

Russell Tillson



Shepway District Council

District/County officer



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"SUBMISSION TO THE LGBCE ON SHEPWAY DISTRICT COUNCIL WARD BOUNDARIES

1. I made a lengthy submission to the LGBCE at the first stage of the consultation process, arguing the council's case for a reduction in the number of seats from 46 to 38 rather than 30, in line with the unanimous resolution of the full council. In the event the LGBCE has decided that the number of seats shall be 30, albeit without any explanation of the decision. This conclusion was deeply disappointing, since the effect is to increase the average number of electors in Shepway to practically 3000 per councillor, and rather more in the Romney Marsh wards. I continue to regard this outcome as undesirable so far as councillor recruitment and workload after 2015 are concerned, while it is certainly out of line with every other District in Kent.
2. The purpose of this brief submission is not, however, to re-open the numbers issue, since I recognise that the LGBCE decision is set in stone. The council has worked hard to devise a new warding arrangement for a council of 30 members, and has come up with a workable solution that seeks to make the best of a bad job. Given the external constraints under which officers were required to operate, I am broadly happy with the proposed boundaries, and will therefore confine my remarks to a small number of cases where I believe there might be a better arrangement. I note in passing that councillors who represent the more rural areas will now have to cover a vast geographical area.
3. The proposed new two member ward, Romney Marsh, is inappropriately named. The Romney Marsh covers over a hundred square miles, and extends into East Sussex. It is made up of several distinctive areas, which are as follows: the historical Romney Marsh, which is north of a line between New Romney and Appledore, the western part of which is in the adjacent constituency of Ashford; the Walland Marsh, which is south of that line and which extends to approximately the Kent/East Sussex border; the East Guldeford Level, which is further south, and extends as far as Rye, in East Sussex; the Denge Marsh, south east of the town of Lydd, and including Denge Beach and Dungeness; the Rother Levels, around the Isles of Oxney; and the Rye, Winchelsea and Pett Levels, all of which are in East Sussex. The proposed new two member ward, encompassing Dymchurch, St. Mary's Bay, St. Mary-in-the-Marsh, Newchurch and Burmarsh, would be much more appropriately named **ROMNEY MARSH EAST**.
4. There is a strong case for dividing Romney Marsh (East) into two single member wards. Prior to the last local government re-organisation, Dymchurch and Burmarsh made up a ward, and could do so again, with a total projected electorate of 3453. St. Mary's Bay, St. Mary-in-the-Marsh and Newchurch would then form a

separate ward, with a total projected electorate of 2,903. In practice, there is likely to be an electorate greater than this by December 2018, since the parish council of St.Mary-in-the-Marsh is currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, which provides for residential development on the old Sands Motel site, among other sites, all of which is over and above the old Potato Site housing development that is allowed for in the council's projections. Both single member wards would have electorates in the upper range of the permissible variation, but then this is inevitable given that the (previously 11 seat) whole Romney Marsh area is inevitably under-represented in the council's proposals, with an entitlement of about 6.3 seats rather than the six allocated. Furthermore, I sit on the parish councils of both Dymchurch and St. Mary-in-the-Marsh, and historical antipathies between Dymchurch and St. Mary's Bay mean that neither wishes to be part of a new ward that includes the other. If the two single member wards option were adopted, it would then also enable the retention of the traditional names of Dymchurch and St. Mary's Bay in the two ward titles.

5. The proposed new two member ward, Walland and Denge Marsh, is being provided with a name that will be entirely unfamiliar to most electors, most of whom live in the town of Lydd. The alternative designation, ROMNEY MARSH WEST, would be appreciably more appropriate, not least because electors there believe (rightly) that they live in the Romney Marsh. Such nomenclature would also have the advantage of consistency with the neighbouring ward of Romney Marsh East., should the proposal advanced in Point 4 above be rejected.

6. There are currently two members in New Romney Coast ward and two in New Romney Town ward. The council's proposals provide for a reduction from four to two, AND an amalgamation of the two wards. The first makes numerical sense, but the second cannot readily be justified. The New Romney Coast ward is in fact made up of the communities of Greatstone and Littlestone, and has a distinctive coastal flavour. To quote from the council's submission, "the two communities, joined by the coast, are very different from New Romney Town, and with an older age profile." I therefore strongly recommend the retention of two separate wards, each with a single member. The projected electorate for New Romney Town is 3173, while that for New Romney Coast is 2,878. Two separate wards therefore meet the numerical criteria. I would go one stage further, and rename New Romney Coast, Greatstone and Littlestone, since in no sense do most of the residents there regard themselves as living in a town.

I am grateful for your kind consideration of the issues I have raised.

Cllr. Russell Tillson
SDC Cabinet Member for Localism and Councillor for Dymchurch and St.
Mary's Bay
Vice-Chairman of Dymchurch Parish Council and Member of St.Mary-in-the-Marsh
Parish Council

1st April 2013

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