

FAIRLIGHT PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk to the Council: John Edmunds

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Review of Rother District Council Wards: Marsham Ward

Response by Fairlight Parish Council 30

th November 2015

The civil parish of Fairlight currently forms part of Marsham Ward which returns two members to Rother District Council. It is understood that the review may consider whether this arrangement should continue or whether Fairlight should be split from Marsham and return one member, an arrangement which existed in the past. This note sets out the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems as applied to Fairlight.

A split would be feasible in that Fairlight has about half the electorate of Marsham, so the two parts would each hold approximately equal numbers of voters.

The advantage of a single-member Ward is that there would be a strong connection between Fairlight and its electorate so the councillor would have to work hard on Fairlight issues as they would be facing the voters at the next election. It would be more likely voters would know the candidates' personal qualities and hence more likely to return a strong councillor. This would be good for democracy and for voter interest in democracy.

The advantage of a two-member Ward is that councillors can cover for each other's absence and voters have a choice of whom to approach if they want to raise a matter. The major drawback is a possible lack of local connection between the electorate and the members, and the possibility of the elected members not being well-known in half their Ward. The consequence of this could be a lack of understanding of and commitment to Fairlight issues. In fairness to present and recent past councillors this has not actually been a problem.

The village of Fairlight (which includes Fairlight and Fairlight Cove) holds nearly all the population of the Civil Parish, which is otherwise rural. The village is geographically compact. Social connections between Fairlight and the rest of Marsham Ward exist on a personal level, but are not strong in terms of civic life or culture (though a local primary school is at Guestling). Fairlight has a strong sense of community and a very active social and cultural life centring on its Village Hall, Church etc.

There have been, and will continue to be, strong local issues affecting Fairlight which are of little or no interest to the rest of Marsham, for example the problems of cliff erosion / landslip (where Rother is the Coast Protection Authority), and planning where Fairlight has a significant and controversial allocation of new housing under Rother's Local Plan.

Should Marsham Ward be split the Commission should note that the Civil Parish boundary in and around Batchelors Bump is anomalous in that the boundary cuts through gardens and at Friars Hill divides houses from their neighbours across the road.

John Edmunds

Clerk to Fairlight Parish Council