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82

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For England
Report No. 560

Review of Electoral Arrangements

BOROUGH OF TONBRIDGE AND
MALLING

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BOUNDARY COMMISSION

FOR ENGLAND

REPORT NO. 560

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO THE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE BOROUGH OF TONBRIDGE AND MALLING IN THE COUNTY OF KENT.

INTRODUCTION

1. The present electoral arrangements for the Borough of Tonbridge and Malling date from May 1979 when the District of Tonbridge and Malling (Electoral Arrangements) Order 1976, giving effect to the proposals contained in our Report No.122, came into force. The Order provides for 27 wards; six represented by three members, 13 represented by two members and eight represented by one member; giving an overall council size of 52 councillors. The borough is partially parished and has elections by thirds.

2. In November 1985 our attention was drawn to a number of serious imbalances in the overall standard of representation in the electoral arrangements for the borough. Many of these imbalances had developed since the 1976 Order was made but others were due to arise from necessary adjustments to electoral arrangements for the borough arising from proposed changes to the parish pattern which were then under consideration (and have since been made). We noted that, under existing arrangements, almost two-thirds of the borough wards were over or under represented and several of these were outside a plus or minus 20% variation from the average for the borough.

3. We therefore decided to conduct a further review of the district electoral arrangements in accordance with the provisions of section 50(3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

4. We formally announced the start of the review in a letter of 17 January 1986 which invited the Borough Council, having regard to the requirements of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, to prepare and submit to us a draft scheme of electoral arrangements for the whole of its area. Copies of the letter were also sent for information to Kent County Council, the Member of Parliament for the constituency, local newspapers, and the local government press. The start of the review was also announced by public notice.

THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S DRAFT SCHEME

5. The Borough Council duly prepared a draft scheme, taking account of the size of the 1986 electorate and that forecast for 1991, and submitted it to us on 24th October 1986. The draft scheme provided for 28 wards; five wards returning three councillors, sixteen wards returning two councillors and seven wards returning one councillor. Under the draft scheme the boundaries of sixteen existing wards would remain unchanged and the boundaries of ten wards would be altered. Four new two-member wards would be created, namely Larkfield North and Larkfield South, and Snodland East and Snodland West, by division of the existing three-member wards of Larkfield and Snodland. The existing ward of Platt would disappear. The overall effect of the Borough Council's scheme would be to increase the total number of wards from the present 27 to 28, and the council size from the existing 52 to 54.

COMMENTS ON THE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S DRAFT SCHEME

6. The Borough Council forwarded 13 comments it had received on its draft scheme, which had been advertised locally. Representations were received from the Tonbridge and Malling Liberal Association, the Tonbridge and Malling Social Democrat Party, the Tonbridge and Malling Conservative Association, the Tonbridge and Malling Labour Group, the parish councils of Addington, East Malling and Larkfield, Mereworth, Offham, Platt, Snodland, West Malling, West Peckham, and one local district councillor.

7. The Tonbridge and Malling Liberal Association and the Tonbridge and Malling Social Democrat Party supported the suggested warding arrangements for Tonbridge, where they felt improved representation was warranted, and welcomed the proposed increase in councillor representation for Larkfield, Ditton and Snodland. They took the view, however, that the lack of community interest between Offham and Platt indicated that Offham should be linked with Mereworth and Borough Green; whilst West Malling should remain a single-member ward until its electorate had risen sufficiently to justify increased representation.

8. The Tonbridge and Malling Conservative Association held the view that West Peckham should be removed from the Forest ward and included in the West Malling ward, with which it had a closer affinity in terms of education and transport links. The addition of Mereworth to the proposed West Malling ward would then result in a new two-member ward.

9. The Tonbridge and Malling Labour Group supported the Borough Council's draft scheme overall, but it saw no point in the division of the parish of Snodland for electoral purposes. As a possible alternative, if division of the existing Snodland ward were to be maintained, it suggested that both Snodland East and Larkfield wards should each return three councillors in order to take full account of proposed future development in these areas.

10. Addington Parish Council opposed the idea of either Mereworth or Offham being amalgamated with West Malling, fearing the smaller villages would lose their identity as a result. It supported the suggestion that Mereworth, West Peckham and Offham should be combined to form a single-member ward, and that Platt should join Borough Green to form a three-member ward.

11. East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council supported the Borough Council's draft scheme, but suggested that their parish wards should be re-named East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South, in order to avoid confusion.

12. Mereworth Parish Council preferred the idea of a combined single-member ward comprising Mereworth, West Peckham and Offham, claiming that Mereworth had no ties with West Malling, but had long-standing historical links with West Peckham. It also stated that the Borough Council's forecast electorate for its ward for 1991 had been underestimated by some 200 electors.

13. Offham Parish Council opposed the merger of West Malling with the surrounding smaller villages. In order to preserve their identity it proposed a new borough ward consisting of West Peckham, Mereworth and Offham, which could be re-named Coppice Ward. It strongly rejected the Borough Council's proposal that its parish should be combined with Platt, and suggested that Platt should form part of an enlarged three-member ward with Borough Green.

14. Platt Parish Council proposed that the existing ward of Comp should be re-named Platt and Offham, as the area currently known as Comp was, in fact, a small hamlet whose name did not reflect the major development which had taken place in its two neighbouring parishes.

15. Snodland Parish Council commented that the partition of its parish would be divisive and lead inevitably to competition for parish funds and, even assuming some division was necessary, that proposed was neither natural nor logical. It recommended the addition of a fifth councillor for Snodland (either to represent Ham Hill or as a third councillor for the proposed Snodland East ward). It also claimed that the Borough Council had significantly under-estimated the 1991 electorate of its parish in its draft scheme.

16. West Malling Parish Council expressed a preference to be linked with Offham, but was otherwise prepared to accept the proposals outlined in the Borough Council's draft scheme.

17. West Peckham Parish Council strongly objected to the separation of its parish from Mereworth in view of the close ties between the two parishes and considered that both parishes, together with Offham, could be merged to form a single-member ward.

18. One District Councillor also opposed the separation of Mereworth from West Peckham because of long-standing ties between the two villages which, she claimed, should take precedence over any desire to achieve electoral equality. She advocated that some degree of rural weighting should be considered to take account of future redevelopment in the area.

OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

19. We considered the draft scheme together with the representations received. We noted that it would involve a larger council, and forecast electorate figures supplied by the Borough Council offered some improvement in extremes of over and under-representation by 1991. However, the improvement in the standard of representation would be achieved only by an increase in the number of wards, and by the re-distribution of electors, with a corresponding increase in the number of wards outside the lower tolerance limits.

20. Two existing wards caused us particular concern - Larkfield and Snodland - one of which was meagrely represented, and the other under-represented. For those two wards the Borough Council's draft scheme substituted four wards - two of which would have been meagrely represented. We noted that, overall, the scheme would leave 14 out of the 28 proposed wards outside the $\pm 10\%$ tolerance limits in 1986. By 1991, this would be reduced to 13 out of 28 wards. These figures indicate a marginal improvement over the existing scheme which left nine out of 27 wards with entitlements outside the $\pm 10\%$ tolerance limits in 1986, and nine out of 27 wards in 1991, but with a further seven wards in 1986 and eight in 1991 outside the $\pm 20\%$ limits.

21. We concluded however that none of the alternatives contained in the representations submitted to the Borough Council provided an overall improvement in the standard of representation. We considered that the scheme prepared by the Borough Council Officers provided a better overall balance. We therefore decided to adopt it as the basis of our draft proposals, subject to the suggestion by Platt Parish Council that Comp ward should be re-named 'Platt and Offham', and subject to some minor adjustments of a technical nature suggested by Ordnance Survey in order to secure better defined boundaries.

22. We issued our draft proposals on 22 June 1987. Copies were sent to all those who had received our consultation letter or who had commented on the Borough Council's draft scheme. Notices were inserted in the local press announcing that the draft proposals had been issued and were available for inspection at the Borough Council's offices. Comments were invited by 17 August 1987.

RESPONSE TO OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

23. We received eleven comments in response to our draft proposals from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, five parish councils, the local Member of Parliament and two political organisations. The Borough Council also forwarded two letters from parish councils which had been sent to it in error.

24. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council agreed in principle with the tenor of our draft proposals. However, despite the fact that our draft proposals were based almost entirely on its draft scheme, it suggested a number of revisions to reflect changed circumstances and additional information which had emerged since its original scheme had been prepared some 18 months earlier. Overall, the comments we received were almost evenly divided between responses to our draft proposals and representations in respect of the Borough Council's revised scheme.

25. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council considered that, in the interest of maintaining and strengthening local ties, and in order to improve the councillor/electorate ratio, the Eccles ward of the parish of Aylesford should be transferred to the Burham and Wouldham district ward to create a new two-member district ward to be known as Valley ward. The remainder of the parish of Aylesford would then constitute a three-member district ward in its own right. It recommended that a new two-member ward should be established for the proposed West Malling and Mereworth district ward, which was to be extended to include the parish of West Peckham. It also suggested the creation of a fresh two-member

ward for the combined parishes of Offham, Platt, Plaxtol and Shipbourne which would be named Long Mill, the name of a lane that bisected the ward.

26. The Borough Council also suggested that in view of a new development, known as Town Acres, which had been completed since the original draft scheme was prepared, it would be more logical and convenient for all the development reached from The Ridgeway to be located in the Cage Green ward. Consequently, the Borough Council recommended a minor adjustment to the boundary between the district wards of Cage Green and Castle, resulting in the sheltered accommodation known as Pentuddock House, on the south side of The Ridgeway, and the area of land to the south and west, as far as the pumping station, being transferred from Cage Green ward to Castle ward. Furthermore, in view of the imminent closure of Leybourne Grange Hospital, the Borough Council felt that its original suggestion to ascribe the name of Grange to the ward comprising the parishes of Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh would no longer be appropriate, the Borough Council felt that the ward should be known as Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh ward.

27. Borough Green Parish Council contended that the M26 constituted the most easily identifiable, and therefore logical, boundary between Borough Green and Wrotham, and should become the civil boundary. It would then follow the same line as the ecclesiastical boundary. The Parish Council also believed that the Valley View estate, currently in the Ightham district ward, should be transferred to its parish and thus conform with the changes proposed as a result of the recent parish review of the area.

28. Mereworth Parish Council objected to our draft proposals on the grounds that, if implemented, they would end the close relationship which had been established between its parish and West Peckham, and tie Mereworth to West Malling with which it had no real affinity. As an alternative, it suggested that the existing Mereworth and West Peckham district Ward should remain unchanged, or, with the addition of the parish of Offham, constitute an enlarged single-member ward.

29. West Peckham Parish Council emphasised the close ties which existed between its parish and Mereworth, and maintained that the interests of all the local population would be best served by continuing with the present arrangement of one councillor representing the two villages. It argued that our draft proposals, as they affected the areas which would constitute the newly proposed Forest ward, would be impractical since one councillor would be required to cover a much larger area. The Parish Council fully supported the Borough

Council's revised scheme which recommended, inter-alia, a two-member district ward comprising the parishes of West Malling, Mereworth and West Peckham.

30. The views expressed by West Peckham Parish Council were endorsed by the Rt.Hon.John Stanley, MP who supported all the Borough Council's suggested revisions to its original draft scheme of representation.

31. Wouldham Parish Council objected to the Borough Council's proposal to create a new Valley ward and expressed its satisfaction with the existing arrangements.

32. Tonbridge and Malling Liberal Association were prepared to accept the proposed re-warding of the north-eastern side of the borough, but objected strongly to our draft proposals as they affected the district wards of West Malling and Mereworth, West Peckham, Oast, Platt and Offham, in the central and northern parts. Its opposition was based largely upon what it interpreted as a failure to reflect local ties. It suggested a number of changes. Its scheme substituted five wards for four of the Borough Council's, namely, Birling and Leybourne; West Malling and Ryarsh; Borough Green and Platt; Offham; West Peckham and Mereworth, and Plaxtol and Shipbourne. The Association claimed that its scheme fully recognised community ties in the area, and provided a more even standard of representation. It also claimed that our draft proposals took no account of the expected major development in the borough. It opposed the Borough Council's suggestions in respect of Aylesford and Long Mill and requested a local enquiry.

33. Snodland Labour Party objected to the proposed division of the parish of Snodland into two district wards. It felt that such a move would destroy the goodwill and community spirit which both long-established and more newly arrived residents had built up over a number of years. It suggested that a four-member ward be established for the parish, or that the Ham Hill area - that part of the parish of Birling recently transferred to Snodland as a result of the parish review - should become a separate single-member ward, with the remainder of Snodland forming a three-member ward.

34. Offham Parish Council opposed the proposed incorporation of the parishes of Plaxtol, Shipbourne, Platt and Offham in one district ward to be known as Long Mill. It highlighted the different characteristics of Plaxtol and Shipbourne when compared with Platt and Offham, and referred to the equally separate identities of Platt and Offham which resulted from the natural barriers and relatively poor communications between the two parishes. The Parish Council believed that the proposed bringing together of the four parishes for the sake

of improved electoral representation should not override the importance of community ties and the status of the individual parishes involved.

35. Aylesford Parish Council did not wish to lodge any objection to the Borough Council's revised draft scheme of representation but felt that the residents of Eccles parish ward should be afforded the opportunity to comment on them. (The Borough Council had not issued a fresh public notice announcing the amendments to its original draft scheme, thought it had informed parish councils by circular letter). The Parish Council further stated that the alternative scheme put forward by the Tonbridge and Malling Liberal Association had been submitted to us without prior consultation with the parish councils or borough ward members, and was therefore contrary to the Borough Council's "all party agreement" that West Malling, Mereworth and West Peckham should be combined into a single two-member ward.

OUR RE-ASSESSMENT OF OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

36. As required by section 60(2)(d) of the 1972 Act, we considered the representations made to us and re-assessed our draft proposals in the light of all the comments received.

37. We noted that the majority of the representations related to our draft proposals for the Mereworth, West Peckham and West Malling areas. The Borough Council had produced a revised scheme in order to accommodate Mereworth and West Peckham Parish Councils, who had requested that their parishes should be in the same district ward. However, because the Borough Council's revised proposals had implications for neighbouring district wards, we dealt first with the Borough Council's amended scheme for this area, followed by the various alternatives.

38. Representations were made to us and to the Borough Council, vigorously opposing the proposal to place the adjacent villages of Mereworth and West Peckham in different district wards. These placed great emphasis upon the local ties which existed between the two villages. In the light of this, and of the availability of more up-to-date electorate figures, the Borough Council decided to re-appraise the situation. It suggested the re-alignment of the district ward boundaries in this area by adding the parish of West Peckham to the proposed Mereworth and West Malling district ward. The remainder of the originally proposed Forest district ward - the parishes of Plaxtol and

Shipbourne - would, as a consequence, have been too small to justify separate single ward status. The Borough Council therefore recommended adding this area to the single-member district ward of Platt and Offham, to create a new two-member ward of Long Mill. The resulting entitlement figures for the two new district wards were marginally better than those in the original proposals, but the topographical outline of the proposed Long Mill ward appeared to us most unusual, bearing little relation to local community ties. However, the revised suggestions were endorsed by West Peckham Parish Council and by the local Member of Parliament.

39. We considered that Mereworth Parish Council's suggestions for the area would result in significantly worse electoral entitlements for those district wards affected. The addition of the parish of Offham to the proposed West Peckham and Mereworth district ward did nothing to improve the entitlement figures, and would also have had a detrimental effect on the proposed district ward comprising Shipbourne, Plaxtol and Platt.

40. The differences in character between the constituent parishes of the proposed Long Mill district ward had been highlighted by both the Tonbridge and Malling Liberal Association, and by Offham Parish Council. However, we considered that the Association's alternative proposals did not overcome the imbalance in electoral equality in the wards affected. We noted that the Association's scheme was at variance with the widely-held local view that West Malling, West Peckham and Mereworth should form a West Peckham and Mereworth single two-member ward.

41. We could not accept Snodland Labour Party's contention that the division of Snodland would undermine the cohesion established between old and new residents, and that Snodland should either be retained as a single four-member ward, or that Ham Hill should form a separate one-member ward. In any event, the Labour Party's various proposals did not provide a significantly improved standard of representation over the Borough Council's revised scheme. Furthermore, we felt that the Labour Party's alternative suggestion regarding Ham Hill appeared to be at variance with its previous view that the whole area needed to be viewed as one community.

42. We noted the Borough Council's point that, under its original scheme, the Burham and Wouldham borough ward was some 20% above the average councillor/electorate ratio as a result of recently completed development in the area. In order to remedy this imbalance, the Borough Council suggested that, as the village of Eccles had a greater affinity with Burham and Wouldham, the Eccles parish ward of Aylesford should be united with Burham and Wouldham to form a two-member borough ward to be known as Valley. Aylesford Parish Council was content with this suggestion, but felt that since the Borough Council's revised scheme had not been advertised locally, the constituents of Eccles should be invited to comment. Wouldham Parish Council, although happy with the present arrangements, objected strongly to the idea of creating the new Valley ward. We concluded that the present imbalance in electoral representation was unsatisfactory and that the Borough Council's revised scheme offered the best means of securing a more even standard of representation in this area.

43. In respect of the proposed Borough Green district ward, we considered that Borough Green Parish Council's comments on our draft proposals appeared to relate, in part, to the question of parish boundaries which were outside the scope of the present review. The Valley View estate, under the revised parish arrangements (effective from 1 April 1988), now formed part of the parish of Borough Green and was thus already included in our proposed Borough Green borough ward. We were satisfied that the electorate figures quoted in the Borough Council's revised scheme had taken full account of these changes.

44. No objections were received to the minor adjustment suggested by the Borough Council affecting the Borough wards of Cage Green and Castle which had been made in order to avoid splitting a new development in the unparished area, or to the re-titling of Grange borough ward. We therefore decided to include the Borough Council's suggestions for these areas in our further draft proposals.

OUR FURTHER DRAFT PROPOSALS

45. We were satisfied that the Borough Council's revised scheme provided the most acceptable and even standard of representation for the borough as a whole. However, we felt that there appeared to have been insufficient local consultation on the matter. In view of this, and of the widespread debate engendered by this review, we believed that it would be right to undertake a further consultation exercise, and to publish our conclusions as our further draft proposals. In the light of our earlier comments about the proposed Long Mill ward, we invited further alternative suggestions for this area.

46. Our further draft proposals were issued on 29 February 1988. Copies were sent to all those who had received our consultation letter and those who had commented on the Borough Council's original draft scheme. Notices were inserted in the local press announcing that our further draft proposals had been issued and were available for inspection at the Borough Council's offices.

RESPONSE TO OUR FURTHER DRAFT PROPOSALS

47. We received seven representations in response to our further draft proposals. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, together with the Rt.Hon.John Stanley MP, considered that they produced an entirely reasonable standard of electoral equality throughout the borough and that the various alternative schemes put forward compared unfavourably with them. Offham Parish Council reiterated its earlier views about the desirability of a Long Mill borough ward. It advocated an alternative grouping of its parish with Mereworth and, perhaps Addington. It also called for a local meeting to resolve outstanding problems.

48. Burham Parish Council and a borough councillor objected to the proposed name for the "Valley" ward, preferring an alternative comprising the names of all the constituent parishes, as did the local Social and Liberal Democrats Association. The Association and a borough councillor suggested an alternative pattern of representation for the central Malling area which avoided the creation of the Long Mill borough ward.

OUR RE-ASSESSMENT OF OUR FURTHER DRAFT PROPOSALS

49. We have considered the representations made to us, as required by section 60(2)(d) of the 1972 Act. We have looked carefully at the alternative scheme suggested to us by the Social and Liberal Democrat Party and the further refinement suggested by Offham Parish Council. We noted that although both these alternatives appeared to take account of local ties, they provided a worse overall standard of representation than our further draft proposals and we regard this as the more important test.

50. We noted that the Borough had no firm views concerning the final name of our proposed Valley ward. Although Wouldham Parish Council had not indicated its wishes in the matter, two borough councillors were in favour of renaming it "Burham, Eccles and Wouldham" ward. We have already agreed to the re-naming of the Borough Council's original "Grange" ward to reflect its constituent parts and we therefore propose to adopt the name of "Burham, Eccles

and Wouldham" for "Valley" ward.

51. Subject to the one amendment outlined in paragraph 50 above, we have decided to confirm our further draft proposals as final.

52. Details of our final proposals are set out in Schedule 1 to this report. A map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries accompanies this report.

PUBLICATION

53. In accordance with Section 60(5)(b) of the 1972 Act, a copy of this report, together with a copy of the map, is being sent to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and will be available for inspection at the Council's main offices. Copies of this report are also being sent to all those persons or bodies who received our consultation letter or who have expressed an interest in the review at any subsequent stage.

LS

Signed: G J ELLERTON (Chairman)

J G POWELL (Deputy Chairman)

G E CHERRY

K F J ENNALS

G R PRENTICE

HELEN SARKANY

BRIAN SCHOLES

S T GARRISH

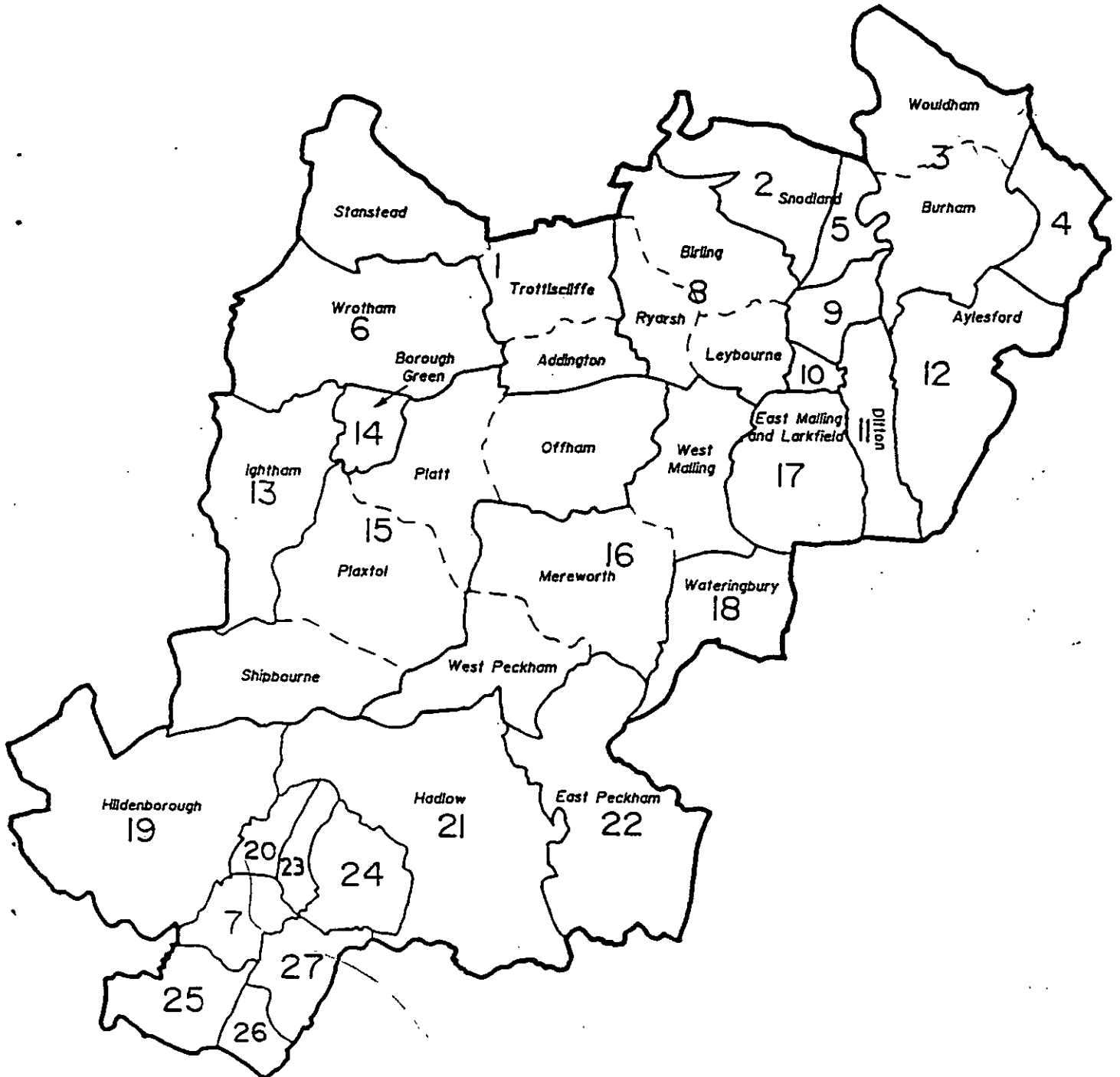
Secretary

20 July 1988

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TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH
FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW

ANNEX A



THE PROPOSED WARDS OF
TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH

1. OAST WARD
2. SNODLAND WEST WARD
3. BURNHAM, ECCLES AND WOULDHAM WARD
4. BLUE BELL HILL WARD
5. SNODLAND EAST WARD
6. WROTHAM WARD
7. CASTLE WARD
8. BIRLING, LEYBOURNE AND RYARSH WARD
9. LARKFIELD NORTH WARD
10. LARKFIELD SOUTH WARD
11. DITTON WARD
12. AYLESFORD WARD
13. IGHAM WARD
14. BOROUGH GREEN WARD
15. LONG MILL WARD
16. WEST MALLING AND MEREWORTH WARD
17. EAST MALLING WARD
18. WATERINGBURY WARD
19. HILDENBOROUGH WARD
20. TRENCH WARD
21. HADLOW WARD
22. EAST PECKHAM WARD
23. CAGE GREEN WARD
24. HIGHAM WARD
25. JUDD WARD
26. VAUXHALL WARD
27. MEDWAY WARD

BOROUGH OF TONBRIDGE AND MALLING -
 COMMISSION'S PROPOSED ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

<u>Name of Borough Ward</u>	<u>No of Cllrs</u>
Aylesford	3
Birling, Leybourne, and Ryarsh	2
Blue Bell Hill	2
Borough Green	2
Burham, Wouldham and Eccles	2
Cage Green	2
Castle	2
Ditton	3
East Malling	2
East Peckham	2
Hadlow	2
Higham	3
Hildenborough	3
Ightham	1
Judd	2
Larkfield North	2
Larkfield South	2
Long Mill	2
Medway	2
Oast	1
Snodland East	2
Snodland West	2
Trench	3
Vauxhall	2
Wateringbury	1
West Malling, West Peckham and Mereworth	2
Wrotham	1



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