

Cllr Kevin Dixon
Leader of Liberal Democrat Group
Rother District Council
Town Hall
Bexhill-on-sea

13th June 2016

LGBCE Review of Rother District Council

Dear Sirs

I write as a response to the LGBCE review of Rother District Council. Bexhill and Battle Liberal Democrats submitted proposals in the first consultation, of which I was the author. I would now like to follow up on your proposals.

Firstly I would like to complain that our representations, ideas and plans were totally ignored in the first draft recommendations. Our plans for the rural area of Rother have been ignored and not referenced in the text, nor have any reasons been given as to why they have not been considered.

You have also taken the Rother District Council submission as 'the plan' and have referred everything else against this. The Rother District Council plan was **not unanimously carried**, and due to their large majority, is a politically motivated plan by Rother Conservatives. It must be viewed with this in mind. Therefore we would like you to re-visit our original plans for the rural area of Rother, along with the maps and calculations supplied alongside our further comments below. I would also like a separate reply to this complaint please, to explain specifically why our submission was ignored.

We have a number of observations on your recommendations and make the following comments;

GENERAL

We support single member wards as a preference over double member wards wherever single member wards can be established with electorally equal numbers. We feel more single member wards could be created, even within the RDC submission.

The reasons we support single member wards are;

- Clearer accountability for the electorate and parish councils

- Clearer accountability for Councillors
- Removal of duplication for the Authority
- Cost savings for the Authority.
- Avoidance of two seats with different political allegiance resulting in unco-operative ward councillors – a situation which currently exists.

We support the separation of the unparished Bexhill from the rural parished area as in your recommendations.

WARD PATTERN

We wish to raise the following comments in conjunction with your proposed wards. Please use our original submission for detail referred to below.

Rye & Winchelsea

We accept that Rye is too large for one councillor, but too small for two, and Winchelsea is an ideal fit to add to it. There is no justification for keeping this as a large two member ward. Rye can be easily split via the railway line (as you have in Battle) into two electorally equal single member wards Rye North and Rye South & Winchelsea. This would give better accountability for Tilling Green in Rye, and more certainty and better representation for Winchelsea.

Southern Rother

Our proposal for this area has been ignored in the text. There is a desire from the community to create a single member ward for Fairlight which has a strong community identity. This would be possible with the addition of the Hastings fringes of Guestling to Fairlight parish. These fringes while part of Guestling parish, are the expansion and overspill of Hastings into Rother and do not relate to the village of Guestling. This would leave Guestling Green, Pett and Icklesham as a coherent single member ward.

Battle, Netherfield and Whatlington

We strongly object to the Commission's recommendations for Battle, specifically the two member ward proposed for Battle, Netherfield and Whatlington. It is clear that your proposal goes against your stated aim of 'providing convenient and effective local government'. If it is necessary to include another parish with Battle parish to increase numbers, there is no justification for creating a mixed urban & rural two member ward. A central ward covering much of the town centre and the main urban part of Battle could be easily created, leaving the rural parts of Battle, current Netherfield ward and Whatlington parish as a further single ward.

With Battle being the largest settlement in rural Rother, a key part of the make up of 1066 Country, and a service hub for its outlying villages, it is vitally important that its representation is not diluted. The current situation of five councillors

representing parts of Battle parish is unwieldy and unworkable and these new proposals do not solve this problem sufficiently. **As a councillor for the current two member Battle Town ward** I can vouch that the workload is already very high. The issues of the town centre, the major A2100 road, the tourist industry and planning issues of a mediaeval town are included in the casework. To add another two villages to this would provide an unbalanced amount of work, and a lack of focus upon the town of Battle. A better solution would be for one councillor to be responsible for the town centre and its issues, and another to be responsible for the northern rural parts and the villages - as well as the already proposed single member for the south of Battle and its rural southern parts. The last all-out election produced councillors from different parties in Battle Town and two councillors covering this area may find it difficult to work together for the best interests of the ward.

Sedlescombe & Westfield

This large ward could be split into two manageable single member wards – Westfield & Three Oaks, and Sedlescombe with Kent Street & Westfield Lane. This would provide better and clearer accountability for the electorate.

Eastern Rother

Our submission was for two single member wards; a ward linking the coastal communities of Camber, Winchelsea Beach & Rye Harbour who share similar issues, and a ward with the remaining inland Rye-dependant villages in the east, - Peasmarsch, Iden, East Guldeford, Rye Foreign and Playden. Both provide electoral equality, and both link very similar communities together in a more accountable way, far better than the geographically large two-member ward with very limited road communication complicated by a bottleneck in Rye. We understood that the Commission wished to avoid wards which encircled other wards, and wards which could not be transversed without going into other wards.

Bexhill Sidley

We see no justification for the fact that this ward is so much bigger than other Bexhill wards. Your proposal goes against your stated aim of 'providing equality of representation'. Bexhill-on-sea is unparished, and as such ward boundaries are easy to move. While the centre of Sidley is well-defined, no-one could identify in the greater conurbation of Bexhill where Sidley ends. Therefore the boundaries of Bexhill St Stephens and Bexhill Old Town & Worsham could be amended to even out numbers, so that everyone's vote in Bexhill counts equally.

The comment in the narrative is contradictory. You wish to stick to the District submission even though it works against electoral equality as it 'closely mirrors the existing situation'. The current situation is irrelevant in this case as the point of the review is to change the current situation where there is inequality. Keeping the unfair status quo where there are other easy options to move

electors between wards contradicts the purpose of the exercise. We urge you to rethink this ward, in conjunction with its neighbours.

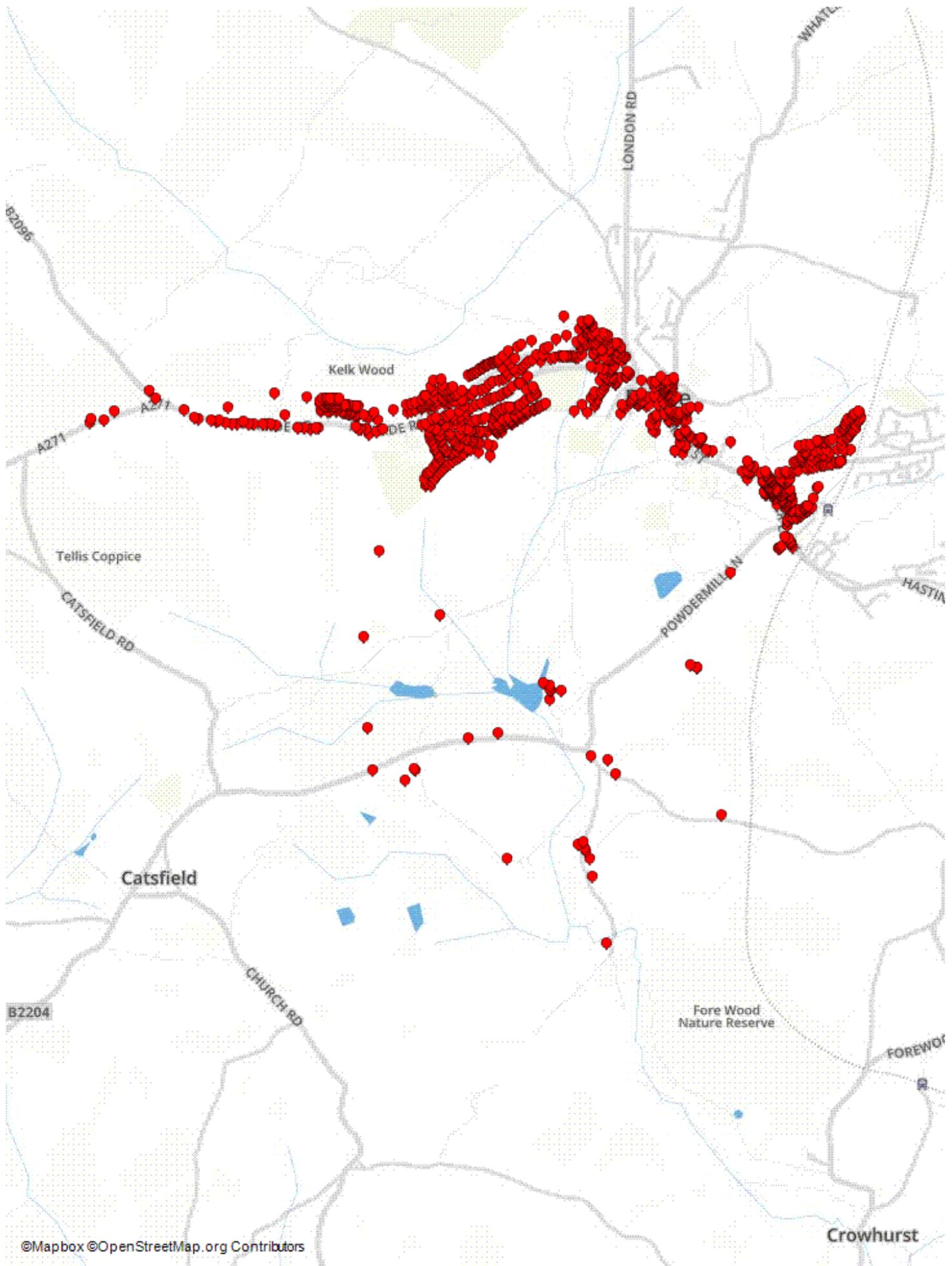
Along with these comments I include;

- Maps illustrating suggested wards in Battle – Battle Central and Battle North and Whatlington.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Kevin Dixon
Battle Town Ward
Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Rother District Council

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