

## Submission to District Ward Boundary Commission Review 2017

### Ropley & Tisted Ward, East Hampshire District Council

#### Background

The Ropley and Tisted Ward comprises four parishes, Ropley, East Tisted, West Tisted and Newton Valence in the north-west corner of East Hampshire district. The village of Ropley, one of the largest civil parishes in Hampshire by area, represents the majority of the ward (73% of electors), followed by East Tisted, Newton Valence and West Tisted. The ward is bounded to the north-west, west and south-west by Winchester City Council wards, to the north by Four Marks and Medstead ward, and to the east by the Froxfield & Steep, Selborne and Hangers & Forest wards. The parish of Ropley is the most developed within the ward with approximately 650 dwellings, together with a primary school, village shop & Post Office, filling station, restaurant and sports pavilion. The village church, substantially destroyed by fire in 2014, has plans approved for restoration. The remaining parishes within the ward are located within the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and have about 250 dwellings between them, with a single shop and Post Office in East Tisted. Rotherfield Park in East Tisted is a substantial farm that includes land in Newton Valence and also in Colemore and Priors Dean which is part of the neighbouring Froxfield & Steep ward.

#### Ward characteristics

The four parishes within the ward are primarily active farming communities with substantial arable and dairy operations, and as a result a significant amount of housing in the parishes accommodates people associated with the farms and supporting trades. There are also a number of small businesses distributed around the ward covering a truly diverse range of activities, including travel booking, furniture manufacturing, stonework and equestrian activities as well as the more usual trades such as catering and motor vehicle servicing. Given the distance from the larger towns of Alton, Petersfield and Winchester, coupled with the almost complete lack of public transport, there is a strong tendency to use local traders and facilities, in part to ensure their continued existence. As with many rural communities in the South East of England there are also a substantial number of houses occupied by families where the employed members commute to either London or nearby employment centres such as Winchester, Basingstoke, Portsmouth, Southampton or Guildford which are within a one hour commute.

#### Electorate development

The electorate of the Ropley and Tisted ward at the launch of the boundary review was 11% below the ward average at 1837 electors. By the time of the June 2017 General Election this had grown to 1866, of which Ropley represented 1366. There are existing planning allocations in Ropley for about 43 dwellings on 4 sites allocated under EHDC Local Plan part 2 (LP2), of which 41 dwellings on 4 sites have full planning permission. Of these 30 are already built and 6 are under construction. Of the built dwellings 8 were occupied and on the electoral roll as of June 2017, and included in the above 1366 electors. This leaves 28 dwellings allocated under LP2 built or under construction which will most likely contribute to the electoral roll prior to 2023.

An additional three net dwellings (not allocated under LP2) are under construction which will also contribute to the 2023 electoral roll. Ropley parish is developing a Neighbourhood Plan, and the emerging plan is proposing to allocate 18 new dwellings. While this plan has yet to start public consultation, it is likely to be made during 2018 and the additional dwellings contribute to the 2023 electorate.

The EHDC forecast for the Ropley parish for 2023 is 1369, an increase of 3 over the June 2017 figure, which I contend is a significant underestimate. It is likely that the 31 additional dwellings built or under construction would yield at least 60 additional electors in 2023, which would yield a total parish electorate of at least 1426, and this does not consider the effect of the Neighbourhood Plan allocated dwellings.

The parishes in the ward other than Ropley are within the SDNP and have no housing allocation in the emerging SDNP local plan. It is therefore likely that the electorates in these parishes will remain largely unchanged, as forecast by EHDC. As a result the total ward electorate in 2023 is likely to be at least 1926. This would be 86.9% of the average electorate based on EHDC's 2023 forecast and a council of 44 members.

As a result, some increase in the size of the ward should be considered to try and achieve an electorate size of 90%-110% of ward average, even though the area of the existing ward is already quite large. The existing ward spans 8 miles east to west and 6 miles north to south (driving distances), so adding further parishes could result in an excessively large ward.

Expansion of the ward to the north-west, west or south-west is not possible as this would fall over the boundary with the Winchester City Council area. Looking at neighbouring wards, it is clear that following substantial development the current Four Marks and Medstead ward could justify either being increased to a three councillor ward (92.5% of 2023 ward average) or being separated into a single councillor ward covering Medstead (95.9%) and a two councillor ward covering Four Marks (91.9%). With continuing development in this ward it is likely that the separation into two wards is the more sustainable solution as the existing single ward would soon require more than three councillors. No combinations of Ropley with either separated Four Marks or Medstead wards or the existing single Four Marks and Medstead ward generate a new ward within the 90%-110% profile, nor would the rural farming characteristics of Ropley fit well with the more developed town aspect of Four Marks and Medstead.

Whilst the Ropley ward is showing small electorate growth, the wards to the east of Ropley and Tisted towards Petersfield are forecast to decrease in electorate, probably due to the more restrictive housing development regime within the SDNP and the national trend towards smaller dwelling units. This results in the Petersfield area (including Froxfield and Steep) no longer justifying seven councillors as they would have an 87.2% ward average in 2023, while six councillors would have a 101.8% average. Again as development in the district is focused more on areas outside of the SDNP, these averages will likely continue to decline such that reallocation to the Petersfield area being served by six councillors is the more sustainable solution.

## Proposal and Conclusion

As discussed, Ropley and Tisted is a primarily farming based rural ward, something it shares with the parishes immediately to its east. Indeed, Rotherfield Park Farm within the East Tisted parish extends into Colemore, and residents of Colemore and Priors Dean use facilities in East Tisted such as the village hall, shop and Post Office, so there is considerable synergy between the residents of Colemore and Priors Dean and those of Ropley and Tisted, particularly those of East Tisted.

A further consideration is that during the recent County Council boundary review the parishes of Ropley, East Tisted and West Tisted were reallocated from the Alton Rural division to the Petersfield Hangers division, which includes Colemore and Priors Dean.

As indicated above, the current ward is already very substantial in size and further enlargement would make the ward less manageable. However, if the Commission were minded to require Ropley and Tisted to be enlarged so that it conforms to the 90-110% ward average, I would propose that the parish of Colemore and Priors Dean be combined with the existing Ropley and Tisted ward. The resulting ward would have a likely electorate of 2030 in 2023, representing a ward average of 91.6%. While adding this parish would enlarge the area of the ward, it would not significantly increase the distances involved with servicing it, as Colemore and Priors Dean abuts quite neatly to the south-east boundary of the existing ward. The combined ward would retain its existing rural character and further enhance the synergy between the parishes of East Tisted and Colemore and Priors Dean.