

Response of the Independent Alliance (Kent) to the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Boundary Review

The benefits you hope to achieve from this review may seem minor and largely irrelevant, but will cause untold harm to our communities and our hard won places in those communities. So our objections are not based on statistics, they are based on the emotions and feelings the review evokes, which in our minds are far more important. We are not at TMBC as representatives of a political party or ideology, we are there to represent our people, our communities.

We wholly understand the need for each Borough Member to represent a similar quantity of residents, and for population increases to be incorporated, but we believe the move from 54 to 43 members has no real economic justification except a tiny reduction in members expenses, and just increases the load on each member to the point where representation and democracy will suffer.

We believe the process should have **started** with the statistical re-jig to include population growth, and then the required number of members drawn from that, rather than try and force awkward sized groups of population into a completely arbitrary number of wards.

The reduction in member numbers is purely a political ploy by the majority Conservative group to reduce numbers in opposition parties - but they clearly have not thought through the implications, which in reality will release established minority members to stand in adjacent conservative wards, so from a political perspective their proposed shuffling could actually benefit the minority parties.

It is very easy for a statistician to look at our parishes in the North of Tonbridge and Malling and decide we are all small, isolated and disparate entities. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is true that we all have distinct cultural identities but the current proposals dismiss decades, even centuries of cultural and economic ties, and ignores the geographical and topographical realities of the area. They see Plaxtol and Shipbourne as remote entities, to be shuffled around the map like low value chess pieces, hostages to statistics and algorithms. But they are part of "us".

Borough Green was created in April 1934 from pieces of St Mary's Platt, Plaxtol, Ightham and Wrotham, and because the railway and industry supported growing local business and population, we have become the economic heart of the area. But we still retain those deep cultural ties to our "parent" parishes.

Interestingly, Borough Green is the smallest Parish in Kent by land area, but the most densely populated outside the urban areas.

Borough Green, St Mary's Platt, Plaxtol, Shipbourne (and Ightham) are tied together by Longmill Lane which as its name implies was the drovers road connecting all the historic paper mills, and is the reason our ward is named "Borough Green & Longmill. Those paper mills were situated on the River Bourne, also fed by the River Busty from Ightham. We all live in the Bourne Valley.

There are deep family ties across all our villages. Borough Green has no cemetery, and the need for burials in other parish churchyards reinforces those family ties across parish boundaries

Borough Green is the economic centre of our area, with the Doctor's Surgery, Library, the railway station and a vibrant shopping centre, and we are the hub village, so as well as having sprung from those neighbour villages, we are also an intrinsic part of the fabric of their lives.

There is actually more evidence pointing to the benefits of amalgamating the existing wards of WIS and BGLM into a single 4 or 5 member ward, than trying to split asunder connections built over generations.

The latest TMBC iteration has Plaxtol and Shipbourne grafted onto the Hadlow East Peckham ward where they are likely to be regarded as abandoned orphans, and not get appropriate representation for many years, not least because the members will have to learn new geographical areas, new people and established cultural ties.

We urge you to set aside the "evidence" presented by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, largely driven by political machination, and instead see us as an indivisible cultural entity. As Borough Council members we are not "parachuted in" by a major political party, we are part of our community, and want to remain serving that same community.

We were elected by our communities because we are part of our communities.

We would clearly see maintaining the status quo as the best option, but we think keeping Borough Green and Longmill as it is, but adding Ightham to make a 3 member ward, and putting the "rural Arc of Wrotham, Stansted, Addington and Trottiscliffe" together as a single member ward would achieve your statistical needs whilst helping us maintain those strong cultural and community ties.

Cllrs Mike Taylor (Leader) Wendy Palmer Tim Shaw