

COASTAL COMMUNITY GROUP

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AMENDED SUBMISSION – 30th August 2013

This amended submission from the Coastal Community Group (CCG) is in response to the Boundary Commission's Draft Proposals for our Coastal Area. The community evidence previously submitted, which we believe was generally accepted, remains the same. We now offer a possible solution to address the issue of low projected population numbers for 2019, as identified in the Commission's statement.

To include in New Romney Town Council's Ward representation, Greatstone, Lydd-on-Sea and Dungeness by the extension of the Coastal Ward to give more appropriate coastal representation than currently exists. This would provide an integrated three member ward, also unifying the village of Greatstone within one ward and ensuring relevant representation for the whole coastal development and the town to which it is joined.

OUR REASONS FOR THIS PROPOSAL

The Coastal Community Group (CCG) have serious reservations about the Boundary Commission's draft recommendation to include the coastal community in an extended Lydd ward (Waland and Denge Marsh) which will also include very small villages to the north of Lydd.

Because of the overwhelming numerical superiority of Lydd Town's electorate, the probability is that their candidates will be elected and they will ensure that the Town's interests are paramount.

We think that this recommendation goes against the concept of electoral fairness and clearly does not “reflect the interests and identities of local communities”. In one of the Commission's guidance notes, three case studies are reported. We think that the example of Goffs Oak is very similar to our situation and urge you change your draft recommendation to include our Coastal Community within a three member New Romney ward.

The draft solution for our coast to be integrated into Waland and Denge Marsh has few advantages. Its effect could well be even less representation and more disenfranchisement. The Commission are placing considerable emphasis on the population numbers for 2019 which, for the coastal area, is 'no change' as shown on Shepway District Council's projected forecast.

We are highly sceptical of the validity of these forecasts given the current employment situation, i.e. uncertainty over the commercial viability of an expanded Lydd Airport and the closure of the nuclear power stations – Shepway's largest single employer. Unfortunately this identified issue of future numbers makes no impact on the long standing problem of our coastal representation needs. The population on the coast has already expanded over the last forty to fifty years to its current level. Therefore the issue is to provide good quality and unified representation, something which the CCG and the coastal people have been trying to address over the last ten years.

The CCG have been looking into this problem of numbers and offer some evidence of municipal inequality of Town and Rural Communities, given in the following paragraph:

It is our view that a simple average does not take proper account of the discrepancy between the areas of high density urban population and sparsely populated rural areas. A more relevant measure of electoral equality is the “median”, i.e. the ward in the middle of the range between the current lowest and highest in Shepway. Based on current ward boundaries, but using Shepway's projections for 2019, this is 1825 represented by Dymchurch and St. Mary's Bay.

To illustrate the enormous variation across Shepway, the lowest ratio per councillor is in New Romney Coast (1489) and the highest in Folkestone Harvey Central (2904). The variation from the median is more than three times between the lowest and the highest.

However, using the 2019 population projection, New Romney Town 3173 + New Romney Coast 2978 + Lydd-on-Sea & Dungeness 1172 and Greatstone 943 results in a total of 8266. Therefore 8266 divided by 3 equals 2755 electors per Councillor, and this would create greater potential for local electoral equality by unifying similar communities with common representational interests. There is already a strong sense of community connection between New Romney Town and its coast which, we believe, would only be enhanced by integrating all of the coastal area of Greatstone, Lydd-on-Sea and Dungeness into one comprehensive Shepway ward.

The effect on Lydd Town would still be that it is within tolerance for a single Councillor ward which could well help Lydd to legitimately focus on its Town population and also retain a Lydd Town ward identity. The remaining elements of the Walland and Denge Marsh draft proposal could well be shared between Lydd town and New Romney and still be within the Boundary Commission's variation limits. It may also give those outlying small communities a better sense of connection to a specific town which the Walland and Denge Marsh description has little meaning for the electorate it seeks to describe.

Lydd Town and the coastal parts have completely separate identities. Greatstone, Lydd-on-Sea and Dungeness are between 4 – 6 miles from Lydd itself with a no man's land in between. The majority of coastal residents go to New Romney which has a Sainsbury's supermarket, a good variety of shops, two banks, doctors' surgeries and good transport links to Folkestone and Ashford. All in all there is greater incentive to visit and be a part of New Romney than Lydd which is a very small town with very few shops and facilities.

Coastal needs are quite separate and different from those of Lydd town, we are still charged a precept by Lydd Town Council and years down the line, are still disenfranchised with little recognition for the coastal people.

Transport

The only viable bus services to Lydd are two in the early morning and two in late evening – there are none during the day. On the other hand, the coast is served with an hourly bus service from “The Pilot” at Dungeness to New Romney, Folkestone and Dover. Another bus service terminates in Ashford.

Local Interest Groups

There are many groups that meet in Greatstone including Mums and toddlers, a retirement group, whist and scrabble, postcard and philatelic group, Yoga, dog training, Guides, W.I., crafts and a youth group.

Tourism

In Greatstone there is a Holiday Village which mainly caters for holidaymakers but has some residential dwellings. Our sandy beaches stretch for miles and are well used by families particularly in the summer months. These are also used for sand yachting and the sea for kite surfing. There are some 'listening ears' used in the War times with regular conducted visits. Dungeness has thousands of visitors over the year – a most unusual, quaint and unique area. The RSPB has a Nature Reserve – also visited by thousands over the course of a year. The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Light Railway serves visitors from Hythe to Dungeness.

CONCLUSION

The coastal residential development is contiguous and it would seem illogical to split what is already integrated geographically and attach it to a town some six miles away with no viable transport links or commonality of interests.

Reasonable representation has been available to the people of the towns of Lydd and New Romney for decades. However our expanding Coastal Community has sadly been overlooked and disregarded.

A testament to our feelings of disconnection was evident in a recent By-election in Lydd parish, which only mustered a turn out in single figures from the Greatstone and Lydd-on-Sea polling districts.

The CCG submit these views and comments to the Boundary Commission for their consideration as a solution to address the issue of projected population numbers for 2019.

These proposals have also been extensively debated at a formal meeting of New Romney Town Council on 5th August 2013 and gained their overwhelming support. They recognised the growing need and wished to grasp this opportunity to support the unity of coastal representation. It is also understood that this solution of a three councillor ward, encompassing the whole Coast and the Town of New Romney, is to be separately recommended to the Commission by New Romney Town Council.

We ask for your consideration and support for our joint proposals which we believe will enhance the relevance of representation for the whole of our local town and coast.

Submitted on behalf of the Coastal Community Group

.....Chairman Vice Chairman Secretary