

Mayers, Mishka

From: Ken Leadbeater [REDACTED]
Sent: 05 December 2017 03:43
To: reviews
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTORAL REVIEW

Dear Sir

**DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTORAL REVIEW
CONSULTATION IN WARDING ARRANGEMENTS
COMMENTS ON THE DBC DRAFT SCHEME AND SUBMISSION**

I write as a member of the public and a registered elector in Sutton-at-Hone.

I have read the report to Dartford Borough Council on 30 November 2017 on their Ward Arrangements Submission and I am writing to make a series of comments on the DBC proposals. I have written separately to express opposition to DBC's proposal to realign the boundary between Hawley and Sutton-at-Hone

The proposals represent a fundamental change to the electoral arrangements of Dartford Borough. They are far more radical than the changes implemented for the 1976 or the 2003 elections. This is out of necessity, partly because of the reduction from 44 to 42 members, but mainly because the extensive new development planned in North Dartford and Ebbsfleet gives an entitlement to 1 and 3 members respectively, which further reduces the entitlement of the existing communities.

Dartford Council has approached the task in an organised and professional manner. Whilst some of the proposals are far-reaching and controversial, it is hard to fault the methodology adopted by Dartford.

The officers have taken the opportunity to redraft the external parish boundaries, where they are no longer easily identifiable, for example where the line of a watercourse has changed over the years, or where boundaries have become indistinct through afforestation. Whilst laudable in its intention, the result of this is that Dartford has drafted some borough ward boundaries which do not dovetail with the parish boundaries. The Commission cannot make recommendations to amend the external boundaries of parishes and it is a matter which is determined locally by a Community Governance Review. The officer report to Dartford Council recommended the commencement of a Community Governance Review, so that revised parish boundaries can come into effect for the 2019.

I am assuming that the Commission, when publishing its draft proposals in February 2018, will revert to the current parish boundaries. Any minor adjustments arising out of the Community Governance Review can be dealt with by a Related Alterations Order.

The report to Council has also breached county electoral division boundaries in at least two places, Gore Road, Darenth and Bluewater Shopping Centre, creating the requirement to create parish wards containing no or very few electors. Again, I am assuming that the Commission will revert to the current county electoral division boundaries, until they can be amended by a Related Alterations Order.

Yours faithfully

Kenneth Leadbeater

I will deal with the wards proposed by Dartford in order.

1. BRIDGE

This ward seems to fit the criteria. The discussion refers to the "Bridge Community". The development, however, is known and marketed as "The Bridge", see <https://www.taylorwimpey.co.uk/find-your-home/england/kent/dartford>

Bridge suggests a confusion with Dartford Bridge, crossing the River Thames, which also looms over part of Stone ward to the east.

I suggest, therefore, that this ward be named “The Bridge” to reflect accurately the name of the development.

2. STONE

This ward is similar to the existing ward of Stone, except that it acquires the part of Milestone polling district south of London Road from Newtown and it cedes the new development around Chapel Drive (formerly the Stone House Hospital site) to Hesketh.

DBC is proposing the boundary between Hesketh and Stone to run down the centre of Cotton Lane. DBC has a development masterplan for Stone Lodge on the eastern side of Cotton Lane, which includes a new secondary school and 1.9 ha of residential. This development faces across Cotton Lane to the Chapel Drive development and would appear to have a closer affinity here than with the houses to the south in Stone St. John’s. I suggest that the area of Stone Lodge, coloured green on the DBC map be included in Hesketh ward. This will improve parity both for Hesketh and for Stone.

Stone ward also cedes Bluewater Shopping Centre (no electorate) to Ebbsfleet ward. As it is not possible to form a parish ward with no electorate, I suggest that Bluewater Shopping Centre remains in Stone ward. This transfer may well be considered as part of the upcoming ROCG review, but is likely to be controversial.

3. GREENHITHE

I support the inclusion of Stone (Castle ward) in Greenhithe, together with Swanscombe Marshes from Swanscombe ward. This will place the whole river frontage (Thames Waterfront Priority Area) in one ward, including the London Resort Theme Park.

4. KNOCKHALL

I support this proposed ward, noting that the development area in the south of the ward (Eastern Quarry) is now included in Ebbsfleet ward. The western boundary will need to follow the parish boundary, rather than the centre of St. Clement’s Way, until the ROCG review is completed.

5. SWANSCOMBE

I support this proposed ward, noting that Alkerden Farm to the south is transferred to Ebbsfleet ward. However, the long-established Taunton Road and the new residential area on Black Eagle Drive, close to the Gravesham border and to the south of Galley Hill Road, has been placed in Ebbsfleet ward. This community would seem to have greater affinity with Swanscombe, than with Ebbsfleet – particularly Taunton Road, which was part of the old Swanscombe Urban District pre-reorganisation.

6. EBBSFLEET

This bizarrely shaped ward is formed to encompass the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation area. This ward seems more like a planner’s dream than reflecting the reality of communities on the ground. The core of the ward are the developments on the former Eastern Quarry and on the electricity sub-station site to the east of Eastern Quarry (Castle Hill), still in early stages. Further development is planned to the north around Ebbsfleet Station, which is likely to progress as a separate community.

Elsewhere DBC has spoken of physical boundaries and respecting physical barriers – yet here DBC has ignored two very stark physical barriers.

Firstly this ward incorporates the long-established Taunton Road and the new residential area on Black Eagle Drive, although this small community is separated from the rest of the ward by the Gravesend to Dartford railway line, with crossing points only in Swanscombe ward and Gravesham. Residents must pass through the centre of Swanscombe to reach the rest of the proposed ward. The nearest housing is at Castle Hill, well over a mile away.

Secondly this ward incorporates Bluewater Shopping Centre (no population) from Stone ward. Bluewater is separated from the remainder of the ward by the massive barrier of an elevated causeway of the B255 (St. Clement’s Way). The only access between the two is a small tunnel for maintenance and working. In the fullness of time, it is planned to open up the tunnel to run buses under the causeway, but the B255 will remain a barrier, with the occupants of buildings on either side unable to see across.

The southern boundary of the ward will need to follow the existing parish boundary between Swanscombe & Greenhithe and Southfleet parishes, rather than Watling Street. Presumably a ROCG review will transfer Springhead Nursery from Southfleet parish to Swanscombe & Greenhithe parish in due course.

One concern is that the current electorate of this ward is less than 1,000, whereas most 3-member wards have a current electorate around 6,000. This means that there will be a considerable democratic deficit here for the 2019 elections, although the development may catch up by 2023. The residents of Ebbsfleet will be substantially over-represented in the early years.

**7. BEAN AND VILLAGE PARK
20. DARENTH**

I have some difficulty with these two proposed 1-member wards. Bean and Darent has worked well as a 3-member ward for the last 14 years, combining the two parishes. Bean has closer links with Ladywood and Lane End via Shellbank Lane, rather than with the new development of Darent Park, which is accessible from Bean only via several roundabouts and the busy A296. Darent Park's links are with Lane End, an easy walk down Gore Road or through the Darent Country Park.

I have never heard of Village Park before. The new development on the old Darent Park Hospital site is called "Darent Park" by everyone round and about. If the Commission sticks with two 1-member wards, then I suggest that it calls this ward "Bean and Darent Park".

A better solution would be to retain a single 2-member ward, Bean and Darent, broadly on the same boundaries as the current ward – and preserving the close links between Darent Park, Lane End and Ladywood. I strongly recommend this solution, which gives a variation of less than 1%.

There was a proposal to realign the western boundary, which runs currently down the centre of Gore Road, along the backs of the houses on the west side of Gore Road, so that the Gore Road properties are transferred into Bean and Village Park (Dartford Rural county electoral division). This makes community sense. Unfortunately, these properties are currently in Fleet Downs parish ward, which is in the Dartford East county electoral division, but the electorate of some 60 is insufficient for a separate parish ward. Until the ROCG review, I suggest that the boundary remains down the middle of Gore Road.

8 and 9. BRENT

I support this ward fully, without comment.

10. HESKETH

This ward is very similar to the existing Newtown ward, with the addition of the Stone House Hospital development site from Stone and of the Hesketh Park area from Brent, which is added to improve the electoral ratio, according to the DBC report.

I have suggested above that the ward is extended at its eastern extremity to incorporate the Stone Lodge development (see under Stone above).

My main objection is to the name. Sir Everard Hesketh did donate Hesketh Park to the people of Dartford around 1905 and his portrait hangs in the Civic Centre – but Hesketh Park is a fairly tight locality and electors in Overy Street to the west of this ward, or the Bow Arrow Lane development to the east of this ward, will not easily associate with the name Hesketh.

Newtown has been a ward name for 41 years, although, strictly speaking, Newtown ends at the M25, whereas this ward extends considerably beyond the M25, to the east of it. We have a West Hill ward and I suggest that the name "East Hill" will evoke much more familiarity and understanding from the electors than Hesketh, or even Newtown.

**11. TEMPLE HILL
12. TOWN**

I support these wards fully, without comment.

**13. WEST HILL
14. HEATH**

I support the boundaries of these wards fully, although there is an electoral imbalance. DBC has already transferred a group of roads back from Heath to West Hill (Somerset Road, Bath Road, Gloucester Road, Sullivan Close and part of Shepherds Lane). These roads were transferred into Heath ward at the last review in 2000.

If the Commission wish to improve the parity of these two wards, I would suggest transferring Havelock Road, Helen Close and Western Terrace from Heath to West Hill, about 300 electors.

15. BROOKLANDS
16. JOYDENS WOOD

I support these wards fully, without comment.

17 and 18. WILMINGTON AND HAWLEY
19. SUTTON-AT-HONE

Wilmington and Hawley ward preserves the unity of the parish of Wilmington, which is strung out along Oakfield Lane and challenged by the A2 cutting through it. The parish has a strong community identity through its various sections. Leyton Cross and Wilmington Village around High Road are strongly connected, within easy walking distance, with the three Wilmington Secondary Schools sandwiched between them.

DBC's proposal also brings into the ward Carsington Gardens, Oakfield Lane, Oakfield Park Road, The Spires and Hawley Road west, which were placed rather awkwardly in Princes ward under the previous review. This is a much better solution. These roads have more in common with the adjacent parish roads, than with the estate in the unparished area to the north.

It is unfortunate that some 400 Wilmington parish electors remain outside the ward in Brooklands, but this ward is a significant improvement on the current arrangement.

To sever Hawley from Sutton-at-Hone is highly unsatisfactory, but the electoral arithmetic makes it inevitable.

Under separate cover, I have objected strongly to the proposed realignment of the boundary between Hawley and Sutton-at-Hone. My suggestion of returning Royal Road and Hawley Road south of the M25 back into Wilmington and Hawley ward will improve the parity of both these proposed wards.

21. LONGFIELD, NEW BARN AND SOUTHFLEET

The existing ward is very satisfactory. Despite the recent developments to the immediate east of Longfield station, the ward has insufficient electorate to sustain 3-members. So the hamlet of Green Street Green has been moved into this ward from Bean and Darenth.

In community terms, Green Street Green has a long association with Darenth. It was an integral part of Darenth parish long before the establishment of civil parish councils. It is on the road out of Darenth and towards Longfield, but it is not part of Longfield. This transfer is for electoral parity, rather than improving community ties.

PARISH ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

STONE PARISH

Stone Parish Council has 12 members elected from 5 parish wards in 2 county electoral divisions. The existing Milestone and St. John's parish wards are split between the proposed Stone and Hesketh wards. It is suggested that the new parish wards are settled as follows:

Proposed Hesketh ward

- Milestone – currently part of Milestone parish ward – Newtown – Dartford North East (1 member)
- Chapel – currently part of St. John's parish ward – Stone – Dartford East (1 member)

Proposed Stone ward

- Rosedale – currently part of Milestone parish ward – Newtown – Dartford North East (1 member)
- St. John's – currently part of St. John's parish ward – Stone – Dartford East (2 members)
- Stone Village – currently Stone Village parish ward – Stone – Dartford East (2 members)
- Horns Cross – currently Horns Cross parish ward – Stone – Dartford East (2 members)

Proposed Greenhithe ward

Castle – currently Castle parish ward – Castle – Dartford East (3 members)

I have suggested Chapel as the name for the part of St. John's parish ward transferred into Hesketh, because it is the site of the former Stone House Hospital and the Victorian chapel has been imaginatively converted into residential accommodation. Chapel Drive is the centre of the new development.

St. John's, Stone Village and Horns Cross are three separate communities within the parish with distinctly separate identities. This is reflected by the three separate parish wards, which have been in existence for 30 years. These are well known and understood by local residents. Whilst the Commission may be inclined to combine these three into one parish ward, returning six members – this will confuse the electorate, submerge separate communities into one entity and result in a large parish ward covering half of the parish and outweighing the remaining areas of the parish.

SWANSCOMBE AND GREENHITHE PARISH (TOWN COUNCIL)

Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council has 20 members elected from 4 parish wards, all within the Swanscombe and Greenhithe county electoral division.

The parish will cover four of the proposed borough wards and it is suggested that each of these forms a parish ward.

Ebbsfleet (projected electorate – 6,531) – 7 members
Greenhithe (projected electorate – 6,288) – 6 members
Knockhall (projected electorate – 2,319) – 2 members
Swanscombe (projected electorate – 4,671) – 5 members

DARENTH PARISH

Darenth Parish Council has 12 members elected from 5 parish wards in 2 county electoral divisions.

The parish will straddle four of the proposed borough wards, with most of Green Street Green parish ward transferred to Longfield, New Barn and Southfleet.

The projected electorates for the five existing parish wards are:

Darenth Park – 731
Fleet Downs – 613
Green Street Green – 210
Ladywood – 1,024
Lane End – 1,152

It is suggested that the new parish wards are settled as follows:

Proposed Bean and Village Park ward

Darenth Park – currently Darenth Park parish ward – Bean and Darenth – Dartford Rural (2 members)

Proposed Brent Ward

Fleet Downs – currently Fleet Downs parish ward – Brent – Dartford East (2 members)

Proposed Darenth ward

Ladywood – currently Ladywood parish ward and a small part of Green Street Green parish ward – Bean and Darenth – Dartford Rural (3 members)

Lane End – currently Lane End parish ward – Bean and Darenth – Dartford Rural (4 members)

Proposed Longfield, New Barn and Southfleet ward

Green Street Green – currently the larger part of Green Street Green parish ward – Bean and Darenth – Dartford Rural (1 member))

Ladywood and Lane End are two separate communities within the parish with distinctly separate identities. This is reflected by the two separate parish wards, which have been in existence for 30 years. These are well known and understood by local residents. Whilst the Commission may be inclined to combine these two into one parish ward, returning seven members – this will confuse the electorate, submerge separate communities into one entity and result in a large parish ward covering nearly two-thirds of the parish and outweighing the remaining areas of the parish.

WILMINGTON PARISH

Wilmington Parish Council has 9 members elected from 3 parish wards, all within the Wilmington county electoral division.

The parish will form part of three proposed borough wards and it is suggested that each of these parts forms a parish ward. The existing Orange Tree parish ward in Princes ward is divided between the proposed wards of Brooklands and Wilmington and Hawley. I estimate the projected electorate of each part to be 400 and 317.

Thus the projected electorates for the three parish wards are:

Birchwood – 1,857

Brooklands – 400

Central – 3,651

Proposed Brooklands ward

Brooklands – currently part of Orange Tree parish ward – Princes – Wilmington – 1 member

Proposed Joydens Wood ward

Birchwood – currently Birchwood parish ward – Joydens Wood – Wilmington – 3 members

Proposed Wilmington and Hawley ward

Central – currently Central parish ward and part of Orange Tree parish ward – Wilmington and Princes – Wilmington – 5 members