

Ian Bigwood

From: Ian Bigwood
Sent: 30 May 2014 12:00
To: Ian Bigwood
Subject: FW: Shoreham Parish Community Governance Review

Categories: Orange Category

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From: Philip Hobson [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 May 2014 00:32
To: Electoral Registration
Subject: Shoreham Parish Community Governance Review

Whilst I believe that creating a new parish ward of Romney Street would be in the best interests of Shoreham Parish, the proposed number of councillors (eight) by Shoreham Parish Council would be detrimental to local democracy. I would suggest a council with the following councillors:

1 Romney Street Ward
3 Shoreham Ward
1 The Well Hill Hundreds Ward

This would achieve a good equality of voters per councillors, and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services.

I have been a councillor on Shoreham parish Council from December 2000 to August 2012 and for much of that time I was Chairman or Vice-Chairman and can see that the proposed Romney Street Ward has a different identity to Shoreham Village and may still have a more Otford or Kemsing focus due to the better road links to those village centres. Having its own ward may encourage the residents to play a more active role in Shoreham Parish Council.

I would not recommend having more than one councillor for the proposed Romney Street ward as it may be difficult to encourage candidates. To my knowledge, the last time a resident of the proposed Romney Street ward stood for election was in June 2000. I am not aware of any resident of the proposed Romney Street ward being co-opted to the council in the last 15 years.

Democracy is best when there is an election. It is even better when there is a poll. Unfortunately, the current Shoreham Ward with its six councillors does not have a good history of attracting sufficient candidates to result in a poll. Looking at the last 3 elections for the whole council - which are all the elections since the current Shoreham Ward was formed - the number of candidates for the six Shoreham Ward councillors were:

2003 - Five
2007 - Seven
2011 - Three

Only in 2007 was a poll necessary. In 2003 and 2011 councillors had to be co-opted onto the council. These figures would suggest that the current Shoreham Ward would need only three councillors to ensure that no councillors are co-opted at the start of a four-year term. The Quality Parish and Town Council scheme requires that at least two-thirds of councillors were elected. This is known as the Electoral mandate test. If it could be guaranteed that the Well Hill Ward would always have an elected member then the size of the whole council should not exceed six members as that would have resulted in the council just meeting the Electoral mandate test. However, despite Well Hill Ward having an elected member since the creation of the Well Hill Ward in 2003, the current ward member was co-opted to the council in 2013. This would suggest that the council size may need to be five in order to meet the Electoral mandate test - one member each for the Well Hill and Romney Street wards and three members for the Shoreham ward.

From information provided by Ian Bigwood on the 19th May, the electorates size of each proposed ward as at 17.02.14 were:

- 159 Romney Street
- 211 Well Hill Hundreds
- 713 Shoreham

Further calculations will be based on these facts.

The Electoral Commission's Guidance on community governance reviews states in paragraph 164 that "It is an important democratic principle that each person's vote should be of equal weight so far as possible, having regard to other legitimate competing factors, when it comes to the election of councillors.

The scheme suggested by Shoreham Parish Council would have 119 electors per new Shoreham Ward councillor and 211 electors for the Well Hill Ward councillor. This is a clear imbalance that is contrary to the Electoral Commission's Guidance.

It would be impracticable to equalise all wards due to their differing sizes. However, a council of Romney Street Ward – one parish councillor Shoreham Ward – three parish councillors The Well Hill Hundreds Ward - one parish councillor

would be a very good fit as, taking the parish as a whole, the number of electors per councillor is 217 and the number of electors per councillor in each ward is:

- 159 Romney Street Ward
- 238 Shoreham Ward
- 211 The Well Hill Hundreds Ward

Although Romney Street appears to be over represented, it is more difficult to keep in touch with a widespread community than a compact village and this anomaly should be ignored.

Shoreham Village benefits from a shop, village hall and several public houses. This makes it easy for elected councillors to meet residents and community engagement. Romney Street has a public house which gives some potential for community engagement. Well Hill has non of these regular meeting places. It may be prudent to consider two councillors for the Well Hill Ward to make the workload of the councillors more on a par with Shoreham Village.

I would also suggest that the name of the council be changed. To my knowledge there has been confusion in the use of the name Shoreham Parish Council. The ecclesiastical Shoreham Parish Council only covers a part of civil parish area. The current civil Shoreham Parish Council contains the whole of the ecclesiastical

Shoreham Parish Council and parts of the Chelsfield, Woodlands, Otford and Halstead ecclesiastical parishes. It may be difficult to find a name that encompasses the three wards of Shoreham Parish without the name being unwieldy long. A possible name could be Shoreham Community Council which is permitted for parish councils and would clearly differentiate it from the ecclesiastical parish.

In Summary

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- 1 Create a new ward called Romney Street
- 2 The new council to have 5 members allocated as
 - 1 Romney Street Ward
 - 3 Shoreham Ward
 - 1 The Well Hill Hundreds Ward
- 3 Rename the council to Shoreham Community Council

This would achieve a council of a size that should meet the Electoral mandate test for Quality Parish Councils and have good local accountability.

Phil Hobson
Well Hill Hundreds Ward of Shoreham Parish