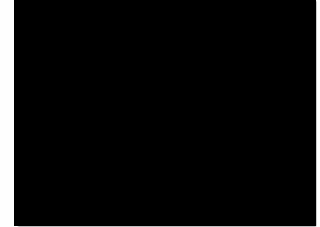


# Eastbourne Borough Council Conservative Group

c/o The Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 4UG



Please reply to:



Mr. Tim Bowden  
Review Manager  
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
14th Floor  
Millbank Tower  
Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4QP

19th November 2015

Dear Mr Bowden,

**Re: 2015 Boundary Review of the Borough of Eastbourne  
Proposal by the Conservative Party Group to the Boundary Commission for England**

This letter is to be treated as the formal response of the Eastbourne Conservative Group to the Boundary Review being conducted by the Boundary Commission of England in respect of Eastbourne's electoral Wards.

## Background:

At its meeting on 18 November 2015, the full Council received the report and recommendations of its working group on Ward boundary proposals. Because political consensus was not achieved by the working group, the Council considered three options, specifically:

1. No change to existing Wards (*the proposal favoured by the Conservative Group who are the opposition group on the Council*)
2. A proposal involving significant changes to three current Wards (*the proposal favoured by the Liberal Democrat Administration*)
3. The option of no formal submission in recognition of the fact that there was no political consensus and any formal Council proposal should have cross party support

As a result of the debate and vote, the second option was approved as the Council's formal submission with the Liberal Democrat administration using their political numbers to secure the decision.

## Our Proposal:

In the light of the above, the Conservative Group now formally proposes for your consideration that the option of no change to existing Wards be approved. This proposal is being put forward on two key grounds, specifically that of:

- a) Reasonable proportionality, and;
- b). The political dimension

In laying out the case for our proposal, we would refer the Commission to the maps and data provided by the Council.

#### Reasonable Proportionality:

- We understand that the reason for the current round of boundary reviews in East Sussex was that the need was triggered by electorate inequality in some of the Councils. We also understand that the triggers are where either there is one Ward with an electorate variance of more than 30% or where there are three Wards with electorate variances of more than 10%. Neither of these triggers apply here in Eastbourne so, in isolation, there was no formal need for a review of Eastbourne's Wards. We accept that Eastbourne chose to participate on the basis of a county-wide review but do not accept that, having agreed to take part, changes to existing arrangements are necessarily required.
- When the last Eastbourne boundary review was conducted in 2000, major changes were made to the Ward numbers and boundaries and the work in creating the new Wards, the strength of those boundaries, and the forecasting of future electorate numbers, was done with great thoroughness. This is evident as, 21 years on, the forecast still shows those Wards to be fit for purpose and within acceptable tolerances.
- Currently, seven of our nine Wards are all forecast to remain within 10% of the average electorate in 2021 and the only two that are not within that tolerance are both forecast to be a mere 1% outside that figure. Therefore, we strongly feel that the changes being proposed by the Liberal Democrat administration involving the movement of some 2000 electors across three Wards with the knock-on effect of needing to review polling district boundaries and polling station provision, is vastly disproportionate to the scale of the issue.
- The Liberal Democrat administration will, we are sure, argue that their proposal brings one of the two current 11% Wards (Hampden Park) within the 10% threshold. However, the improvement is slight with Hampden Park still having an 8% variance. Further, if the administration felt that strongly about an 11% variance, they would have surely also made recommendations in respect of the other Ward (Sovereign) in the same situation. The fact that there was unanimity in respect of retaining the current Sovereign Ward boundaries demonstrates that, in isolation, an 11% variance is acceptable to both parties.

In summary therefore, specifically with regard to reasonable proportionality, we recommend no change to existing Wards on the grounds that the current Wards remain within acceptable tolerance in respect of electorate variance, and that the minimal nature of the variances that exist do not justify the scale of change being proposed in the Council submission.

#### Political Dimension:

Given that boundary reviews are intended to be non-political and having approached this exercise in good faith, we regret the need to highlight the political dimension behind the Council proposal. However, it is necessary for the Boundary Commission to be aware of underlying political reasons to the Council submission.

- Electoral data and results over many years show that Eastbourne is a marginal constituency and that the voting pattern across all Wards is well established.

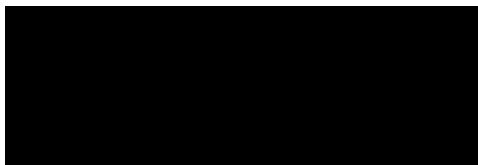
Throughout the years, the consistently key marginal Ward, and therefore the primary decider as to which political party holds power, has always been Old Town Ward.

- The changes being proposed to the boundaries between Old Town and Ratton Ward will dramatically affect the current political dynamic. Ratton Ward carries a strong Conservative majority vote and, as such, carries little political ambition with the Liberal Democrat administration. However, the area being identified for movement from Ratton to Old Town (zone 2 in the Council proposal) is perceived to be a liberal democrat stronghold. Thus, it could be seen that this is a ploy to transfer a significant number of Liberal Democrat votes from Ratton (where they have little effect) to Old Town where the effect on the current political dynamic of that Ward will be profound.
- If the Liberal Democrat administration was purely focused on improving the current electoral variance in Hampden Park, they could have simply made the zone 1 change as proposed and compensated Ratton numbers with a smaller version of the zone 3 change from Old Town to Ratton. Clearly though, the primary objective was to use political numbers to drive through the zone 2 change in order to affect the outcome of future local elections in their favour.
- The argument being used for the zone 2 change is that the current boundary dissects an identifiable community. However, this is not a new estate and it was readily approved in 2000 with a boundary that uses the naturally strong arterial road. Further, no evidence was provided to the effect that this community feels divided in any way by the current arrangements. Finally, if indeed the community does feel divided, surely the non-political option would have been to transfer the electorate in the opposite direction, i.e. from Old Town to Ratton as it is Old Town that is currently above average in electorate and Ratton that is below.
- Further, the Council was given the option of no formal submission so that both parties on the Council would be free to equitably submit their suggested proposals. However, this option was not taken up leading us to conclude that the Liberal Democrat administration felt that their political proposal would gain more weight with the Boundary Commission if it was submitted as the formal Council proposal.

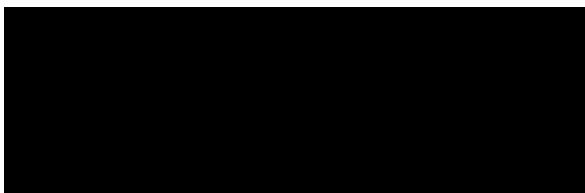
In summary therefore, we ask the Commission to accept that, in essence, the Council submission is a political submission from a single political party and needs to be weighed equally against this submission having regard to the motives and reasoning behind both.

We trust that the Boundary Commission will take full account of this submission and are happy to respond to any queries that you may have.

Yours Sincerely,



Councillor Tony Freebody  
Leader, Eastbourne Conservative Group



Councillor Gordon Jenkins  
Boundary Review Working Group Representative, Eastbourne Conservative Group

