

Received 16 FEB 2012



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

13th February 2012

Dear Mr Bigwood,

I understand from the In Shape magazine Issue 81 that Sevenoaks District Council is conducting a Community Governance Review. As I would like to see a change in the electoral arrangements in Hartley I have put forward my reasons for consideration by the Electoral Arrangements Committee. These are enclosed with this letter and are entitled "Proposals for Warding of Hartley Parish Council."

I look forward to hearing the outcome of your review.

Yours sincerely,

Dr J E Roberts

Proposal for Warding for Hartley Parish Council

Hartley has always been known as a village but over the years it has grown considerably and would now more aptly be described as a dormitory town made up of 3 distinct communities. These are North Hartley including the Wellfield and Bramblefield estates, Middle Hartley and South Hartley.

Many of the residents of North Hartley use the facilities and services provided for Longfield. Most of the children on the Wellfield estate attend the schools in Longfield and many of the residents of Bramblefield believe that they live in Longfield and have no connection with Hartley. In South Hartley most of the homes are in the Green Belt and are subject to very restrictive planning policies and to the highest rate of crime in the area. Many of these residents use the shops and services provided for New Ash Green. Only the residents in Middle Hartley are dependent on the library, post office and other shops in Hartley itself.

Following the past 3 elections the Parish Council has been dominated by one political grouping known as "Putting Hartley First". This group is based in Middle Hartley. None of their members has lived either in any of the Green Belt areas or on the Wellfield or Bramblefield estates. I believe that unless you live in an area you have no real understanding of the problems those residents face.

I would like to see Hartley divided into 4 wards so that all areas have some form of local representation on the Council. The Parish contains approximately 2,200 houses. This large number makes it very difficult for individuals to stand in elections as it is too large for one person to deliver to and canvass for election. In addition if they live at one end of the village they have no knowledge of the other end of the village. Approximately 500 houses would make this more feasible.

Hartley is already divided into two for polling at elections (All Saints Church Centre and the Scout Hut). The South could be divided further along the boundary of the Green Belt as those in the Green Belt are subject to very different planning rules to those in Middle Hartley. The North could be divided on an East West split so that the Wellfield estate is in one area and Bramblefield in the other. I do not have access to an electoral role and the number of voters in particular areas so I cannot determine how this would fit in with the current number of councillors.

Hartley currently votes for 13 councillors making the ballot paper too unwieldy and complex plus difficult to count. By-elections involve the whole village at great expense whereas warding would reduce the numbers involved and hence the cost.

The guidance on Community Governance Reviews states that electoral arrangements should “Encourage more community engagement reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area.”

The Councillors Commission Report 2007 states, “Councils have a duty to encourage participation. It recommended that they actively attract and encourage potential candidates irrespective of political allegiance, and from as diverse a range of backgrounds as possible”

Warding would help satisfy these two objectives.

In conclusion, reasons for warding in Hartley are as follows.

1. The very large size of Hartley makes fair representation on the Parish Council for all the different parts of the parish very difficult.
2. Residents are unable to identify with which councillors actually represent their part of the village. The councillors do not know the entire village.
3. Legislative guidance suggests that warding should take place so that the wards reflect different parts of a parish within one overall identity.
4. The high costs of casual vacancy by-elections for this large parish.

I hope that these suggestions will be considered carefully by the Electoral Arrangements Committee with a view to enabling a fairer and more equal representation for all residents throughout the Parish of Hartley.

Community Governance Review
Sevenoaks District Council

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Community Governance Review – Hartley Parish

I am a local resident and I wish to make suggestions which I hope will improve local democracy. In a number of places I have referred to “Guidance on Community Governance Reviews” (2010) by the Department for Communities and Local Government (“DCLG Guidance”).

1. Boundaries

1.1 Boundary between Hartley and Ash parishes

I understand that Ash parish has proposed an alteration of the boundary in Ash Road to incorporate the New Ash Green Sports Centre and Milestone School into the parish of Ash cum Ridley. I have no objection to this as they are part of the built up area of New Ash Green and make for clearly identifiable boundaries.

I would not be in favour of moving any part of Northfield (the land to the north of Milestone School). It forms an important green space between the parishes of Hartley and Ash, and it is important for both communities to have a stake in this land via (1) being in the parish of Hartley and (2) the freehold ownership of the New Ash Green Village Association.

1.2 Boundary between Hartley and Longfield parishes

I understand that as part of this review, the council can request the Boundary Committee for England to look at District Council Boundaries. I think that the council should survey the residents of the Bramblefield Estate in the north of Hartley to see which parish they would prefer to be in. The 2009 Hartley Parish Plan (page 8) found that 73% of those who replied identified more with Longfield than Hartley, and the area remains in the ecclesiastical parish of Longfield. I therefore endorse the recommendation of the parish plan and request that the council seek the views of the residents there.

2. Warding

I believe that there is a very strong case for warding, based on the criteria set out in paragraph 159 of the DCLG Guidance.

2.1 Single Election of Councillors is Impracticable and Inconvenient

Hartley is by far the biggest unwarded parish in the district and this causes a number of practical problems:

- Difficulties in running a poll. The ballot paper has been about 2 feet long on more than one occasion. As well as adding to confusion for electors, it causes problems when they come to

be counted. At one count I attended Hartley's was not completed until long after all the others.

- Cost of having to run by-elections for such a large electorate. A by-election for a ward will require only one polling station and fewer poll cards.

Having wards will, I believe, encourage democratic participation. It should encourage people to stand for council if they know they only have to run a campaign for 500 houses and not 2,000 – saving time and money.

It will also help improve voter identification with their councillors. A smaller ward will help people to more easily identify who to bring their concerns to, and increase the chances of having councillors who live closer to them.

2.2 Strengthening community cohesion

Paragraph 73 of the DCLG Guidance States *“Community cohesion is about local communities where people should feel they have a stake in the society, and in the local area where they live by having the opportunity to influence decisions affecting their lives. This may include what type of community governance arrangements they want in their local area.”*

The Wellfield Estate in the north of the parish is one of relative deprivation compared to the rest of the parish. According to the Sevenoaks Population and Social Profile 2010, it is the most deprived area in the district outside Swanley. In the last 40 years I think that only one parish councillor has come from there, even though numerically they would be entitled to about 2-3 councillors every election.

The Hartley Parish Plan has an action point to encourage greater involvement in community issues by the residents of the Wellfield area. This was endorsed by the Parish Council at their Finance and General Purposes Meeting of 5 May 2010.

The area is believed to have significantly lower turnout in elections. Encouraging participation is vital to a flourishing democracy.

I have used Wellfield as an example, but all areas of Hartley have their own concerns, which may be better met by having ward councillors.

I believe that warding will encourage greater participation. This amply meets the criteria of paragraph 159 of the DCLG Guidance.

2.3 Proposals

Therefore I propose 4 wards for Hartley with a possible layout set out below to achieve the same council size as present. In doing so I have been mindful of the need to balance community identity with the desirability of equal representation set out in paragraph 166 of the DCLG Guidance. Wards of roughly equal size are proposed to avoid the risk of one area dominating the others. I have given them compass point and also more “local” suggested names.

Ward	Details	Electors	Councillors
North (Hoselands)	Bramblefield Estate, Ash Road north of Wellfield, Wellfield Road, Wellfield Estate, Copse Side, Hottsfied, Quakers Close, Merton Avenue.	1,294	4
West (Bancks)	Ash Road between Wellfield and Fairby Lane, Round Ash Way, Oast Way, Conifer Avenue, Culvey Close, Broomfields, Castle Hill, Old Downs, Downs Valley Estate, The Warrens, Stack Lane, Green Way, Hoselands View.	1,001	3
East (Woodland)	Church Road between Ash Road and St Johns Lane, Larksfield, Woodland Avenue, Gresham Avenue, Wickhams Way, Dickens Close, Gorsewood Road, Gorse Way, Briars Way, Beechlands Close, Carmelite Way, Cherry Trees.	1,051	3
South (Manor)	Remainder of Ash Road and Church Road, Fairby Lane, Chantry Avenue, Tates Orchard, St Johns Lane, Billings Hill Shaw, Grange Way, Manor Drive, Manor View, Manor Lane, Manor Road, Springcroft, Grange Lane, Hartley Hill, Hartley Bottom Road, Chapelwood Road	1,047	3

The figures are based on the 2000 Electoral Roll so may need revising slightly (although little in the way of new development to change the numbers significantly since then). This is because members of the public can no longer see the electoral register unless they go in person to Sevenoaks.

3. Council size

Paragraph 154 of the DCLG guidance states that most parishes with a population of 2,501 to 10,000 had 9 to 16 parish councillors. Given that Hartley currently has 13 councillors, I make no recommendations to change to size, unless it would facilitate the other proposals.

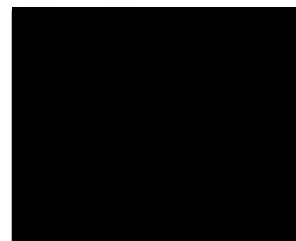
I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Peter Mayer



Received 16 FEB 2012



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

February 14th 2012.

Dear Mr Bigwood,

I have lived in the Green Belt area of South Hartley for over 40 years. Prior to the last 10 years we have always had a Hartley Parish Councillor living along the road that I could speak to if I had a problem.

We currently have 13 Councillors on our Parish Council but not one of them lives in the Green Belt and therefore they are not aware of the problems caused by the very restrictive planning policies enforced by Sevenoaks or the effect of the crime in the area which particularly upsets the elderly.

The current councillors claim that they represent everyone within the village but 3 weeks ago I did have a request that was never fulfilled. I would like to return to the days when we had Councillors living nearby who you could get to know and who appreciated your problems. This could be achieved by warding Hartley so particular Councillors were responsible for particular areas.

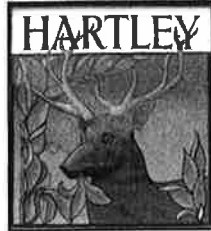
I would therefore ask that the Electoral Arrangements Committee be requested to discuss warding for the election of Hartley Parish Council.

I look forward to your consideration on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Ivy Sharp



Received - 1 MAR 2012

HARTLEY PARISH COUNCIL
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28th February 2012

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

Dear Mr Bigwood

Community Governance Review

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



Julie Hoad MILCM
Clerk to the Council