

East Sussex County

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Comment text:

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Mrs K L Ripley (Clerk)

[REDACTED]

November 2015

To: The Local Government Boundary Commission

Electoral Review of East Sussex County and Districts

Thank you for inviting views on new ward and electoral division boundaries for councils in East Sussex. Herewith the Parish Council comments, relating to our own area within Rother District Council.

We note your recommendation of 38 councillors for Rother District, with 2027 electors each, to meet the requirement for electoral equality.

Rother District Council has been working on a proposed new warding pattern, with their final submission agreed last week. Their proposed pattern includes a recommendation to ward part of our parish, in order to remain within a 10% variance of the 2027. However, whilst the Parish Council recognises the constraints, we strongly disagree with this proposal, and our view is that the requirement to reflect the interests and identities of local communities would justify the variance created by keeping our entire parish within the same ward and we ask you to consider the following reasons for this.

Salehurst & Robertsbridge is one of the larger parishes in Rother District, with 2,243 electors (uplifted 2021 figure). Our name suggests two separate places but, despite the fact that Salehurst is mainly comprised of a small hamlet situated approximately one mile from the centre of the village, it is very much one 'village' and one community; this is true despite the fact that the A21 Robertsbridge bypass, opened some twenty five years ago, appears to divide the two areas. The bypass was campaigned for over many years, to benefit all the residents of the parish, including Salehurst, but was never intended to 'separate' and the Parish Council has always reinforced this concept. Our residents living in Salehurst, whilst proudly possessive of their area and history (the parish was originally named Salehurst) nevertheless consider Robertsbridge to be their village. Equally, residents in Robertsbridge consider Salehurst to be part of their 'home' too.

As your guidance reflects, it isn't possible to measure levels of community identity, nor is it easy to explain this 'feeling' of one community, but our village is rural, and naturally has several distinct areas of habitation, divided geographically by the flood plain, river and railway lines, not just the A21. Each of these areas has its own distinctiveness, but nevertheless it is all of them, including Salehurst, that make up

the community of Salehurst & Robertsbridge. None of them would consider themselves to be merely 'adjacent' to Robertsbridge, but very much part of it.

There are however, shared physical and practical factors that contribute to this; our Parish Church is situated in Salehurst, as is the cemetery and one of our three pubs (the fourth, in the centre of the High Street, sadly ceased trading recently). But our school (named Salehurst CE Primary School) is situated in Robertsbridge, as are all other facilities including the nursery and playgroup, doctors' surgery, shops, hairdressers, Village Hall, Community Church, Club (formerly Working Men's), Youth Centre, Guide Hut, Scout Hut, Recreation Ground, plus a wealth of local groups, clubs and societies; all of these serve, are used, and indeed sometimes run by, residents across the whole parish.

It is our view that residents would identify with, and look to, the same District Councillor(s) for Salehurst & Robertsbridge, as issues and matters that affect one area generally affect the whole, and they would expect to be represented by the same councillor(s). It is our view that to change this would be divisive to our community. We consider the same to be true of creating a parish ward comprising only 59 (2021 figure) electors. We recognise the reality that sometimes some of our areas may feel less considered than the very centre of the village, but this applies equally to other areas and in our view warding would exacerbate this rather than improve it.

Your Technical Guidance, at section 7 - Implications for Parishes, whilst recognising that it is sometimes necessary to establish new parish wards (not necessarily with the blessing of the councils concerned), also states that you would not normally recommend the creation of parish wards that contain very few electors (less than a hundred), because there must be a reasonable number of local council electors in the parish ward to make the election of a [parish] councillor viable. In our view the creation of a ward of just 59 people, from a reasonably large total electorate, as proposed by Rother District Council, is not viable, and would be divisive rather than beneficial to the community. We believe it would also be confusing for residents and from their point of view would not reflect 'effective and convenient local government'.

The Parish Council is mindful of the fact (and reasons) that you do not apply strict mathematical criteria for council size or impose nationally a formula for its calculation, and there is no prescribed level of variance from the resulting number of electors per councillor. Rother District Council's application of plus or minus 10% of your recommended 2027 would seem reasonable as a general working guide. However, we have also noted that when discussing electoral balance in terms of Community Governance Reviews, the Commission talks about the electoral ratio in more than 30% of the principle council's electoral area varying by more than 10% from the average, and/or the ratio in any one ward by more than 30%.

Rother District Council quotes a variance of 7.75% (of 2027) for the proposed new Robertsbridge ward (with the 59 from outer Salehurst removed), with a variance of 8.39% for the proposed Hurst Green & Ticehurst ward (with the 59 added in). To retain Salehurst & Robertsbridge as a single ward, represented by one councillor, would represent a variance of 10.66%, with a resulting variance of 6.93% for the Hurst Green & Ticehurst ward. It is our view that considered in the context of the whole of the Rother District, this is not an unacceptable variance.

In summary it is the view of Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council that all three legal criteria would be reasonably met if the Rother District Council proposals were amended to retain Salehurst & Robertsbridge as one ward.

However, without prejudice, should this view not be accepted, we would suggest alterations to the ward names proposed. The parish name is Salehurst & Robertsbridge; the proposed new ward should also be Salehurst & Robertsbridge, and the proposed new parish ward be named 'The Stage' to reflect the name of the road where almost all of the 59 properties are situated.



Karen L Ripley (Mrs)
Clerk to the Council