



## **SWANSCOMBE AND GREENHITHE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION**

**'By Residents for Residents'**

**2 MERIEL WALK, INGRESS PARK, GREENHITHE, KENT, DA9 9GL**

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

Swanscombe and Greenhithe Residents' Association (SGRA) is a community group with over 1,500 members from the traditional community of Swanscombe and Greenhithe. This area is clearly defined in our constitution as the current Borough Wards of Castle, Greenhithe and Swanscombe. The twin areas of Swanscombe and Greenhithe have historically been a single community with a strong sense of its own identity; acknowledging and celebrating a greater common heritage. Our principle purpose, as an independent Residents' Association, is to support the wellbeing, environment, and amenities available to all residents of Swanscombe and Greenhithe. This principle ensures effective representation for all local residents; which is demonstrated by the SGRA currently holding twenty-one of the elected Councillor positions within Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town.

These Councillors serve on the Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council (SGTC); Dartford Borough Council (DBC) and Kent County Council (KCC). The SGRA welcomes this opportunity to participate in shaping the future democratic landscape in Dartford.

The SGRA recognises the work already undertaken in determining Council size in Dartford and believes the decision to recommend forty-two councillors will be effective. Based on the current total Borough electorate of 88,995 and the proposal for 42 members, this will mean that each DBC Councillor should have a target electorate of about 2,119. We believe this will provide an appropriate balance between strong, effective local governance as well as having the capacity of democratically elected representatives to maintain a meaningful connection with the residents that have elected them.

The current boundaries and representation are generally perceived to work very well in providing good local governance for residents. Additionally, the SGRA recognises that there is always scope for improvement and as such there is a particular need to address current elector inequalities within Swanscombe and Greenhithe. These thoughts are based on for an examination and meaningful revision to accommodate the planned, large population growth in certain areas. Looking at the electoral data provided by DBC through the Commission's website, the current wards of Castle, Greenhithe and Swanscombe have an electorate of 12,990. According to the DBC forecast, this is set to grow by 50.55% in the five years from the completion of the review. This will therefore bring the figure of approximately 19,556 in 2023 and would equate to a need for nine DBC Councillors as representatives within the current area by 2023.

Polling Ward	2017	Forecast 2023
DA – Greenhithe	2971	3285
DB – Knockhall	2610	7087
NA - Swanscombe	2226	3339
NB – Craylands	1542	1923
NC – Galley Hill	1523	1523
CA – Castle	2118	2339
TOTAL	12990	19556

### **Current Swanscombe Ward**

The SGRA suggests there should be no boundary changes to the Swanscombe Borough ward, or to the number of DBC Councillors representing that ward.

#### Background

Swanscombe is a historical settlement and community on the eastern side of the DBC boundary, partly located within the Ebbsfleet Garden City designated area. It has a vibrant commercial centre, leisure facilities, schools, places of worship and open spaces.

The area currently has three DBC Councillors for its 2017 electorate of 5,291; which is due to rise by 2023 to a forecasted electorate of 6,845 – 108% of the average, which is slightly above but within tolerance

Although divided into three polling wards (NA Swanscombe, NB Craylands and NC Galley Hill), there are no obvious natural or man-made barriers that could be used to logically divide the community; nor is there any perceived need locally why this would be desirable or beneficial.

With specific regards to voter equality, the status as of April 2017 had minimal variation from the Borough average. Although leaving this unchanged will mean the number of registered voters will be slightly under the DBC average in 2017 at 1,765; they will slightly exceed the average as the population growth continues in line with forecasts at 2,282 in 2023.

Maintaining the current coverage of three DBC Councillors would make sense, maintaining the reasonable relationship between the number of allocated Councillors and registered voters over the next five years.

### **Current Greenhithe Ward**

The SGRA recommends no changes to the core Greenhithe Borough ward boundaries or to the number of Councillors representing the community.

However, as considerable population growth is already underway to the south of this ward, the SGRA recommends creation of a new ward of Ebbsfleet, with two Borough Councillors.

#### Background

Greenhithe is an historical settlement and community bordered by the River Thames to the north, and the A2 trunk road to the south. Swanscombe is to the east and Stone Parish to the west. The community is centred on the London Road, which is its main thoroughfare.

This has enabled strong links to Ebbsfleet Garden City in that the residents have already been forged with the new school; in addition the SGRA committee has representations from this area.

The area currently has three Borough Councillors. Its 2017 electorate is 5,581, rising to a forecasted 10,372 in 2023.

The greater part of this electorate growth is in fact part of the Ebbsfleet Garden City historically linked to Swanscombe and Greenhithe. This development is in the areas to the south and east of the established community and known colloquially as 'Eastern Quarry' and 'the previous substation site'. We understand this has already been recognised by DBC with the recent introduction of a new polling ward called 'Cherry Orchard'.

#### **Greenhithe 2019 Polling Ward 2017 Electors**

Abbey	1,791
Knockhall	2,286
Village	1,179
Cherry Orchard	348

The SGRA proposes that the border should be the southern edge of the road that starts as Mounts Road in the west at the junction of the B255, continues as Alkerden Lane until it meets the southern boundary of the existing Swanscombe Ward. The new ward would be to the south and the current Greenhithe ward to the north. The community believe that this is a common sense boundary marking the older, established community of Greenhithe from the emerging, rapidly developing community within the Ebbsfleet Development Corporations area of responsibility.

Separating the existing Greenhithe ward in any other way would clearly break up the community's coherence. The community facilities that bind local residents such as the library, doctor's surgery, parish church, primary school, convenience stores, Royal British Legion and most of the public open spaces are close to either side of this road. The area shares a busy transport hub for trains and buses at Greenhithe Station but also has a number of connecting services running between the communities. There is an active and vibrant community life within Greenhithe. This is exemplified in how the whole of Greenhithe came together to raise funds for a new war memorial. These facilities that are situated either on or near London Road serve our community. We are proud to support the Annual Greenhithe Regatta organised by the Cambria Sea Scouts with the assistance of local residents. The natural environment – The River Thames, Parks & Open Spaces, play areas together with many local events organised by the Town Council that bring the whole community together in the many parks and river front in Greenhithe overall.

Maintaining the current coverage of three Borough councillors in Greenhithe provides greater resilience for electoral equality and makes for a homogenous area set to absorb growth over the next five years. Growth, excluding the Ebbsfleet development areas, in Greenhithe will be in line with the two neighbouring wards of Stone and Swanscombe. The status as of voter equality as April 2017 has a variation from the new 2,119 Borough average at 1,860. However, as development identified by DBC for housing development is completed, this is set to evolve to closer to the average at 2,083. For the new ward of Ebbsfleet, this is expected to be 2,400 for the two members by 2023.

## **Current Castle Ward**

The SGRA would recommend no changes to the Castle Ward as it stands.

This ward currently experiences a greater degree of electoral inequality than most other wards, with the electorate is predicted to rise by 10.4% to 2339 by 2023 which will put it at 110.4% of the average electors per Councillor, however we feel that this represents a degree of overestimation. The current ward is significantly constrained by infrastructure; the major roads of St Clements Way and London Road; the North Kent Railway line; and by the regional shopping centre, Bluewater. Additionally, to the west, are two large public open spaces

The current Ward of Castle has a complicated mix of community interest, which makes it difficult to sensibly combine with neighbouring areas to create resilience in terms of electoral equality. Whilst on the face of it, it would appear to be an east facing community, looking to Greenhithe for its supermarket and transport; this ignores the strong links with Stone to the west, for open spaces, church and primary schools, uniformed youth groups and community events.

Historically, accented by the presence of Stone Castle within one of recent developments and by the local Parish Council boundaries, this area has been considered as part of Stone. Our resident members tell us that while they of course look to Greenhithe for their commute, as do a great many Dartford residents from Swanscombe, Bean and even Northfleet, they look to Stone for community.

On balance, we submit that Castle Ward should remain unchanged, represented by one Borough Councillor with an above average but relatively stable electorate.

## **Summary**

In summary, Swanscombe and Greenhithe Residents' Association proposes the following Borough ward changes:

- Increase the overall number of Borough councillors representing the Castle, Greenhithe and Swanscombe area from seven to nine
- Retain the current Borough boundary and Councillor numbers for the core Greenhithe community that covers Ingress Park, Knockhall and the Village
- Create a new ward for Ebbsfleet residents south of Mounts Road / Alkerden Lane
- Retain the current Borough boundary and councillor number for Swanscombe
- Retain the current Borough boundary and councillor number for Castle
- Thank you for the opportunity to put forward the views of Swanscombe and Greenhithe Residents' Association. We are very happy to provide any further information should this be required.

Kind regard

Sue Butterfill

Association Secretary

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