

## Dover District

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### Comment text:

Submission from Councillor Bill Gardner Ward: North Deal Bill Gardner [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded

## **SUBJECT: BOUNDARY COMMISSION REVIEW FOR DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL.**

To Emily Starkie,

I wish to make the following submission which comes in 4 parts.

- 1) Introduction.
- 2) Comments of the way the council has dealt with this whole issue.
- 3) General comments on the whole district.
- 4) My comments on the ward I have had the honour to represent for 8 years as a town Councillor including 2 years as mayor of the town, and for the last 7 years as the district Councillor for the same ward.

### **1) INTRODUCTION**

I am a Labour Councillor on the district Council and a member of the shadow cabinet. When this review was first announced back in September our group set up a working party to look at the whole issue and my role was to be our group's number-cruncher for our report.

### **2) COMMENTS ON THE WAY THE COUNCIL HAS DEALT WITH THIS WHOLE ISSUE**

Whilst I totally understand that I am a member of the opposition and the Tory group is larger than ours and therefore runs the council it has used this advantage to the point of abuse. This started with the decision for the number of Councillors from 2019 onwards. The majority party wanted 32 Councillors our group wanted 37. When the vote was taken it came as no surprise that they won the vote, and they told the officers that they should put out press releases stating that it was the council's policy to go for 32 Councillors. But, no it was the majority party's policy, but everything sent to the newspapers and the LGBCE says it is the policy of the council.

The report that went to the Electoral Matters Committee 1.3.18 was a report prepared by the council's own officers who had looked at the whole district and had come up with a way of splitting up the entire district. In the most part this splitting up of the district was done in a manner that followed the boundary commissions suggestions on communities and solid proper ward boundaries like main roads and railway lines.

At that meeting of the five Councillors, which were three Tories, (the Leader of the council, the Chairman of the council, the Chairman of the planning committee) and the two Labour Councillors, (which was the leader of the opposition and myself), the paper from the officers was introduced by the officers, and the first speaker was the chairman of the council, a role that is defined in the constitution as being independent. Everyone understands that the chairman is a Councillor from the main political party, and some chairmen do try occasionally to make the effort to try to be impartial, or at least to try to be seen to act in such a manner, but at this meeting the chairman had turned back the clock to when she was the Tory party agent for the district.

This can hardly be seen as impartial.

Actually the first suggestion from the majority party certainly had some legs and looked reasonable, this was to make the centre of Dover town into one ward, currently the shopping centre is split up into 3 separate parts, and the idea of making it all be in one ward sounded good. I was happy to agree to that because the ward I represent which is the current North Deal ward has all the shops, nearly all the takeaways and most of the pubs in the one ward, so it is a problem in one sense for the Councillors in that it has all the licensing problems in the one ward, but it actually works because it doesn't have the problems split amongst a number of wards and a number of Councillors with different approaches.

Whilst this was well thought out and well presented in part and agreed as a reasonable approach, no work had been done on the mathematics behind this suggestion no list of roads to be included, no list of polling districts just a rough idea on the back of a fag packet.

Then the leader of the council as chairman of the panel asked us for our first suggestion and we proposed splitting the very large ward of Little Stour and Ashstone into two separate parts, because the ward has such a large area for two Councillors to cover. We had presented this proposal with all the required numbers to show that as two one member wards this would work on the 2902 plus or minus 290 voters, so we had done our homework as requested for any amendments. Unlike the Dover Town proposal.

The meeting went on to discuss the majority party proposal to make Deal and Walmer into 3 wards each with 3 Councillors and this involved splitting the ward of Mill Hill a strong Labour ward with good a community identity in half and putting half of it in Middle Deal and half in with Walmer. There are no community links at all between Walmer and Mill Hill and currently their shared boundary is the railway line. Which under the boundary commission rules is a good clearly defined solid boundary. Again, this was not properly worked out with all the supporting figures and polling districts and was just a rushed job.

The meeting went on for a while longer and the Leader asked us if we actually wanted to put anything to the vote, because we were clearly going to lose 3-2, factually accurate but not exactly a shining example of democracy in action, so the Tory proposals were put to the vote and agreed. We then asked about us having a fair share of officer time to help formulate all our proposals into the right format and we were told that the officers would be too busy working on the majority parties proposals, which now because of the 3 votes to 2 could be called the council's policy. Therefore we would have no help from officers because our proposals suggestions were from a political party, whereas the Tory proposals could be worked on by the officer's and would be worked on by the officers because these were now the council policies.

*What a farce!*

All this was to be sorted out within a matter of hours by the officers for the full council .to discuss the following week. This was scuppered by our parties legal challenge .and the threat of a judicial review, this caused a postponement of the council meeting for three weeks, but still we were not allowed any officer time.

So this whole matter went to full council for their consideration and we were amazed to see that the paper before us, which was described as the report of the chief executive was indeed the Tory proposals that had been heavily worked on by the officers since the scheme we had seen in its bare skin and bones ideas at Electoral Matters. The papers before us that night should surely have been the original officer report that went to Electoral Matters and a second paper, the majority party's proposals for all to see.

### **3) THE WHOLE DISTRICT**

There are various points I wish to make about the proposals for the district as a whole, before getting down to my own ward North Deal in the final section of my submission.

I do not believe there should be any three member wards in the district because they are too large, not necessarily in terms of area, but in terms of numbers of people. I will explain. A three member ward will contain almost 9000 voters. I read the arguments put forward by the Boundary commission against single member wards and why it is good to be in a 2 or 3 member ward where you can share problems and discuss problems with colleagues. Yes, that is true, but that assumes that the ward is all one colour. I have been the only Labour Councillor in the three Councillor ward of North Deal for two terms now, and being Billy-no-mates for 7 years is not easy in a ward of 5000 voters. It is even worse when the majority party comes up with a bad unpopular policy like closing down the council helpdesk in the library or their latest crackpot ideas on charging for Sunday parking because it means that not only do I get the Labour voters contacting me about the issue but also I get Tory voters coming to me to help fight their corner because I am the only opposition Councillor in their ward and they see it as pointless going to either of their Tory Councillors about the issue, because they voted for it.

So currently I am the only opposition Councillor in a 5000 voter ward and if this proposal goes through and there are 3 members wards that are split when the votes are counted then suddenly a single opposition Councillor would have up to 9000 voters to represent if people want to complain about a council proposal.

I want to turn now briefly to the Aylesham Ward, and the numbers of voters in that ward. Again, I speak as the Labour spokesperson on Planning and with some considerable experience of planning. It was decided nearly 10 years ago that Aylesham would be extended by a project to build an extra 1200 houses over the 10 years up to 2019 as part of the district plan. 1200 houses meaning 2100 extra voters by 2019. But the builders were slow to start for various reasons However in the last two years the builders have been completing more houses than predicted and the voter numbers for 2023 are only 5002 which is an increase of only 800 on the present numbers which suggests that only 450 houses will be built in the next 5 years, whereas the developer is promising to finish the whole development by 2023 or 2024 at the latest. Now as our party's number-cruncher and also our party's shadow cabinet member for planning, I would not want to go too heavily into basing too many targets generally on developer's promises because one can be sadly misled and in nearly 25 years in politics I have seen many people very suddenly totally disappointed in the past by developers promises I would ask that the boundary commission take another look at the Aylesham predicted figures for 2023.

The Tory proposal for a Dover Town Ward including all the town centre is a good one, as I said above and was one that I supported at the Electoral Matters meeting 3.1.18, but one of the major consequences of their gerrymandering approach to the splitting up of Mill Hill has caused the shopping area of Deal, which was all in one ward, my ward North Deal to be split into two wards, North Deal and Sholden and South Deal and Castle. Now how in the name of everything that is holy can it be right for the majority party to say on the one hand that it is a good idea to copy the idea in Deal and put all the shops in one ward for Dover in future, and then in the very next breath turn round and split up the shops in Deal, the end that you just used to justify the new proposals for Dover. This could be indeed it is a perfect example of exactly why the vast majority of the general public don't like and don't trust politicians.

#### **4). THE WARD OF NORTH DEAL**

Until now this ward has had simple easy to follow easy to understand boundaries:

- The sea to the East,
- The railway line to the West,
- Sandown Castle and the Golf Course to the North
- Deal Castle to the South,

All part of Deal parish council and covered by the 3 polling stations of The Landmark centre: the Golf Rd centre and the Church in Victoria Rd, AD1,AD2 and AD3, plus a small part of the Gladstone Rd of Walmer up to the Parochial School and the railway bridge, AA4.

The original officer proposal, because North Deal needed more voters to make it a two member ward, was to move the southern boundary and include a further section of Walmer to include the School of Music site and Marine Rd and parts of York Rd etc, these houses have always been seen as part of Walmer, both by estate agents and the Post Office from the point of view of postal addresses.

However, the Labour Party proposal was to tidy up a small part of Sholden, the part of PSH that is trapped by the railway line so that anybody living in that section who goes to vote has to drive either past the Golf Rd polling station or past the Landmark polling station over the railway line and through Middle Deal ward to get to their polling station in Sholden, this small area has been mentioned before by us as a small boundary change to allow for a bit of tidying up. Also with the new development of 150 houses on the Albert Rd site with the construction of the link road to the Minters Yard development and industrial site that should never have been granted planning permission without proper highway infrastructure this will now make Albert Rd a major road, so it is our proposal to add the houses on the East side of Albert Rd, Victoria Mews, Bridgeside and the

few houses on the North side of London Rd between the Fire Station and the railway bridge into North Deal.

Whereas the new proposal that went to council following the Tory gerrymandering to split up Mill Hill, meant that the new boundaries for North Deal to make it into a 3 Councillor Ward include two polling districts of Middle Deal, the whole of Sholden PSH and two polling districts of North Deal, AD1 and AD2 but to move AD3 into the new ward of South Deal and Castle.

The effect of this is to split the shopping area in two, see above about Dover Town centre, and furthermore by this moving AD3 this means that 6 roads Century Walk, Anchor Lane Park St, Stanhope Rd, King St and Market St will be the wrong side of Queen St which is a natural boundary. So this would leave an amazingly ragged boundary.

Therefore I would ask that if you as the boundary commission consider adopting this ill-considered idea of making the current North Deal into a new North Deal and Sholden Ward will you please consider this southern boundary of the ward and I would ask that it is moved to include the shops on the south side of Queen St down the High St to Victoria Rd down to Deal Castle Rd and to the sea, thus restoring the old ward boundary, so that all the shops are in the one ward, as per the Tory suggestion for Dover.

This would increase the voter numbers by including Sondes Rd, Clanwilliam Rd Ranelagh Rd Stanley Rd and Prince of Wales Terrace, which would still be under the 10% excess limit and it would lead to clearly defined and understandable boundaries.

Councillor Bill Gardner