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Representative of a community group/organisation

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"As a starting point of our submission, we would like to take the draft proposals that went to Shepway District Council for consideration and available to view at <http://www.shepway.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=122&MId=2602>

Shepway District Council have subsequently proposed to make changes with which we do not agree, and seem to us to fundamentally break the principle of keeping communities together on which the boundaries should be drawn. For clarity in our comments below, we will refer to the 2 different proposals as the SDC Draft proposals (being as linked to above) and the SDC Final Proposals.

Taking the SDC Draft proposals, the supporting report makes it clear that in all cases, each Councillor would represent roughly the same number of voters, generally respect existing communities, and will lead to fair representation on the basis of 30 Councillors. We do feel that there are a few instances where the SDC Draft proposals could be amended to better respect existing communities. These are:

1. The ""Lemanis"" ward includes Saltwood Parish. Saltwood as a community is much more logically a part of Hythe itself, and looks to Hythe for its services. Simply moving Saltwood Parish into the Hythe ward looks like it keeps both wards within acceptable tolerances (of voter numbers - ""Lemanis"" 5502, Hythe & Saltwood 9518) and more logically places Saltwood within the District ward it ""looks to"" for services: Hythe.

Saltwood is almost completely distinct from West Hythe / Palmarsh - it's almost impossible even to drive between the two locations without leaving the proposed ward. Equally, two communities are very distinct: there is no unifying sense of identify between the places, whereas Saltwood residents would frequently look to Hythe as a shopping centre, and indeed the Saltwood / Hythe boundary as it stands is unclear: you wouldn't necessarily currently know you were leaving Hythe and entering Saltwood.

There is a clear case for revising the SDC draft proposals to remove Saltwood Parish from the proposed ""Lemanis"" ward, and place it with the proposed ""Hythe"" ward. It has a much stronger community case and keeps the number of voters in each within reasonable tolerances.

Finally on this point, although the ward name ""Lemanis"" has been justified on a historical basis, it is a completely made up name, and as such unlikely to give any resident a clearer idea of the ward in which they are resident. Although it may inspire historical research, it is unlikely to give any resident a clearer idea of where they live. If our proposals our followed as Saltwood is removed from the ward, we would recommend naming the remainder ward as ""West Hythe and Lympne"".

2. There is no clear argument for the Romney Marsh East ward to be a 2 member ward, when it could easily be broken into 2 single member wards, both within voter tolerances - Dymchurch & Burmarsh (3,353), and St Mary's and Newchurch (2,913). These two wards would much more clearly reflect their own community rather better than one larger ward.

3. The Walland & Denge Marsh ward would also ideally be split into to, smaller, single member wards. However, there seems to be no way to do so without turning Lydd Town into a ward of itself, which creates a ""polo"" ward around it, which we believe to be unacceptable. Reluctantly therefore, there seems to be little alternative to the SDC Draft proposals.

4. In New Romney, we support the retention of the 2 seats, as New Romney Town and Coast are clear and distinct communities. There is also the chance to realign the ward boundary between New Romney Town and News Romney Coast along the railway line, which would only affect a few voters but give a much simpler boundary between the two wards and clarify the boundary for each community. We therefore do not support the SDC Final proposals for a merged seat.

Turning to the SDC Final proposals (available at <http://www.shepway.gov.uk/content/view/201502/81/>) we see no merit in the proposed change to absorb the area of the West Folkestone ward (in the SDC Draft proposals) into the Cheriton and Sandgate wards. The ward of Sandgate in the SDC Final proposals covers an area including much of Sandgate and West Folkestone running up almost to Folkestone Central train station.

The communities of Sandgate and Folkestone are completely diverse, and Sandgate has long established and known boundaries: a 2 member ward for Sandgate and West Folkestone as proposed runs entirely contrary to any idea of warding to existing and known communities. We cannot conceive of any reason for such a proposal, and would strongly urge that it is rejected in favour of the SDC Draft Proposals.

Finally on parish boundaries as proposed within the SDC Draft proposals: we support many of the SDC Draft proposals, especially the realignment of the border between Sandgate Valley and Sandgate Village in the Sandgate Parish Council proposals: the enlarged Valley ward is a much more complete community in itself, and enlarging the number of Councillors it has will enhance its representation on the Parish Council.

For Folkestone Town Council we feel the SDC Draft proposals for just 4 wards leaves wards which are too big, and will lead to the perverse situation that a District Council election will be easier to stand for (due to the smaller wards) than a Town Council one. Town Councils should be encouraging a wider range of candidates and representation for more groups and independents: that is simply unlikely to happen with Council seats that are that large. We would recommend the sub-division of the proposed Town Council wards so they each are represented by no more than 2 or 3 Councillors, working as close to new District ward boundaries as possible but realising that that is impractical in some instances.

Tim Prater

for Shepway Liberal Democrats"