

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party submission to the Consultation on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Draft Recommendations for Shepway District Council.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party is pleased to make our submission to the consultation on the Local Government Boundary Commission's Draft Recommendations for Shepway District Council.

We would also like to express and register our serious concerns about the proposals to be submitted by Shepway District Council in response to the LGBCE draft recommendations. The Council, with 42 out of 46 local district councillors being members of the Conservative Party (even though their vote decreased proportionally at the last council elections), have sought to amend the LGBCE draft recommendations in a manner which seeks to break up existing communities, nor does it seek to achieve better electoral equality. The Shepway District Council proposals are nothing short of a blatant attempt at gerrymandering on behalf of the Folkestone and Hythe Conservative Association and its councillors.

The Shepway District Council proposal to amend the west Folkestone area to create a single member ward for part of Sandgate seeks to divide a unified and established community and parish area and create disharmony within the parish. Furthermore it seeks to create a new west Folkestone ward of Folkestone Harvey to incorporate parts of the Sandgate Parish and community with the west end of Folkestone and a large proportion of rented flats and transient population east of Grimston Avenue. Furthermore it seeks to place Folkestone Central station within the new Shepway District Council proposed west Folkestone ward, thus making little sense as it continues with the name 'Folkestone Central' in a smaller Folkestone Central ward to the east. These are distinctly separate communities which have little in common and the proposal is based on ensuring an alleged enhancement to the Conservative Party's ability to win seats on Shepway District Council and Folkestone Town Council at future local elections.

The more marginal Folkestone Central area is reduced to two seats whilst the more affluent West Folkestone and Sandgate areas are increased to 3 seats with the inclusion of the large amount of rented accommodation to the east of the originally proposed boundary between the LGBCE's proposed Sandgate and Folkestone Central wards.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party is concerned that the figures presented by Council Officers to Shepway District Council's Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 28 August 2013 backing up their proposals are both inaccurate and flawed. The Shepway District Council's proposed wards of Sandgate, Folkestone Harvey and Folkestone Central equate to 12,290 in 2012 and a projected electorate of 14,227 in 2019. These proposed wards are geographically identical to the total areas of the proposed LGBCE recommendations of Sandgate and Folkestone Central wards which only equate to 11,601 electors in 2012 and 12,912 in 2019. This

discrepancy indicates flawed figures used by Shepway District Council to blatantly seek to gerrymander the proposals on behalf of the ruling Conservative Party.

Furthermore, the indicated variances for the new wards within the Council reports to the meeting indicate that there will be a projected variance in 2019 of nearly 10% for Sandgate ward, 6% for Folkestone Harvey ward and 9% for Folkestone Central. Such variances are not within the spirit of achieving electoral equality and as stated previously are clearly designed to enhance the electoral opportunity of the Conservative Party candidates. Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party request that you do not entertain the proposals from Shepway District Council about central and west Folkestone as they split established communities are not impartially balanced in their opinion nor in the evidence presented.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party is also concerned that Shepway District Council's submission is seeking to move the triangle community north of Hill Road into the proposed Folkestone East ward. Conservative Councillors who spoke at the meeting argued that they did not want this area of social housing in Folkestone Harbour as it would reduce their chances of winning the ward at the next election. There was no consideration for the feelings of the community and, as stated in the Labour Party's original submission, Dallas Brett Crescent, Keyes Place, Hill Road and Dover Road, Tyson Road and Ingoldsby Road form part of the same community. An example being the Folkestone Baptist Church located on Dover Road and serving both sides of the Dover Road whereas the Council's proposal seeks to divide this distinct community.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party's response to the Consultation on the Draft Recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for Shepway District Council are set out below.

Proposed Walland and Denge Marsh ward
Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for Walland and Denge Marsh.

Proposed New Romney ward
Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for New Romney ward.

Proposed Romney Marsh ward
Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party does not support the proposal for a Romney Marsh ward made up of Dymchurch, St. Mary's Bay, St Mary in the Marsh, Newchurch and Burmarsh.

We believe that the electorate figures offer a unique opportunity to create two single member wards, one covering Dymchurch and one covering the more rural communities of St. Mary's Bay, St Mary in the Marsh, Newchurch and Burmarsh. Dymchurch is a more established coastal community of 3,102 electors compared to the smaller and more transient St. Mary's Bay further along the coast which has

considerably less history having only been created in the 1950s and 1960s as a popular holiday destination.

The communities are very different, with Dymchurch having a large number of established local clubs and societies such as the Dymchurch Football Centre, Dymchurch Cricket Club, Dymchurch Rainbow Guides and the Dymchurch Players. It has its own vibrant centre with four pubs and is very much a distinct community in its own right with many families able to trace their heritage back over hundreds of years or more to the local area, with key features such as the Norman Church of Dymchurch which was built in 1150 and the sea wall which was first built in Roman times.

Other key features of Dymchurch are the Dymchurch Martello Towers built in the nineteenth century as part of an Empire-wide coastal defence programme during the Napoleonic Wars which have been restored to former glories as a visitor attraction and the two redoubt forts constructed into the south coast Martello chain to act as supply depots for the local Martellos, and were originally described as "eleven-gun towers". A four-gun tower was originally proposed at Dymchurch, but this idea was revised at the Rochester conference of 1804. Dymchurch Redoubt was built between 1806 and 1809. Dymchurch underwent significant re-fortification during the Second World War, with bunkers and pillboxes adorning its parapets. The gun platforms were encased in concrete for machine guns to be mounted, artillery emplacements constructed and an observation post erected and was the site of the first local fatalities of the war in 1940 during German bombing raids and casualties continued through to May 1944, 22 soldiers were killed by the explosion of anti-tank grenades at Dymchurch. It was also in Dymchurch that the first recorded sightings of the German V1 flying bomb were recorded.

Dymchurch is also famous for the Scot Tax first implemented in the sixteenth century levied on residents to fund maintenance of the sea wall. Those directly outside the boundaries and thus not eligible for the tax were said to have got away "Scott Free", a phrase still heard today throughout the English speaking world. Residents with land were required to grow thorn bushes for building of the wall, as thorn twigs were believed impervious to sea water and failure resulted in an ear being cut off. Dymchurch residents are proud of their history and contribution to the nation and continue to maintain a distinct identity to other areas of the Romney Marshes. With a current electorate of 3,102 and a projected electorate of 3,102, it makes it an ideal opportunity to reflect this distinct community and have a Dymchurch ward with one councillor and a projected variance of 5%.

In contrast, the St. Mary's Bay coastal community further along the coast is more transient in nature with more second home owners, and is an area which has only evolved recently as a community in its own right. Additionally there are a large number of holiday homes, parks and caravan parks in the area further adding to the transient feel of the community there. St Mary's Bay has a small modern church of All Saints, located on Jefferstone Lane and is part of the parish of St Mary in the Marsh. It has a small recent community centred around the tiny local retail community featuring a post office and newsagents but the focus on shopping tends to be towards the large new Sainsbury's at New Romney.

The older communities of St Mary in the Marsh, Newchurch and Burmarsh have long and ancient historical records as tiny communities with key historical churches on the Romney Marsh. The history has always been separate from the growing Dymchurch area and for them to maintain their unique identities as Romney Marsh communities and not be encompassed into the politics of the large Dymchurch parish. Many of these settlements are included in the Domesday Book and residents see themselves as very much part of separate communities as demonstrated by various consultation exercises that have taken place in the area.

Based on this evidence, the Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party proposes two separate wards for the area of Dymchurch with 3,102 electors and a variance of 5% and a single councillor Romney Marsh ward of St. Mary's Bay, St Mary in the Marsh, Newchurch and Burmarsh with a current electorate of 2,908 and a variance of 6% and a projected electorate of 3,180 electors and a variance of 7%.

Proposed Hythe Rural ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for proposed boundary for Hythe Rural ward. However we feel that the name should more aptly reflect the two communities which make up the proposed area and give equal weight to each within the new ward name.

Palmarsh, the area to the west of Hythe, is the largest community within the new proposed ward area. It has its own primary school, the Palmarsh Primary School, which has as one of key aims and objectives "to promote a sense of belonging and our local community" and the school shares grounds with 'First Steps Nursery & Playgroup' for pre-school children age 2 to 4 years and the 'Lullabies' baby unit. Palmarsh developed after World War II as Hythe continued to grow west and is now a vibrant community in its own right with their own shops, doctors and dentist and is very separate and distinct from Hythe. The area cannot really be described as rural and therefore the proposed name for the ward of 'Hythe Rural' is clearly a misnomer.

The other distinct community in the proposed ward is that of Lymgne, which is steeped in history and overlooked by Lymgne castle built in around 500AD. It has a thriving village community with lots of local shops and a village pub.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party therefore propose the new proposed ward of Hythe Rural should be called 'Palmarsh and Lymgne' to reflect the two main communities in the ward area.

Proposed Hythe Ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for Hythe ward however we are disappointed that the Commission did not seize the opportunity to look at re-warding for Hythe Town Council to ensure better electoral equality. We are nonetheless pleased to see that common sense has prevailed and Saltwood parish now forms part of the new Hythe ward as it is clearly an extension of the Hythe town centre with no discernible boundaries.

Proposed North Downs West

Following amendment of the projected electorate figures by Shepway District Council in May 2013 given that the proposed development at Folkestone Racecourse will no longer happen by 2019, Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party is concerned that the proposed ward of North Downs West now has a variation of -8% from the average based on current electorate figures and a projected variation of -10% from the average in 2019.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party consider that this large variation can be overcome by placing the parish of Newington in the new proposed ward area of North Downs West. Newington parish area is part of the Kent County Council seat of Elham Valley that covers the area that includes the whole of the proposed North Downs West ward. As such it already has strong community links with Lyminge and Etchinghill offering alternative dentists and doctor's surgeries to those more over-stretched services in Cheriton, Folkestone. The Lyminge Bowls Club and Etchinghill Golf Club have a number of members from Newington and Peene which reflects the gentrified nature of the area. The residents of Newington and Peene see themselves as a distinct rural community to Folkestone and it would be more appropriate for them to be within a more rural ward compared to the urban sprawl of Hawkinge in North Downs East to which there are significantly fewer road transport links and a requirement to change buses in the Folkestone area to access the North Downs east ward. In comparison there are direct services from Newington to the Lyminge area.

By placing the parish of Newington in North Downs West, the electorate would be 5,378 and a variation of -2% based on the current electorate and 5,638 and a variation of -5% based on the projected electorate. This fairer electoral equality would be welcomed by Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party and ensure that the more rural areas do not receive over-representation compared to the urban ones.

Proposed North Downs East ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party supports the proposed North Downs East ward with the exception of the inclusion of the parish of Newington. By removing the 304 electors within Newington parish to the more appropriate ward of North Downs West with which there are closer ties with those communities, the electorate figures are reduced to 8,187 based on current electorate with a variation of less than 1% and 8,810 based on projected electorate with a variance of virtually the same as currently and less than 1%.

Proposed Cheriton and Morehall ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for Cheriton and Morehall ward as this accurately reflects the communities within the ward.

Proposed Sandgate ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for Sandgate ward as this conveniently links the two similar highly

educated and wealthier aspirational communities either side of Cooling Lane. The proposal also ensures that the parish of Sandgate remains whole and intact.

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party is concerned at the immediate electoral inequality of -24% and the projected electorate inequality of -6% by 2019 if all developments are successfully in place. We do not have full confidence in the ability of Shepway District Council to encourage and nurture fully the proposed developments within the proposed ward, based on a track record of failure to get other developments off the ground. In light of this, Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party would favour the eastern boundary for the ward being extended to down the middle of Grimston Avenue, thus ensuring a more balanced and objective variation in the figures for the proposed ward of Sandgate and similar properties and elector community

The proposed ward name of Sandgate should be amended to reflect the small number of West Folkestone electors contained within the ward whilst still recognising the predominant Sandgate community. Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party therefore support the name of 'Sandgate and West Folkestone' for the new proposed ward.

Proposed Folkestone Central ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for Folkestone Central as it accurately reflects the central Folkestone community and has the main railway station of Folkestone Central within the proposed ward boundary.

Proposed Folkestone Park ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for of the boundary for Folkestone Park ward however Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the name of 'Broadmead Village' for the new ward.

The current Folkestone Park ward has been significantly decreased in terms of electorate and geography when compared to the new proposed Folkestone Park ward. Residents in the area have expressed a desire to us for a change in the name to reflect the new ward boundary which has Broadmead Village as the predominant main urban conurbation within the ward and is at the very heart of this new ward. Road signs, such as those which lead into the ward from the junction of Cornwallis Avenue and Cheriton Road signpost the area as Broadmead Village and all of the bus routes provided by Stagecoach into the ward are indicated as going to Broadmead Village on their signage on the front of the bus and on timetables for the general public. The only independent grocer shop and off licence in the ward is the Village Fayre on Broadmead Village Green alongside the only public house in the ward, the Master Brewer at Broadmead Village. The name Folkestone Park referred to Radnor Park which used to be a more integrated feature of the previous ward area when the boundaries formally went across Radnor Park Road and up Bournemouth Road. This is no longer the case and there is no local support for the continued use of this name as residents have bought or rented homes in the Broadmead Village area as propagated by local estate agents. It is a distinct community very much

different to the rest of Folkestone where residents seek to stay because of its unique nature and features such as the green and pond with ducks. It also has a very distinct history from the rest of Folkestone dating back to the 13th century when it was a separate manor to the rest of Folkestone and which is one that history continues to the present day, as Broadmead still has its own court baron.

Proposed Folkestone East ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for the boundary of Folkestone East ward. We are pleased that the boundary accurately reflects the East Folkestone community. However the name of the new ward should be 'East Folkestone' to more accurately reflect this and how the area is usually referred to by local residents. The old Folkestone East railway station is actually in the proposed Folkestone Harbour ward and therefore it is illogical to call the ward Folkestone East as it does not accurately reflect the history or how the area is referred to.

Proposed Folkestone Harbour ward

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendation for Folkestone Harbour ward however we would favour the ward name of 'Folkestone Harbour and East Cliff' to reflect the inclusion of the community that lives further north from the harbour adjacent to the Warren and East Cliff countryside park areas off Wear Bay Road.

Proposed Folkestone Town Council wards

Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party support the LGBCE draft recommendations for the warding arrangements of Folkestone Town Council with the exception that the proposed single member ward of Folkestone North East is incorporated into the proposed Folkestone Harbour ward of Folkestone Town Council. If the Commission were minded to accept this then the new Folkestone Town Council ward should also be called 'Folkestone Harbour and East Cliff'.

Approved on Friday 6 September 2013 by Folkestone and Hythe CLP Executive Committee and Folkestone and Rural BLP and Hythe and Romney Marsh BLP Campaign Teams