

Burgess Hill Town Council wishes to register a strong objection to the Boundary Commission's draft proposals for the four divisions in the southern part of Mid Sussex District. We consider it fails to meet two of the three criteria that the Commission has deemed as important; namely “Community identity/interest” and “Effective and convenient local government”. We are proposing an alternative proposal which we believe satisfies these criteria as well as meeting the “electoral equality” criterion.

The four divisions in the southern part of Mid Sussex District are Burgess Hill Town, Burgess Hill East, Hassocks & Victoria and Hurstpierpoint & Bolney. The first two divisions are entirely composed of wards within the town of Burgess Hill and have a clear “town” focus. The two other divisions are based on the two large villages in the area and have a “village” focus.

Burgess Hill Context

Burgess Hill is a market town with a population of around 32000 people and an electorate of 23300.

It is divided into six wards of roughly equal size for District and Town council elections; namely St Andrews, Franklands, Meeds, Leylands, Dunstall and Victoria. Since 1997 the two Burgess Hill divisions have been composed of five of the six wards. The sixth ward, Victoria, has been combined with Hassocks parish to form the Hassocks & Victoria division for a number of decades.

The combined boundary of the two Burgess Hill divisions is coterminous with the five District and Town council wards. The Town centre and all of the key facilities and establishments are contained within this combined boundary. This coterminousness of the County divisions in Burgess Hill with the District/Town council wards has enabled a strong sense of community identity and coherent and effective local government representation to develop over the last 20 years and has enabled the “1990s” development in the west side of the town to be assimilated effectively.

To ensure electoral equality one of the five district wards, Meeds, had to be split into two “mini” wards – Meeds North and Meeds South – which were allocated to each of the two “town” divisions. At the last two county council elections the structure of the two divisions was as follows:

Burgess Hill East: St. Andrews, Franklands and Meeds South wards

Burgess Town : Dunstall, Leylands and Meeds North

For subsequent District/Town Council elections the two mini wards were recombined as Meeds ward.

Currently the combined electorate of the two Burgess Hill divisions, at 7.3% above the county average currently, is within the permitted limit. In 2021 it is projected to just exceed the 10% upper limit by 0.46% or 87 electors. Therefore only the smallest of adjustment is needed to the boundary of the Burgess Hill division to comply with the electoral equality criterion.

Burgess Hill is, over the next decade, will experience rapid growth and regeneration. Over 6000 houses are planned to be delivered taking the population to nearly 45,000 and the electorate to 34,000. A further boundary review will almost certainly be required in 2024.

Hassocks&Victoria and Hurstpierpoint&Bolney Division (Village Divisions) Context

These two divisions are centred on the large village parishes of Hassocks (currently 6229 electors) and Hurstpierpoint& Sayers Common parish (currently 5152 electors). Neither of these parishes are large enough to be a division.

Since 1997 Hurstpierpoint has been combined with nine smaller parishes in the southern area of Mid Sussex to form a suitable division. This appears to have worked well with all the residents represented by parish councils

which have a strong relationship with their county councillor and hence WSCC. The councils' interests are aligned.

For Hassocks the problem of a small electorate has been solved by combining it with Victoria ward of Burgess Hill to form a suitably sized division. This situation is not ideal as Victoria is the smaller entity in the division and the residents do not have a “parish council” to work with the county councillor/WSCC on their behalf. Hassocks residents, on the other hand, do have a strong parish council on work on their behalf. However this was the only route through which electoral equality could have been achieved and has been the status quo for over 30 years.

Although the electorate of these two “village” divisions were at an acceptable level in the past the pattern of building development in this area of Mid Sussex has resulted in both divisions being outside the acceptable range for electoral equality. Currently Hassocks&Victoria is 17.2% above the county average and Hurstpierpoint&Bolney is 14.6% below. In 2021 these figures are 14.8% above and 16.7% below the average respectively. To bring both divisions within the 10% tolerance Hassocks would have to lose 660 electors and Hurstpierpoint gain 660 electors

Solution to the Electoral Equality Problem - Boundary Commission

As the above analysis shows the main problem of electoral inequality that exists in the southern area of Mid Sussex is between the two “village” divisions. The two Burgess Hill divisions only exceed the limit by 0.46% or 87 electors which can easily be overcome by a minor boundary change if it is deemed to be necessary.

To solve the “village” problem the Boundary Commission has proposed widespread and radical change to all four divisions but the proposal has the biggest impact on Burgess Hill and the representation of its residents. This proposal solves the village divisions' problem by radically altering the current boundaries within Burgess Hill but leaving the village parishes unaffected. Large sections of Dunstall and Meeds ward are moved out of the Burgess Hill divisions and a part of Victoria ward is moved back in. This proposal, in our opinion, will have a hugely negative impact on the community of Burgess Hill by weakening its cohesion, community interest/ identity and its ease of representation. This goes against two of the criteria by which the Commission judges the suitability of a divisional arrangement,.

The reasons why we consider these proposals are unacceptable are as follows:

- 1) The two “town” divisions will no longer be coterminous with the five District/ Town council wards.
- 2) 7000 electors of Burgess Hill will have their representation at a divisional level changed. This is over 30% of the total electorate of Burgess Hill. The resultant confusion amongst the electorate arising from this and the loss of coterminosity will cause a loss of community cohesion, identity and interest.
- 3) Nearly half of Dunstall ward and over half of Meeds ward will be transferred to the “village” divisions where they will be in a minority. The current problems experienced by residents of Victoria of difficult lines of communication and representation will in future be experienced by Dunstall and Meeds residents as well as that part of Victoria ward remaining in Hassocks&Victoria division.
- 4) The Town Centre would be split between three divisions. This, at a time of major redevelopment of the Town Centre, could result in a loss of focus by the county council on issues that are their responsibility which may harm or delay this major redevelopment.
- 5) Important town facilities and establishments such as Oakmeeds Community college, London Meeds primary school, the Triangle leisure centre, and the railway station would all be transferred from “town” divisions to “village” divisions. This is particularly concerning with respect to the secondary school as there could be conflicts of interest for the Hassocks&Victoria councillor with two such schools in their division.
- 6) With major housing development planned for Burgess Hill between now and 2031 delivering

6000+ houses. There will be a need for major boundary changes to the area as early as 2022 which will probably make all these changes redundant.

7) Ten wards are created by this proposal of widely varying electorate; from around 600 per councillor for Norman ward to over 2000 per town councillor for Dunstall and Gatehouse wards.

Burgess Hill Town Council Proposal

We consider that a simpler solution to the “village” divisions' electoral inequality problem should be found which does adversely affect the current Burgess Hill divisions. To ensure that the existing community cohesion, community identity/interest and ease of representation of the the electorate in the current divisions of Burgess Hill is not lost we believe that there should be little or no change to their divisional boundaries and that coterminously with the District wards should be maintained.

The problem for the village divisions would be solved if 660 voters were transferred from Hassocks&Victoria to Hurstpierpoint&Bolney. There appears to us to be two options- to transfer part of Hassocks parish to Hurstpierpoint division or to transfer part of Victoria ward to Hurstpierpoint. As a Town Council we would prefer the former but from correspondences between Hassocks parish and the County Council they do not support this approach. Therefore we propose that the “village” divisions' problem is solved by moving the minimum number of electors of Victoria ward from Hassocks&Victoria division to Hurstpierpoint&Bolney division to achieve electoral equality within well defined borders.

We are proposing that Victoria ward is split into two wards along a north /south axis. The western part, comprising 860 electors, will go to Hurstpierpoint&Bolney division and the eastern part, 3400 electors, remaining in Hassocks&Victoria division. These two new wards could be called Victoria West and Victoria East respectively. The streets which are transferred to Hurstpierpoint division are listed on attachment 1 and shown on Map 1.

For the Burgess Hill divisions we suggest the minimum of change. The divisional structure used for the last two county elections should be maintained i.e. Burgess Hill East : St. Andrews, Franklands and Meeds South and Burgess Hill Town : Dunstall, Leylands and Meeds North. The split of the District Meeds ward between North and South is shown on Maps 2 and the road allocated to the two Meeds division is shown on Table 2.

In 2021 the combined Burgess Hill divisions will exceed the maximum limit by 0.46% or 87 electors. We question whether it is worth making any changes for such a small amount, given the scale of development over the next decade around the Town. Currently the two divisions are within the required limit and based on the phasing of the expected housing delivery will still be in 2020. If, however an adjustment is needed to be made now it could be achieved by moving the northern boundary between Dunstall and Victoria wards from the centre of West Street to the north side. This would transfer 115 electors.

Summary of BHTC Proposal:

- 1) Split Victoria ward into two wards – Victoria West 860 electors in 2015; Victoria East 3438 electors in 2015. Victoria West going to Hurstpierpoint&Bolney division .and Victoria East3 remaining in Hassocks&Victoria division
- 2) Split the District Meeds ward into two wards Meeds North and Meeds South and share between the two “town” divisions as for previous county elect
- 3) Only if necessary. Adjust the northern boundary between Dunstall and Victoria wards by moving it from the centre of West Street to the north side. This involves just 115 electors.

This proposal will overcome all our objections detailed above as follows:

- a) the existing structure of the combined Burgess Hill divisions will be maintained.
- b) a maximum of 115 people will be transferred between the “town” divisions and the “village” divisions as

opposed to 7000.

c) the Town Centre will be in one division.

d) all of the Town's major facilities will be in Burgess Hill divisions

e) the new town ward structure of eight wards as opposed to 10 will have a much smaller variation in electorate size, ranging from 860 per councillor for Victoria West ward to 1400 per councillor for Franklands ward.

The resultant electoral numbers of our proposal are:

Division	2015	2021
Burgess Hill Town *	9680 (9.9%)	10381 (9.6%)
Burgess Hill East	9412 (5.8%)	10429 (10%)
Hassocks&Victoria	9409 (5.8%)	9818 (3.6%)
Hurstpierpoint&Bolney	9049 (1.7%)	9409 (-0.8%)

Burgess Hill Town numbers assumes the minor boundary change between unshall and Victoria District wards. If not considered necessary the resultant figures for Burgess Hill Town and Hassocks&Victoria would be:

Burgess Hill Town	9795 (10.1%)	10496 (10.7%)
Hassocks&Victoria	9294 (4.5%)	9703 (2.3%)

The resultant boundaries from our proposal is shown on Map 3