



HARTLEY PARISH COUNCIL
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5th July 2012

Ian Bigwood
Electoral Services Manager
Sevenoaks District Council
Council Offices
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks TN13 1HG

Dear Mr Bigwood,

Community Governance Review – Draft Recommendations

Further to your email dated 16th May 2012, seeking the Parish Council's response on the District Council's draft recommendations in respect of the Community Governance Review.

The Parish Council would like to re-affirm its original comments as follows:

Hartley Parish Council wishes to make the following representations in respect of the Community Governance Review being undertaken by Sevenoaks District Council.

- (1) Hartley Parish Council does not propose any changes to the parish boundary.
- (2) Hartley Parish Council has no objection to a proposal put forward by Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council for a minor amendment to the parish boundary to include the Milestone School within the parish of Ash-cum-Ridley. This would enable the Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council offices to be brought within the parish boundary of Ash-cum-Ridley rather than Hartley.
- (3) Hartley Parish Council does not seek any changes to its current parish electoral arrangements in terms of number of parish councillors or merger with neighbouring parishes.
- (4) Hartley Parish Council objects to any proposal to Ward the parish for the reasons set out below.

- (i) Historically Hartley has always been a single village and is not a community which consists of separate hamlets. There are no distinct neighbourhoods or communities with separate identities which would readily enable the division of the parish into Wards. *(Para. 158 of the DCLG guidance)*.
- (ii) There would be no benefit to the residents of Hartley for Warding in the parish. *(Para. 157 (b) of the DCLG guidance)*.
- (iii) There is no argument to support that the current electoral arrangements, in terms of the number or distribution of local government electors, would make the single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient. *(Para. 157 (a) of the DCLG guidance)*.
- (iv) If implemented, Warding would break ties and linkages which have existed in the community for over 100 years, *(para. 162 of the DCLG guidance)*, and could result in an imbalance of representation on the Parish Council, *(para. 164 of the DCLG guidance)*, and would conflict with DCLG guidelines.
- (v) Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission states that principal councils should consider the desirability of parish Warding in circumstances where the parish falls across two districts or boroughs. This is not the case in Hartley as the parish falls entirely within the Sevenoaks District area. *(Para. 161 of the DCLG guidance)*.

The issue of Warding was discussed at recent Parish Council meetings after it was raised by two members of the public and following discussions Members decided that Warding was not necessary, as current electoral arrangements serves the community well with electors having access to 13 Members.

Hartley Parish Council is aware that representations have been made by three members of the public in favour of Warding. The views expressed by Mrs Roberts, Mrs Sharp and Mr Mayer are personal to them and in the Parish Council's views are not held widely in Hartley.

The main basis of their arguments in favour of Warding relate to a mistaken belief that Hartley consists of a number of separately identified Communities which should each be recognised as Wards. This is just not the case. Hartley is a single Community with most of its services such as shops, library, schools, clubs and meeting halls all placed in the centre. To the north it has a very clear boundary along the railway and on the other three sides it has its own section of Green Belt which it protects.

There is no rationale behind Mr Mayer's suggested Wards, but have clearly been devised to give equality of electors.

By having Councillors elected from across the whole of the Parish avoids conflict between Ward interests and allows the Parish Council to deal with issues in the best interests of the whole Parish. This is particularly relevant to planning matters where under Mr Mayer's proposals each Ward would have a section of the Green Belt.

Mrs Roberts suggests that Members can have no understanding of problems faced by residents unless they live in the area. Members consider this assumption to be quite ridiculous, and rejects any claims that they can have no appreciation or understanding of problems relevant to specific sections of the community.

The problems identified by Mr Mayer on the Wellfield estate will not be resolved by Warding. The Parish Council is of the view that integration and not separation is the right solution and is using the PACT arrangements to this end.

The other suggestion, that the current arrangements are impractical and inconvenient, raising the question as to whom. The Parish Council believes that (the majority of) Hartley's residents would feel insulted if it is suggested that they did not understand the current voting arrangements. The fact that seats on the Parish Council are contested and leads to lengthy ballot papers should be applauded as it shows a healthy interest in local affairs. The Parish Council is more than satisfied that the Returning Officer can deal with the counting arrangements.

The Parish Council wishes to comment on the proposals concerning the future location of the Bramblefield Estate. It is not unusual for some residents living close to a boundary, be it Parish, District, County or Country to feel closer to the adjoining Community. However boundaries have to be drawn somewhere and the Parish Council is convinced that the present boundary is correct, as it is clearly defined along the railway line.

Finally, Hartley Parish Council is satisfied that the current electoral arrangements reflects the identities and interests of the community in Hartley, and is effective and convenient. Furthermore there is no demonstrable evidence that residents are disadvantaged by the current electoral arrangements or that changes would provide any benefits.

Yours sincerely

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Clerk to the Council



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July 15th 2012

Community Governance Review for Hartley

Dear Mr Bigwood,

I was very disappointed with the outcome of this review so far. What is the point of wasting time and money conducting a review if you are not prepared to recommend any changes? Why ask the public to comment if you are simply going to ignore their suggestions?

I have noted the submission by Hartley Parish Council and would like to make the following comments;

1. Hartley has never been a single village but was originally 2 hamlets known as Hartley and Hartley Green. On the 1961 ordinance Survey map a third area was added known as Hartley Hill. All three are found on today's maps.
2. I agree that the village does not readily divide into 4 equal parts. This is true of many towns and villages but this has not stopped them from being warded. It simply needs someone with the relevant up to date information to sit down and work out suitable divisions.
3. Residents would benefit by having specific Councillors to represent their areas and would be able to identify with those Councillors.
4. This community has not existed for 100 years. The Wellfield Estate was being built in the early 1970's and most of the estates infilling the area between Longfield and new Ash green have been built since then, i.e. within the last 50 years. There are very few ties between the

communities as houses can be up to 3 miles apart. One end of the village is very influenced by Longfield and the other by New Ash Green. Where I live I have no reason to use any of the facilities provided by middle Hartley as I am well provided for by New Ash Green which is closer, as are most of my neighbours.

5. People I have canvassed in Hartley have all been in favour of warding but then they do not tend to live in middle Hartley which is very well represented by the current electoral system.
6. Elections have been contested in Hartley over recent years but only because people are so disgusted with the current council that they are prepared to put themselves up for election.
7. The current Council claims that it represents all areas of Hartley but a number of the Councillors have no idea where certain roads and places actually are as shown by their ignorance in meetings where they often ask where the road or place is someone is referring to.

The real reason why the Council objects to warding is because none of the members of the current ruling group are prepared to stand and represent areas like Wellfield. I think that says it all! We all pay council tax, some more than others, so we should all expect equal representation.

Prior to moving to Hartley I lived in an area that was warded. This resulted in much better governance. Warding led to representatives from different backgrounds with different ideas. The Council was more open, had much more discussions which led to a greater consensus of opinion. As they were better known and more accountable they were less afraid of involving the public. As the public had only 3 Councillors representing them rather than 13 they were more willing to communicate with them.

Local government appears to me to be in trouble. Time will tell but there are already many electors who already feel disenfranchised. Anything that can encourage more local interest and participation in our electoral system must be a good thing.

Therefore I would urge you to reconsider warding for Hartley.

Yours sincerely



Dear Mr Bigwood

I am writing to comment on the draft proposals so far as they affect the parish of Hartley.

I am concerned that too much weight has been attached to the response of Hartley Parish council in paragraphs 23.1 - 23.4 of the report. The District Council appears to acknowledge there is a representation issue in Hartley, but then goes onto say they will not do anything if the Parish Council are opposed. Is this in conformity with DCLG Guidance? Does the parish council have an effective veto?

I would like to reiterate my comments on the Parish Council's submission in conjunction with the official guidance from the DCLG.

Hartley Parish Council's letter

In my view the current system works unfairly against some areas of the parish. For example, as you will recall, part of New Ash Green used to lie in the parish of Hartley, but as I remember no candidate with a New Ash Green address was ever elected to the council.

On the specific points raised in the parish council letter:

(a) Numbered items in paragraph 4

You will note that the parish council have made a number of unsupported statements without any evidence to back them up (sub-paragraphs (ii), (iii) for example).

Referring to paragraph (i), historically Hartley was not a nucleated village but a collection of isolated farms and hamlets (for example Hartley Green, Grubb Street by the Black Lion, and the collection of houses around All Saints' Church). The recent Hartley Parish Plan noted that different parts of Hartley have different focuses, for example:

- South Hartley's links to Longfield are weaker than the rest of the parish, as they look more to New Ash Green for services, such as shops and doctor's surgery. They have Ash Green and not Longfield telephone numbers.
- I understand that schoolchildren in the Wellfield area tend to be sent to Langafel Primary rather than Hartley Primary by the County Council.
- When it comes to local shopping, people in the different areas of Hartley tend to shop at the store closest to them.

I do not understand the reference in paragraph (iv) to linkages that have existed 100 years, as less than 2% of the current houses in Hartley actually existed in 1912! There is no risk of an imbalance on the council if electoral equality is respected when drawing boundaries, however an imbalance already exists in that some areas suffer from persistent under-representation which is surely what a governance review is supposed to address. Therefore if the parish council are concerned about imbalance, they should not be supporting the status quo.

Paragraph (v) simply states one of the many grounds for warding which does not apply to Hartley and is therefore irrelevant here.

(b) Can councillors elected at large represent whole parish?

The penultimate paragraphs on page 2 of their letter is a stark statement of majoritarian politics. There is a risk that this means that minority areas with no representation on the council will not even have a say if a proposal is deemed to be for the benefit of the majority. For me this statement is the reason why all areas must be represented on the council.

(c) PACT and Wellfield

The parish council appear to have completely overlooked paragraph 137 of the DCLG advice which states:

However, what sets parish councils apart from other kinds of governance is the fact they are a democratically elected tier of local government, independent of other council tiers and budgets, and possess specific powers. This is an important distinction to make. Parish councils are the foundation stones for other levels of local government in England. Their directly elected parish councillors represent local communities in a way that other bodies, however worthy, cannot since such organisations do not have representatives directly elected to those bodies.

Therefore national guidance is clear that proper representation on the parish council is paramount.

Both the parish and district councils are aware of the distinctive nature of the Wellfield area. The Hartley Parish Plan made a recommendation to improve greater involvement in community issues in the Wellfield area. At the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes committee the council undertook “to engage with residents in the Wellfield area”. In 2005 West Kent Housing made Wellfield a “focus area”; survey evidence suggested that many of those living there thought it was an isolated community with a lack of facilities (source – Sevenoaks District Community Partnership Meeting 12.7.05).

(d) “Personal” views of submissions

The important issue is not the person or organisation submitting the response, but which responses best fit the criteria laid down by the DCLG.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Hartley, Kent