

Starkie, Emily

From: Alison [REDACTED]
Sent: 14 June 2016 15:47
To: reviews; Starkie, Emily
Subject: Isfield Parish Councils view on the Proposed Boundary Changes

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Sirs,

I write on behalf of the Isfield Parish Council in response to the proposed ward changes in Wealden district and at East Sussex County Council level.

We understand that the principles guiding the Boundary Commission changes, which should have been closely considered by East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council in making their initial recommendations for warding to you, are that wards should contain approximately equal numbers of electors, that they should reflect the interests and identities of local communities, that they should be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries and that they should help the council deliver effective and convenient local government.

Currently, the parish of Isfield, and its "semi-detached" sister parish of Little Horsted (semi-detached because Little Horsted, while a separate parish, does not have a Parish Council, but rather a Parish Meeting, and Little Horsted residents are eligible to stand as Isfield Parish Councillors) are currently included in a District Council Ward with the neighbouring parishes of Danehill, Fletching and Nutley. From a numerical point of view, that grouping is inappropriate under the review. The proposal suggested by the Boundary Commission is:

- i) to move Nutley into the Maresfield ward
- ii) to separate part of the parish of Fletching and join it, together with Isfield and a part of the urban centre of Uckfield into a new ward of West Uckfield and Isfield
- iii) to join Little Horsted to the Uckfield urban ward of Ridgewood.

To address first the issue of identity and interests of communities. Isfield, Little Horsted, Fletching and Danehill are all rural communities, with the population distributed broadly between a village and a farming environment. In the particular case of Isfield and Little Horsted, the common elements of the community are deeply ingrained and of long standing. The school which caters for the children of both villages is in Little Horsted, while the pre-school - also taking children from both villages - is based in the Isfield village hall. The Bonfire Society, which, as in many East Sussex villages, is an important part of community life, is shared by both villages as the Isfield *and* Little Horsted Bonfire Society. The Isfield Community Enterprise is an association which owns land on which village events take place; the shareholders are residents of both parishes. The two public houses in Isfield (there is not one in Little Horsted) are frequented as regulars by members of both parishes. To re-iterate; the links between these two parishes are of long standing and of great strength. It would be highly inappropriate to split the community in the way proposed under the draft changes.

There are some very clear natural boundaries defining the limits of the parishes and wards. To the west, Isfield (and in fact Wealden) is separated from Lewes District by the River Ouse. More importantly in this context, though, to the north-east the rural communities of Isfield and Little Horsted are separated from the urban centre of Uckfield by the A22 Eastbourne road. This is an important boundary as it serves to contain the urban area within its own boundaries, much as is the case with other urban centres in East Sussex. The proposed new West Uckfield and Isfield ward would straddle the A22, thus bracketing together urban development and rural communities.

It is difficult to see how creating wards which mix urban and rural communities can be conducive to effective and convenient local government. The demands and requirements of the two different populations will inevitably diverge, in areas, for example, like infrastructure, public transport, development and others. If the current proposal were to be adopted, then the reality is that the rural populations are at serious risk of being effectively disenfranchised. That is not said lightly; the five hundred-odd electors of Isfield (and the one hundred and eighty-odd of Little Horsted) will be a minority voice in ward of approximately three thousand. Now, it is perfectly reasonable to take the view that that is how democracy works - the majority have the voice; at present, in a rural ward, that is perfectly correct. But by creating the hybrid rural/urban wards, balance is lost. The reality would be that the rural population would be highly unlikely to be represented in future by councillors from within their own communities with an understanding of rural issues. They would frankly be swamped, which is not - we would suggest - symptomatic of effective local government.

Those are effectively the problems raised by the current proposal. Together with the Chairman of Little Horsted Parish Meeting and Fletching Parish Council, we believe that there is an alternative solution we can offer which safeguards the nature of the communities we represent. With Nutley leaving the current Danehill, Fletching and Nutley ward - which is already proposed - that would leave Danehill, Fletching, Isfield and Little Horsted with a projected electorate in 2021 of approximately 3100, which is within the variance of proposed Wealden wards. Uckfield can then be contained to the north and east of the A22, and, with electoral numbers projected of just over 12000, can be re-drawn to contain four wards, without taking in any of the rural parishes. The result of this is that the urban centre is kept within a contained boundary and the rural parishes are able to be grouped into a ward together (as at present). This solution seems to satisfy the criteria set by the Boundary Commission as well as the desires of the rural population to respect historic community connections and identities, and not to see their voice swamped.

We would further draw your attention to the proposals for the redrawing of East Sussex County Council divisions. This again splits Isfield and Little Horsted from each other, and both from the neighbouring rural parishes. The proposal is to incorporate Isfield in Uckfield North and Little Horsted in Uckfield South. This is inappropriate for all the same reasons as given above, and we would urge you to reconsider this proposal as well.

Yours faithfully



Alison Stevens
Clerk to Isfield Parish Council.