

# Lindfield Parish Council

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5 February 2016

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## Electoral Review of West Sussex

I am writing on behalf of Lindfield Parish Council to comment on the proposal to create a third ward from an area currently within the Lindfield and High Weald Division of West Sussex County Council and to move it out of that division into Haywards Heath East, together with Franklands and Bentswood wards.

Although the area that would form the new ward is within the neighbouring parish of Lindfield Rural, Lindfield Parish Council recognises that these residents see their area as an integral part of Lindfield village and they have shared interests with the residents of Lindfield Parish. For this reason we consider that it is appropriate for this Council to express its views on the proposal.

We note that the key to the overview map refers to the Lindfield parish ward as Lindfield Rural Central under the heading Lindfield Rural CP. This is somewhat misleading. The existence of two parish councils for Lindfield already causes a certain amount of confusion and this would add to it as the grouping in the key suggests that the area of Lindfield Parish is part of Lindfield Rural. The civil parish of Lindfield is a separate parish from that of Lindfield Rural and the parishes are named accordingly. The current county division is made up of Lindfield and High Weald wards which also clearly identify Lindfield. Moreover the term "central" would seem more appropriate in a city context than a semi-rural village and rather misrepresents the character and scale of the Lindfield ward. It is therefore suggested that Lindfield remains as Lindfield without further description.

### Parishes.

The Lindfield village community extends beyond the parish boundary of Lindfield to the south-east into Lindfield Rural Parish and the residents of this area, which would become the proposed new ward, belong to and identify with Lindfield village where they make use of public facilities including a good range of local shops, medical centre, churches and village hall.

The two Lindfield Parish Councils have been working closely together since 2012 on a joint Neighbourhood Plan, which has now been through all stages of consultation and examination and passed referendum on 28 January. The fact that the Lindfield and Lindfield Rural Neighbourhood Plan covers the full extent of both parishes is in itself evidence of community cohesion; the letter to Mid Sussex District Council formally describing the plan area for designation, stated:

*"...The area under Para5(a) is considered appropriate because it is the discrete and full area of the two Parishes and as such is the sum of two extant legal entities. We reason that working together is in the best interests of residents in both parishes because of the geographical, economic and social proximity of the parishes and the facilities shared between them"....*

In setting the context for its policies, the Plan states:

*"Lindfield has managed to retain rural separation between itself and the neighbouring settlements to the north and north-west, and east towards the hamlet of Walstead and village of Scaynes Hill. These rural*

*approaches to Lindfield are key features of the character and identity of the village, and significantly contribute to its identity as a settlement. Although over the years the similar gap between Lindfield and Haywards Heath has disappeared, the Lindfield Community still considers itself as a separate entity.”*

Residents of both parishes have made significant contributions to the development of the Neighbourhood Plan through membership of focus groups and by responding to consultations, the feedback from which reveals their shared concerns and common interests. Strengths quoted in the Neighbourhood Plan from the State of the Parishes Report, drawn from the feedback, include:

- the physical distinctiveness of Lindfield from its larger neighbour, Haywards Heath
- the community spirit
- the special character of Lindfield Common
- its community facilities, recreation areas and playgrounds in places
- its primary schools
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The Vision for 2031 as quoted in the Plan includes the statement that the parishes of Lindfield and Lindfield Rural will have remained distinct communities from the larger adjoining town of Haywards Heath.

### Boundaries

Your booklet entitled “How to propose a pattern of wards” refers to recognisable boundaries in the form of natural features and that in carrying out a review of a county council, you will try to match the boundary of the new electoral divisions as far as possible with the existing district ward boundaries.

The Scrase Stream and its brook forms a distinct natural boundary between Haywards Heath and the proposed third ward. The Parish boundary and the currently coterminous District and County ward boundaries follow the natural boundary created by this watercourse.

The proposed new ward is also within the catchment area boundary of Lindfield Primary Academy.

Haywards Heath has always been divided into wards for County, District and Town Council representation and the divisions and wards reflect the nature and interests of the areas within the town. We would suggest that there is scope within the existing Haywards Heath divisions to rebalance the electoral numbers if that is considered to be necessary, without breaking up the consistent arrangement of electoral boundaries of Lindfield that exists both at County and District Council level and which respects the wholeness and separateness of Lindfield. To remove the area covered by the proposed new ward from the Lindfield and High Weald division would fracture the unit and weaken the sense of belonging for its inhabitants.

### Identity.

Lindfield is a medieval village which grew very gradually over several centuries. Development has happened at a faster pace over the last hundred years, but without the loss of the distinctive village identity in which there is a great deal of pride.

This history of the village still has relevance and is at the root of institutions that thrive today, for example the Lindfield Bonfire Society founded in 1894 and a village charity which combines four secular parochial charities (founded in 1602, 1742, 1854 and 1881) and continues in the present day having adapted itself to respond to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A hard and long-running battle with Royal Mail was fought and finally won by a Postal Address Action Committee in December 2004, to correct the exclusion of the village name in the Postcode Address File in which Lindfield properties were addressed as Haywards Heath. Our County Councillor at the time was in support of the campaign to have the separate village identity recognised. The campaign began with letters in the local press from residents of Gravelye Lane and Rustlings Close, which are within the proposed new ward, and the following statements about the identity of Lindfield, as expressed in this correspondence remain true today and are reflected in the extracts from the Neighbourhood Plan quoted above:

*“Lindfield is not, and never has been, part of Haywards Heath. It has its own identity, post office, shops, pubs, Parish Council etc. Lindfield was established over seven hundred years before Haywards Heath came into being”.*

*“... an address style that shows the history and the unique heritage of a cherished village identity”*

Of course Haywards Heath also has many strengths and its own community identity, but, being a town and growing at a fast pace, its character is different in many ways from that of a village and the interests of its inhabitants will also differ in a number of ways from those of Lindfield residents.

The current pressure from developers to build large numbers of houses in the area is already seen by Lindfield residents as a threat to the separateness of the settlements. Any other moves perceived to have the effect of absorbing Lindfield into a “Greater Haywards Heath” should be resisted.

#### Community Groups.

The King Edward Hall in the village centre is the main community hub, in constant use by residents throughout the village for a wide range of purposes. It is home to a daily nursery school and is the venue for local dramatic club performances, monthly film shows, a weekly country market, horticultural shows, exercise classes, exhibitions, social events and meetings of organisations of which many of the residents of the proposed new ward are members, including two WIs, British Legion, Lindfield History Project Group, Lindfield Bonfire Society, Flower Club, Wine Society, Horticultural Society and the Lindfield Preservation Society.

Other venues used by the community include rooms at the three village churches, with eighteen social groups meeting regularly on church premises, scout hut, pavilions and school facilities all hired out to groups.

The Common is another centre for the community to come together for outdoor social and sporting events and informal leisure activities. The annual Lindfield Village Day and Bonfire Night celebrations draw huge crowds and are prime examples of what Lindfield is all about and how much effort residents are prepared to put into maintaining village traditions.

The two primary schools and five nursery/pre-school settings in the village also pull families closer into the community.

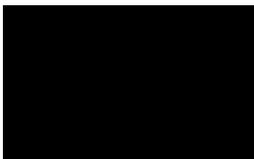
#### Facilities

Lindfield is an increasingly rare example of a much photographed picturesque village which still retains a very good range of shops, cafes, restaurants, pubs, medical centre, and business services catering for both local people and visitors. The High Street bustles every day with local people and visitors using these facilities.

#### Conclusion

All of the above points add up to the reason why people want to live here: because they identify with and want to belong to Lindfield not Haywards Heath. Separating the area of the proposed new ward and adding it to the Haywards Heath East division would not, in our view, be in the best interests of its residents. The potential harm to community cohesion and the integrity of Lindfield as a village unit would far outweigh any benefit to be derived from redistribution of a relatively small number of electors. As stated above, there may be scope within the existing Haywards Heath divisions to rebalance the electoral numbers and it may even be pertinent to suggest that this review is premature in view of the current housing developments under construction which will reshape built area boundaries around the town.

Yours faithfully,



Christine Irwin  
Parish Clerk  
Lindfield Parish Council