow if the LP were approved which makes the figure unlikely unless the Inspector knocks the two sites out. If that happens then the council's figure is nearer the mark. 1897 voters (the council's figure) are at the lower end of expectations even if the Inspector gave the green light to one site and not the other.

CPC argue that the whole of Capel should be represented by the same councillor.

Capel Parish is an identifiable community with its own history. Most families here use the primary school; there is a real sense of community, even more obvious since the lockdown, based on the Cricket Club, Capel in Bloom, the preschool and other community groups. It has its own pubs (though sadly the one in the centre of FOG is closed at the moment). Most of the population live north of the High Weald AONB in the Medway Valley with its heritage of hop picking quite distinct from other communities in the Borough, and communications run east west along the valley. It borders Tonbridge and commuting to work, and shopping are more focused on Tonbridge than TW. Many locals would argue a mistake was made in 1972 by not including it in T&M and TWBC can be seen as remote. All the postcodes are Tonbridge ones, and the west of the parish has Tonbridge phone numbers.

If it was to be joined with other communities no solution would work really well. Although geographically adjacent to Southborough there are no real communication links to it as everything runs through Tonbridge - it is a completely different community with little in common with Southborough - people rarely go from here to shop or socialise there for example. As a rural parish Capel has more in common with adjoining parishes in Tonbridge and Malling like East Peckham or Hadlow than it does with adjoining urban or suburban areas of Tunbridge Wells (Sherwood, Pembury) and Southborough. It would therefore be difficult for the same councillors to, for example, represent Sherwood and Capel at the same time they are two very different communities and Capel residents would be forgotten. Sherwood has the same communication issue as Southborough. To the east Paddock Wood is a town with its own interests clearly different from Capel. It is adjacent but Capel is a community with a very different heritage and outlook (as we repeatedly point out to TW planners). Given the respective numbers Capel would be swamped and it would be inevitable that we would be seen as a rural outlier to what will become quite a large town. With the best will in the world our community's interests are likely to take second place or worse be ignored in that context by any councillors who seek most of their votes in Paddock Wood.

Hence, Capel should have its own representation. The community should be treated as a whole and not added on to a bigger neighbour with a different set of interests and heritage. We realise this would not, at least in the short term fulfil the principle of equal representation, but we believe this is outweighed by recognising the community identity of the parish and more effective and convenient local government if the councillor is clearly identifiable by and responsive to the community he or she represents.