

Councillor Rupert Simmons
Heathfield Division



[REDACTED]

Tim Bowden Esq.
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
14th Floor, Millbank Tower
London SW1P 4QP

14th December 2015

Dear Mr Bowden

RE: County Council Boundary Changes

Please accept my late submission for review of the County Boundaries proposed by East Sussex County Council. I have been subject to two set-backs in terms of speed of response, one an internment in hospital in an emergency for an operation and secondly the breakdown of my computer. I am back from Hospital now and the computer has been repaired by County Staff.

My first complaint about the process being carried out recently supposedly in full cooperation of both District Councils and County Councils the timescale simply did not allow this to happen in East Sussex and especially in Wealden which required a wholesale rethink.

Secondly lessons were supposedly going to be learned after the last boundary Commission change in 2003/04 which left a number of Parishes split asunder. Knowing that, I made special efforts to communicate with the Boundary Change Officers of both Wealden District and Mr Paul Dean at County. This informed them of the catastrophe that had occurred ahead of the 2005 county council elections when last changed: the Parish of Heathfield & Waldron was split between two MPs, two County Councillors and six District Councillors. We want to resolve this issue during the current review.

The model currently being recommended by Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council also splits Heathfield and Waldron Parish by the same number of District Councillors and five County Councillors even though the total number of Wealden District Councillors is to be reduced by 10. This is an inefficient structure as Parish meetings often last several hours; in practice the Parish agenda would not commence until those ten district and county councillors have spoken. Such meetings would be tiresome for the public.

It is also not going to help when the Parliamentary boundaries are changed ahead of the next general Election where the community would be happy to be served by either the Right Honourable Nus Ghani or the Right Honourable Hew Merriman but just one of them.

Under the current review the Boundary Commission has emphasised the importance of two factors, mathematical equitability and secondly community Identity recognising it had not done that in the last exercise.

The Parish of Heathfield & Waldron, is a very strong community built upon the founding Parochial parishes of two Churches, Those of All Saints Church Old Heathfield and All Saints Church Waldron which is now over 900 years old. The Secular Parish combines the villages of Old Heathfield, Broad Oak, Punnett's Town Cross in Hand and of course Waldron. The Town of Heathfield has grown in the middle and the balance has worked well for all Citizens. There is a rhythm to the community which is most especially seen by the

actions of the Heathfield Partnership Trust which serves the Parish as a whole and reference can be found on www.heathfield.net the community web-site. I have the privilege of being the Chairman of the Trust and have been doing so for the last 13 years.

My County boundary (always known as the Heathfield Division) since being elected in 2001 started by including the whole Parish but adding Horan and the Warbleton Parish. The Boundary changes in 2005 meant me losing Cross in Hand, and Waldron from the Parish and also Horam. I ensured this worked by working closely with my County Colleague, Councillor Chris Dowling who currently represents Cross In Hand, Waldron and Horam.

The issue I am bringing to the attention of the Boundary Commission is that no recognition was given to the Parish Boundaries when they considered their own divisions and by not working in collaboration with County, the final presentation to County from Wealden came in at the deadline for submission by County and by doing so did not enable any significant changes to be made to the basic presumption of three District Councillor divisions to one County Council Division. This was in effect a fete a complis and the consequence of this lack of sensible collaboration is seen above

I would commend the Boundary Commission to produce a model that takes account of all the above factors ie. a pattern that is built on local communities (with mathematical equitability). That way we should be able to stop this tearing of local communities apart which leads to less identity from the electorate and in their confusion less engagement in the subsequent elections.

The distress at the Heathfield & Waldron Parish Council is that they took guidance from their District Councillors and were informed that they need not worry. Now seeing the proposals without any consultation, they are distraught and will make their own representations. They are largely apolitical but wish their identity to be protected. They are also seeking their meetings to be manageable.

I would accept that the Parish of Heathfield and Waldron has 9,882 electors to serve which is just above the average being projected by County per seat. I would forgo my own village of Waldron if that helped mathematical equitability and so share again (if elected) the responsibility of the Parish. What we are currently seeing been projected is both ludicrous and unmanageable and might well lead to further complications when it comes to the proposed parliamentary boundaries which are imminent ahead of 2020.

Yours sincerely,

