

Medway

Personal Details:

Name: June Nicholson
E-mail: [REDACTED]
Postcode: [REDACTED]
Organisation Name: Cuxton Parish Council

Comment text:

Cuxton Parish Council Response to the Boundary Commission Consultation

Uploaded Documents:

https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/download_document?file=draft%2F1582809249_Cuxton+PC+Boundaryconsultaionresponse+Feb2020.docx

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Criteria 1 – Delivering electoral equality for local voters

When the number of Ward Councillors is increased to 59, each ward would need to have approximately 3996 voters to provide equity of representation. Currently there are 55 ward councillors with a Ward average of 3641, however, Cuxton and Halling have 5074 voters (39% above average). This indicates that Cuxton and Halling have been underrepresented for many years with the Ward Councillor having 1433 more voters to support than fellow Ward Councillors. It is difficult to see how our Ward Councillor can be as effective as others with this additional workload, or indeed how the vote of the Cuxton and Halling electorate has equal value to that of other Medway residents.

Cuxton Parish Council would argue that Cuxton and Halling should be allocated 2 Ward Councillors. The Council acknowledge that, using this will mean each Ward Councillor would only have 2658 voters each rather than the 3394 average, however, arithmetical criteria are not the only criteria to be considered. We suggest that in this case the statutory criteria contradict each other, and we ask the Electoral Commission to use its discretion when making decisions that impact on Cuxton and Halling Ward.

Criteria 2 – Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities

We understand that one possible solution being proposed is to join Cuxton and Halling, a rural area, to parts of Strood South which is an urban part of Strood. However, distinct differences exist between these rural and urban communities creating the potential for conflicting and stressful demands on the Ward Councillors.

Conversely, Halling and Cuxton are both large rural communities with similar landscapes sharing many community interests and services such as:

- the Riverside Medical Practice, which is a joint GP practice serving both Cuxton and Halling surgeries;
- the Rector of Cuxton and Halling churches who commutes between both parishes;
- Cuxton and Halling Scout Group who are based in Bush Road, Cuxton;
- the Healthy Retirement Association based in Halling but serving both Halling and Cuxton communities;
- Cuxton supermarket (Co-op) and library (Halling does not have a supermarket or library).

The Parish Council believe that there are no such community interests that bind Cuxton and Halling with urban Strood. Combining them into one ward may create equal ward representation but may not be in the interest of Cuxton residents. Such a

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change also has the potential to cause Cuxton and Halling to lose their rural character and identity.

There are clear and identifiable boundaries between Cuxton and Strood which include the M2 motorway, the High Speed Rail line and the London/Victoria train line. The Cuxton Parish boundary also lies within these landmarks.

Criteria 3 - Promoting effective and convenient local government

Cuxton residents and the Parish Council currently feel underrepresented by having just one Ward Councillor to cover such a large geographical area, with evidence of delayed responses to enquiries and escalating concerns.

Any proposal to combine Cuxton and Halling ward with Strood South would come with its own problems, including:

- the lack of an easily identifiable ward name that could create confusion for the electorate.
- the potential for conflicts of interest and a disparity of time constraints for the Ward Councillors.
- the loss of a clear Ward boundary that could potentially lead to urban sprawl from Strood into Cuxton Parish with the associated loss of green space.

Cuxton Parish Council believe that it would be more effective and economical to keep the ward boundaries as they are and to allocate two Ward Councillors to service Cuxton and Halling electorate.

June Nicholson

Clerk, Cuxton Parish Council

On behalf of Cuxton Parish Council

26th February 2020