

Maidstone Borough Council

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Comment text:

Dear Sir/Madam, I am writing in my capacity as the Kent County Councillor representing residents of Maidstone Rural East – a large rural Division which under current ward boundaries includes Headcorn, Harrietsham and Lenham, Hollingbourne, Detling and Thurnham and North Downs Ward in their entirety. Following my earlier representation on 4th April 2022, I was delighted when the revised ward recommendations eliminated the original proposal to divide Lenham parish on the basis of community identity and split. My late response to the latest proposal follows impassioned communications from several residents and parish councils within my Division who are dismayed at the decision by Maidstone Borough Council this evening to ratify a proposal that would see North Downs ward and Harrietsham and Lenham wards remaining as separate wards with the current representation. Whilst we all have some sympathy for retaining the ward boundaries as they currently stand so that communities within the current North Downs ward can retain their sense of rural identity, the revised proposal fails to address the community identity issues and splits that would result. Residents in the current Harrietsham and Lenham ward who reside north of the A20-Wychling, Otterden, Warren Street and those at Pilgrims Retreat - see these rural centres as the focus of their daily interactions in accessing vital services such as medical services, educational facilities and other community amenities – to separate them in name from these connections is unthinkable to them. Their pride in their heritage and environment is equally important – Lenham residents on either side of the A20 fought for many years to obtain the Historic England listing for the Lenham Cross on the North Downs and continue to maintain and protect this valuable heritage asset. For many residents who I have spoken with this evening, the thought of this type of separation is simply offensive and damaging to their sense of identity and heritage. Again, whilst I understand the initial concerns raised by the boundary commission on large wards with three members, it could now be reasonably argued that the need to address this has been negated by Maidstone Borough Council having adopted the 4 yearly election cycle. Large rural wards are not uncommon in other parts of the Country and fair representation can be achieved by councillors working together in the best interest of their residents without the need to break up communities and community identity in this unjustifiable manner. Yours faithfully, Shellina Prendergast Kent County Council Member for Maidstone Rural East.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded