

New electoral arrangements for Maidstone Borough Council Draft Recommendations

July 2022

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A note on our mapping:

The maps shown in this report are for illustrative purposes only. Whilst best efforts have been made by our staff to ensure that the maps included in this report are representative of the boundaries described by the text, there may be slight variations between these maps and the large PDF map that accompanies this report, or the digital mapping supplied on our consultation portal. This is due to the way in which the final mapped products are produced. The reader should therefore refer to either the large PDF supplied with this report or the digital mapping for the true likeness of the boundaries intended. The boundaries as shown on either the large PDF map or the digital mapping should always appear identical.

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Introduction

Who we are and what we do

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament.¹ We are not part of government or any political party. We are accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. Our main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England.

2 The members of the Commission are:

- Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
- Andrew Scallan CBE (Deputy Chair)
- Susan Johnson OBE
- Peter Maddison QPM
- Amanda Nobbs OBE
- Steve Robinson
- Jolyon Jackson CBE (Chief Executive)

What is an electoral review?

3 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority. A local authority's electoral arrangements decide:

- How many councillors are needed.
- How many wards or electoral divisions there should be, where their boundaries are and what they should be called.
- How many councillors should represent each ward or division.

4 When carrying out an electoral review the Commission has three main considerations:

- Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
- Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

5 Our task is to strike the best balance between these three considerations when making our recommendations.

¹ Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

6 More detail regarding the powers that we have, as well as the further guidance and information about electoral reviews and review process in general, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Why Maidstone?

7 We are conducting a review of Maidstone Borough Council ('the Council') at the request of the Council. The Council requested this review as part of a move to all-out elections, and to ensure that arrangements are fit for purpose. We are also conducting a review of the Council as its last review was completed in 2001, and we are required to review the electoral arrangements of every council in England 'from time to time'.² Additionally, some councillors currently represent many more or fewer electors than others. We describe this as 'electoral inequality'. Our aim is to create 'electoral equality', where the number of electors per councillor is as even as possible, ideally within 10% of being exactly equal.

8 This electoral review is being carried out to ensure that:

- The wards in Maidstone are in the best possible places to help the Council carry out its responsibilities effectively.
- The number of electors represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the borough.

Our proposals for Maidstone

9 Maidstone should be represented by 49 councillors, six fewer than now.

10 Maidstone should have 23 wards, three fewer than there are now.

11 The boundaries of 22 wards should change; one will stay the same.

How will the recommendations affect you?

12 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the Council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward, and, in some cases, which parish council ward you vote in. Your ward name may also change.

13 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of the borough or result in changes to postcodes. They do not take into account parliamentary constituency boundaries. The recommendations will not have an effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums and we are not able to consider any representations which are based on these issues.

² Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 paragraph 56(1).

Have your say

14 We will consult on the draft recommendations for a 12-week period, from 5 July 2022 to 28 September 2022. We encourage everyone to use this opportunity to comment on these proposed wards as the more public views we hear, the more informed our decisions will be in making our final recommendations.

15 We ask everyone wishing to contribute ideas for the new wards to first read this report and look at the accompanying map before responding to us.

16 You have until 28 September 2022 to have your say on the draft recommendations. See page 41 for how to send us your response.

Review timetable

17 We wrote to the Council to ask its views on the appropriate number of councillors for Maidstone. We then held a period of consultation with the public on warding patterns for the borough. The submissions received during consultation have informed our draft recommendations.

18 The review is being conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
18 January 2022	Number of councillors decided
25 January 2022	Start of consultation seeking views on new wards
4 April 2022	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming draft recommendations
5 July 2022	Publication of draft recommendations; start of second consultation
28 September 2022	End of consultation; we begin analysing submissions and forming final recommendations
29 November 2022	Publication of final recommendations

Analysis and draft recommendations

19 Legislation³ states that our recommendations should not be based only on how many electors⁴ there are now, but also on how many there are likely to be in the five years after the publication of our final recommendations. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for our wards.

20 In reality, we are unlikely to be able to create wards with exactly the same number of electors in each; we have to be flexible. However, we try to keep the number of electors represented by each councillor as close to the average for the council as possible.

21 We work out the average number of electors per councillor for each individual local authority by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors, as shown on the table below.

	2021	2027
Electorate of Maidstone	128,574	146,228
Number of councillors	49	49
Average number of electors per councillor	2,624	2,984

22 When the number of electors per councillor in a ward is within 10% of the average for the authority, we refer to the ward as having 'good electoral equality'. All but one of our proposed wards for Maidstone will have good electoral equality by 2027.

Submissions received

23 See Appendix C for details of the submissions received. All submissions may be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Electorate figures

24 The Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2027, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2022. These forecasts were broken down to polling district level and predicted an increase in the electorate of around 14% by 2027.

25 We considered the information provided by the Council and are satisfied that the projected figures are the best available at the present time. We have used these figures to produce our draft recommendations.

³ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

⁴ Electors refers to the number of people registered to vote, not the whole adult population.

Number of councillors

26 Maidstone Borough Council currently has 55 councillors. We initially looked at evidence provided by the Council and concluded that decreasing by seven would ensure the Council can carry out its roles and responsibilities effectively.

27 We therefore invited proposals for new patterns of wards that would be represented by 48 councillors: for example, 48 one-councillor wards, 16 three-councillor wards, or a mix of one-, two- and three-councillor wards.

28 We did not receive any submissions about the number of councillors in response to our consultation on ward patterns.

29 The Commission, when proposing a council size, reserves the right to alter this number if it discovers that an alternative council size would provide a pattern of wards that better reflects its statutory criteria. During our analysis of the proposals for warding arrangements in the borough, we noted that the submissions received for Harrietsham & Lenham strongly argued against the Council's proposed two-councillor Harrietsham, Lenham & Hollingbourne ward that split Lenham parish.

30 As set out in paragraph 149, we were convinced by extensive community evidence not to split Lenham parish. As a consequence of the decision not to adopt the Council's proposed two-councillor Harrietsham, Lenham & Hollingbourne ward, we have incorporated Harrietsham Parish Council's proposal, which allocates an additional councillor to this area to create a three-councillor Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs ward. Overall across the borough, this has resulted in a slightly increased council size of 49 in order to facilitate a good balance in our statutory criteria within all wards.

31 We have therefore based our draft recommendations on a 49-councillor council.

Ward boundaries consultation

32 We received 168 submissions in response to our consultation on ward boundaries. These included one borough-wide proposal from Maidstone Borough Council ('the Council'). The remainder of the submissions provided localised comments for warding arrangements in particular areas of the borough.

33 The one borough-wide scheme provided a mixed pattern of one-, two- and three-councillor wards for Maidstone. We carefully considered the proposals received and were of the view that the proposed patterns of wards resulted in good levels of electoral equality in most areas of the authority and generally used clearly identifiable boundaries.

34 Our draft recommendations also take into account local evidence that we received, which provided further evidence of community links and locally recognised boundaries. In some areas we considered that the proposals did not provide for the best balance between our statutory criteria and so we identified alternative boundaries.

35 There was a detailed virtual tour of Maidstone. This helped to clarify issues raised in submissions and assisted in the construction of the proposed draft boundary recommendations.

Draft recommendations

36 Our draft recommendations are for seven three-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards and four single-councillor wards. We consider that our draft recommendations will provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we received such evidence during consultation.

37 The tables and maps on pages 8–35 detail our draft recommendations for each area of Maidstone. They detail how the proposed warding arrangements reflect the three statutory⁵ criteria of:

- Equality of representation.
- Reflecting community interests and identities.
- Providing for effective and convenient local government.

38 A summary of our proposed new wards is set out in the table starting on page 47 and on the large map accompanying this report.

39 We welcome all comments on these draft recommendations, particularly on the location of the ward boundaries, and the names of our proposed wards.

⁵ Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Central and North Maidstone



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Central Maidstone	3	-8%
Grove Green & Vinters Park	3	-8%
Penenden Heath	3	-5%
Ringlestone	1	10%

Central Maidstone

40 We received two submissions regarding this area from the Council and Green Party.

41 The Council proposed a Central Maidstone ward represented by three councillors. This ward would be similar to the existing High Street ward, with the exception of the area east of Wat Tyler Way and north of Mote Road being moved out of this ward and into Grove Green & Vinters Park ward. The Council stated that this ward would include the area of the town centre and similar densely populated residential areas around the town centre.

42 The Green Party proposed two two-councillor wards named Central North and Central South. Central North ward would be bounded by Fairmeadow, John Street, Curzon Road and Sittingbourne Road. The boundary between these two wards

would be High Street and King Street. Central South ward would retain the current High Street ward boundaries in the east and south, but this ward would extend west along Farleigh Hill to include the area of Tovil up until Bydews Farm. They stated that the High Street provides a natural boundary and that the areas around Hastings Road and Tovil are a community. However, while Central North ward would have a good level of electoral equality with a variance of -9% by 2027, Central South ward would have an electoral variance of 29%. Additionally, as discussed in paragraph 57, we do not consider the boundary between the proposed Central North and Penenden Heath & Ringlestone wards to be clear and identifiable. As a consequence, we have not adopted this proposal as part of our draft recommendations.

43 We are therefore adopting the Council's proposal for Central Maidstone ward. We consider that this ward reflects the extent of the town centre and uses broadly clear boundaries.

44 However, we are proposing a minor modification to the boundary between Grove Green & Vinters Park ward and Central Maidstone ward. The Council proposed to include Square Hill Road, Blythe Road and Chancery Lane in Grove Green & Vinters Park, with the neighbouring residential roads placed in Central Maidstone ward. To unite this area, we are instead proposing to use the River Len as the boundary between these two wards. We consider this is more identifiable for local residents.

45 Additionally, we are proposing that the north-eastern boundary between Tovil and Central Maidstone wards run along Brenchley Road and Tovil Road. An arrangement which follows the parish boundary in this area, as proposed by the Council, would create an unclear split through the properties on Courtenay Road.

46 Our proposed Central Maidstone ward will be represented by three councillors and have an electoral variance of -8% by 2027.

Grove Green & Vinters Park

47 We received eight submissions regarding this area from the Council and seven residents.

48 The Council proposed a three-councillor Grove Green & Vinters Park ward. This ward would include Mote Park and have an electoral variance of -8%. The Council stated that this proposed ward would be centred around the green space of Vinters Park.

49 The Council acknowledged that both Grove Green and Vinters Park have strong identities and did consider splitting these areas into two wards. We also received submissions from three residents stating that Vinters Park should be

represented in its own ward and not linked with Grove Green, as the green space of Vinters Park is a dividing rather than uniting feature. While a single-councillor Vinters Park ward would have a good level of electoral equality with a variance of 9%, a Grove Green ward would have a poor electoral variance of -32%. A resident proposed to combine Grove Green with Detling village to try and achieve electoral equality. However, this would result in an electoral variance of -22% and additionally would link together a rural area with the urban facing Grove Green. We did not think it would be appropriate to add in more electors from the neighbouring Bearsted & North Madginford ward to improve the electoral variance, as we consider the eastern boundary of Grove Green along the railway to be strong and identifiable.

50 Three residents argued that the area south of Ware Street and north of Ashford Road, currently in Detling & Thurnham ward, is part of the Grove Green community and therefore should be included in a Grove Green ward. They stated that residents in this area access facilities, such as medical practices, in Grove Green and are far removed from the rural parishes of Detling and Thurnham.

51 Following consideration of the evidence, we consider that the Council's proposal offers the best balance of our statutory criteria. A three-councillor Grove Green & Vinters Park ward would allow for the urban area currently in Detling & Thurnham ward to be included with the rest of the Grove Green community, thereby uniting a community and resulting in a sensible urban-rural split. While we acknowledge that Grove Green and Vinters Park are separate communities, placing them in different wards would not provide for a good level of electoral equality. Additionally, we consider grouping together different communities to be preferable to splitting them to achieve a good level of electoral equality.

52 Grove Green & Vinters Park ward would be contained by strong boundaries. We are proposing a minor modification to the Council's proposed boundary between Grove Green & Vinters Park ward and Central Maidstone ward. The Council proposed to include Square Hill Road, Blythe Road and Chancery Lane in Grove Green & Vinters Park, placing the neighbouring residential roads in Central Maidstone ward. To unite this area, we are proposing to use the River Len as the boundary between these two wards. We consider this arrangement to be more identifiable for local residents.

53 We further note that Mote Park, south of Ashford Road, could be included in Shepway ward or Central Maidstone ward and still allow for good levels of electoral equality, bringing Grove Green & Vinters Park to -10%. We would be interested to hear from local residents about this area.

54 Our proposed Grove Green & Vinters Park ward will be represented by three councillors and have an electoral variance of -8% by 2027.

Penenden Heath and Ringlestone

55 We received two submissions regarding this area from the Council and the Green Party.

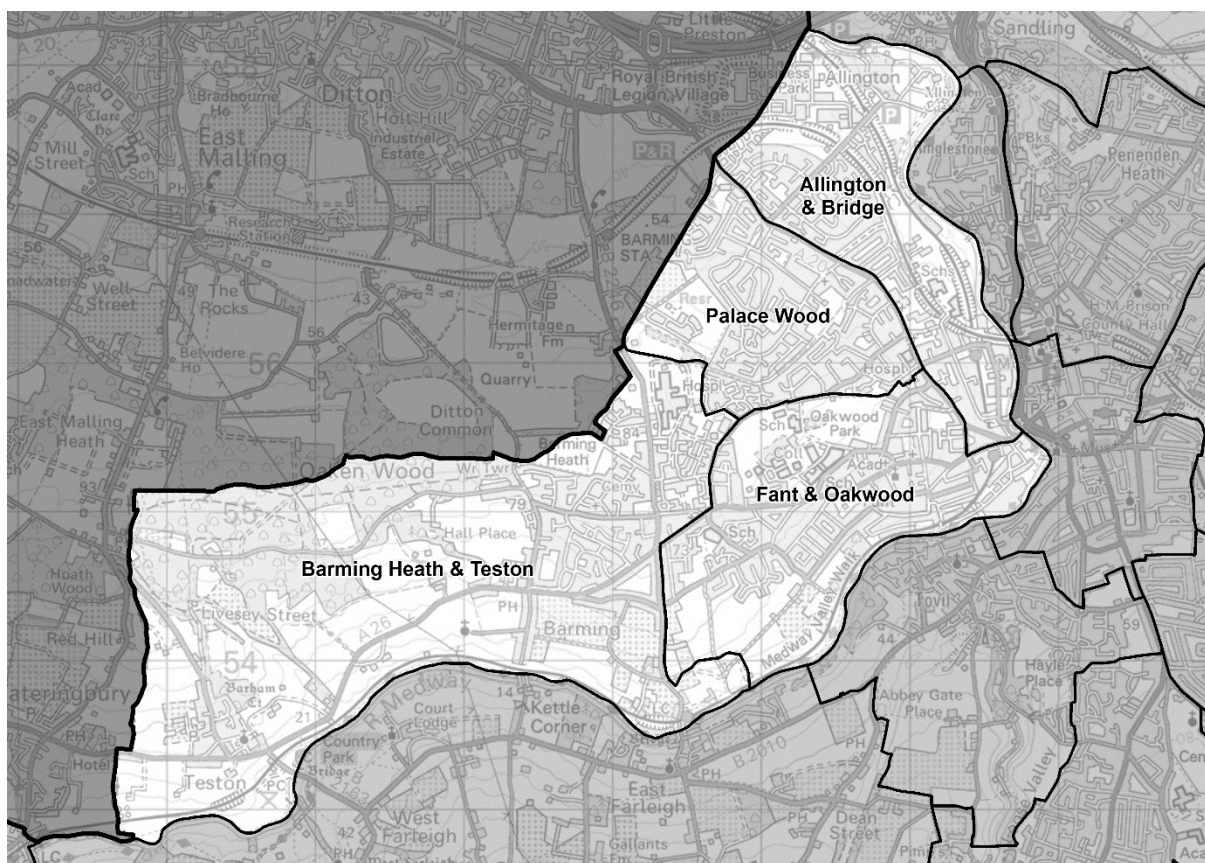
56 The Council proposed a single-councillor Ringlestone ward and a three-councillor Penenden Heath ward. Ringlestone ward would centre on the expanding Ringlestone estate and be contained by strong boundaries, including the River Medway and Royal Engineers' Road. The Council also argued that Penenden Heath is a recognised historic community with strong external boundaries.

57 The Green Party proposed to group together Ringlestone and the area of Penenden Heath north of John Street and Curzon Road into a two-councillor Penenden Heath & Ringlestone ward. They stated that this boundary separates different housing types; however, they did not offer any further evidence. We do not consider that this boundary is clear and identifiable for local residents.

58 We have decided to adopt the Council's proposal for Ringlestone and Penenden Heath wards. We consider that these wards reflect well-defined communities and use robust boundaries.

59 Our proposed Penenden Heath ward will be represented by three councillors and Ringlestone ward will be represented by one councillor. They will have electoral variances of -5% and 10%, respectively, by 2027.

West Maidstone



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Allington & Bridge	2	-8%
Barming Heath & Teston	2	9%
Fant & Oakwood	3	9%
Palace Wood	2	7%

Allington & Bridge

60 We received seven submissions regarding this area from the Council, Labour Group, Green Party, Fant & Bridge Labour Party, Councillor Harper and two residents.

61 The Council proposed two single-councillor wards for this area, named Allington and Bridge. The boundary between the two would run to the south of Little Buckland Avenue, including the roads of Grace Avenue, Palmar Road, Hyde Road and Buckland Lane in Allington ward, as suggested by a local resident. The Council stated that Allington and Bridge are well-defined and recognisable communities. However, the Council's proposed Bridge ward would have an electoral variance of 15%. We do not consider that the evidence provided justifies this level of electoral inequality and have therefore not adopted these wards as part of our draft recommendations.

62 The Labour Group and Fant & Bridge Labour Party proposed to combine the wards suggested by the Council into a two-councillor Allington & Bridge ward. Councillor Harper also proposed this combination. This ward would have an electoral variance of 12%.

63 Councillor Harper initially proposed to retain a two-councillor Allington & Palace Wood ward (with a small name change) and a two-councillor Bridge ward, using the current boundary of Giddyhorn Lane as the divide between the two. However, Allington & Palace Wood ward would have an electoral variance of 13%. The councillor further suggested using A20 London Road as the boundary between a western Palace Wood ward and eastern Allington & Riverside ward; however, they also stated this could split the Allington and Bridge communities.

64 The Green Party proposed a two-councillor Bridge ward which would stretch from Grace Avenue in the north to the River Medway in the south. They stated that this ward would give 'greater consistency of tenure and community'. However, this ward would have an electoral variance of 20%. Additionally, we are not convinced that including the area between Tonbridge Road and the River Medway would best reflect communities in this area, as this could split the community of Fant defined by the Labour Group as stretching from the town centre to Farleigh Lane.

65 Following careful consideration, we are proposing to combine the Council's proposed Allington and Bridge wards into a two-councillor Allington & Bridge ward, as suggested by the Labour Party, Fant & Bridge Labour Group and Councillor Harper. We consider that combining these two wards would reflect local communities in this area by combining the well-defined communities of Allington and Bridge. However, this ward would have an electoral variance of 12% so we are proposing a modification.

66 In the south-west of Allington & Bridge ward, we are proposing to use London Road as the boundary between Allington & Bridge ward and Fant & Oakwood ward. With London Road being used as a strong boundary between Allington & Bridge and Palace Wood wards, we consider that extending the boundary along this road allows for the use of an identifiable boundary. This modification would mean that Allington & Bridge ward would have an electoral variance of -8%. We would like to hear from residents in this area as to whether this boundary reflects local communities.

67 Our proposed Allington & Bridge ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of -8% by 2027.

Barming Heath & Teston

68 We received seven submissions regarding this area from the Council, Labour Group, Fant & Bridge Labour Party, Councillor Harper, Barming Parish Council, Teston Parish Council and one resident.

69 The Council proposed to extend the current Barming & Teston ward eastward to Farleigh Lane and Queen's Road, naming this ward Barming Heath & Teston. They argued that the parished areas at the edge of the urban Maidstone area are closely linked with the urban areas to the east and that the A26 is a key link between these communities.

70 The Labour Group, Fant & Bridge Labour Party and Councillor Harper proposed the same eastern extension as the Council for this ward; however, they argued that the parish of Teston should not be included. They instead argued that Teston is better aligned with rural communities, such as West Farleigh and Yalding parishes. Teston Parish Council stated that they are reasonably comfortable in the proposed Barming Heath & Teston ward, but that Teston parish is more rural than Barming. Placing Teston parish in Coxheath & Farleigh ward would result in a variance of 12% for this ward. We do not consider that the evidence provided justifies a higher level of electoral inequality and have therefore not adopted this suggestion as part of our draft recommendations.

71 Barming Parish Council proposed that the eastern boundary of the current Barming & Teston ward should be moved from the Barming parish boundary to Hermitage Lane and Farleigh Lane. A local resident also suggested this boundary, stating that this would include many facilities linked with Barming in a Barming-facing ward, such as Barming Heath. While using this boundary would result in a good level of electoral equality for Barming Heath & Teston ward at -10%, placing these areas in neighbouring Fant & Oakwood ward would result in an electoral variance of 22% there.

72 We are therefore adopting the Council's proposed Barming Heath & Teston ward as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that this arrangement unites the urban areas of Barming Heath that are closely linked with the parishes of Barming and Teston in a single ward, and that the A26 offers a spine for this ward. We also note that extending the current Barming & Teston ward eastwards was universally supported. We consider that the boundaries suggested by the Council are clear and identifiable.

73 We are proposing to adopt the name of Barming Heath & Teston, as suggested by the Council. The Labour Group, Fant & Bridge Labour Party and Councillor Harper stated that the name Barming & Heath would better reflect the constituent communities of this ward. However, as we are proposing to retain Teston parish in this ward, we consider that the Council's proposed name best reflects this ward.

74 Our proposed Barming Heath & Teston ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of 9% by 2027.

Fant & Oakwood

75 We received six submissions regarding this area from the Council, Labour Group, Green Party, Fant & Bridge Labour Party, Councillor Harper and a resident.

76 The Council, Labour Group, Fant & Bridge Labour Party and Councillor Harper all proposed the same two-councillor ward for this area. This ward would be named Fant & Oakwood, with the Labour Group, Fant & Bridge Labour Party and Councillor Harper arguing that this ward would bring together the two distinct but interrelated communities of Fant and Oakwood. They further stated that this ward would have clear boundaries. A local resident also suggested that the name Oakwood should be incorporated into the ward name, arguing that Oakwood is a recognisable name in the local community.

77 The Green Party suggested an alternative configuration for this area. They proposed to place the area east of Clare Park in their proposed Bridge ward and create a two-councillor Oakwood ward. Oakwood ward would encompass the area between Clare Park and the junction between Glebe Lane and Tonbridge Road. This proposed ward would use Queen's Road as its northern boundary. The Green Party argued that this ward represents a defined community.

78 As discussed in paragraph 64, we were not convinced to adopt the Green Party's proposed Bridge ward as we considered that it would split Fant, defined by the Labour Group as a cohesive community stretching from town centre to Farleigh Lane.

79 We consider that the Fant & Oakwood ward proposed by the Council, Labour Party, Fant & Bridge Labour Party and Councillor Harper best reflects the communities of Fant and Oakwood and are therefore adopting this ward as part of our draft recommendations. We are also of the view that this ward utilises clear and identifiable boundaries for local residents.

80 Our proposed Fant & Oakwood ward will be represented by three councillors and have an electoral variance of 9% by 2027.

Palace Wood

81 We received four submissions regarding this area from the Council, Labour Group, Fant & Bridge Labour Party and Councillor Harper.

82 The Council proposed a two-councillor Palace Wood ward, with London Road forming a strong eastern boundary. They stated that this ward is centred around the Palace Wood estate. We consider that this ward generally uses strong boundaries and provides a good level of electoral equality. The Labour Group supported this proposal.

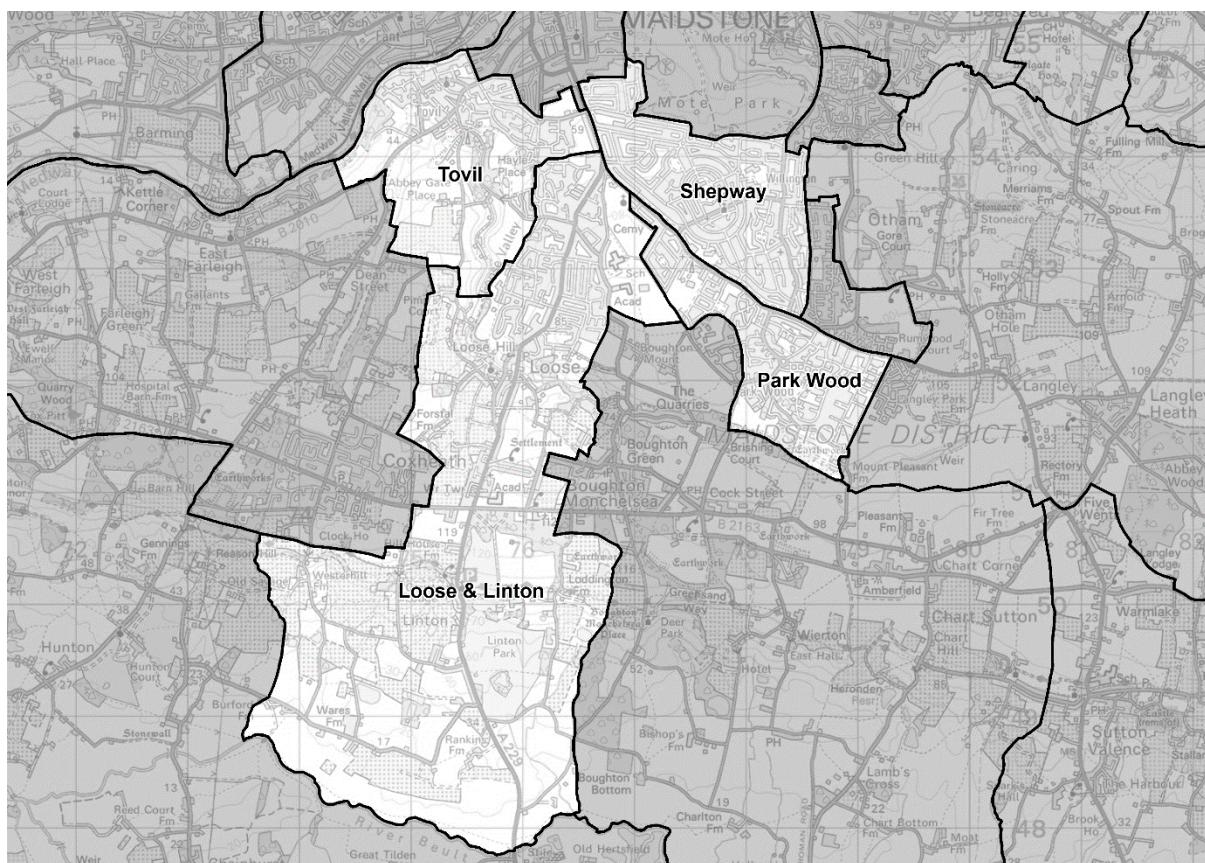
83 Councillor Harper proposed to retain the current Allington ward but rename it Allington & Palace Wood ward. However, this would result in an electoral variance of 13%. The councillor stated that an alternative to this proposal would be the Palace Wood ward proposed by the Council.

84 We are adopting the Council's proposed Palace Wood ward as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that this ward reflects the recognisable Palace Wood community and generally uses clear boundaries.

85 The Green Party argued that the Council's proposed southern boundary of Somerfield Road would be unclear. We looked at this boundary and agreed that it would likely be confusing for residents, with residents on Greenwich Close accessing north into Palace Wood but not being included in this ward. We are therefore proposing that the boundary between Palace Wood ward and Fant & Oakwood ward should run behind the properties on the south side of Somerfield Road, including the residents on Queen's Road, Greenwich Close and Somerfield Road in Palace Wood ward.

86 Our proposed Palace Wood ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of 7% by 2027.

South Maidstone



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Loose & Linton	2	10%
Park Wood	2	-5%
Shepway	3	-1%
Tovil	2	-9%

Loose & Linton and Tovil

87 We received 16 submissions regarding this area from the Council, Green Party, Councillor FitzGerald, Councillor Rigby, Linton Parish Council, Loose Parish Council, North Loose Residents' Association and nine residents.

88 The Council proposed to split Loose parish, placing the area north of the junction between Old Loose Hill and Linton Road into Tovil & North Loose ward. They stated that there are links between these two areas via Cave Hill and Stockett Lane, and that extending the boundary southwards to the edge of the urban area would create a stronger boundary. However, Councillor FitzGerald disputed the links between Tovil and North Loose and stated that travel across Cave Hill and Stockett Lane is not encouraged or safe.

89 To the south, the Council further proposed to group together the majority of Loose parish with Boughton Monchelsea parish. They stated that these two areas share common issues and have a strong connection. Two residents supported this suggestion. However, Councillor Rigby argued that grouping Loose and Boughton Monchelsea parishes would not work as they are two distinct communities with poor transport connections and little linking them together.

90 Loose Parish Council opposed the Council's proposal and argued that Loose parish should not be split. Three residents also argued that Loose parish should remain together. Loose Parish Council stated that the part of Loose parish the Council proposed to place in Tovil & North Loose ward contains important community assets, such as Loose Primary School and Loose Parish Pavilion. They offered an alternative proposal which would link the entirety of Loose parish with Linton parish, stating that these areas are linked by common issues. This was also suggested by Councillor Rigby and supported by Linton Parish Council and two residents. This ward would have an electoral variance of -11%.

91 Loose Parish Council further stated that Loose could be joined with the unparished area of North Loose, and that these areas share doctors, transport links and a neighbourhood plan. The North Loose Residents' Association, Councillor FitzGerald and Councillor Rigby also proposed this ward, stating that these areas share community links and common issues, such as development and A229 infrastructure. A two-councillor ward containing the parish of Loose and North Loose would have an electoral variance of -1%. Finally, they stated that Loose could be linked to Boughton Monchelsea parish.

92 Linton Parish Council stated that Linton parish should be linked with Loose and Boughton Monchelsea. They stated that these wards have a similar rural outlook and would be a good match.

93 Councillor FitzGerald proposed a Tovil ward coterminous with Tovil parish. However, this would result in an electoral variance of -20% for this ward.

94 Following careful consideration of the evidence, we have been persuaded to include the entirety of Loose parish in a ward with Linton parish and North Loose, up until the Wheatsheaf Junction. We consider that this best reflects the strong community links in this area and allows for the A229 to act as a spine for this ward.

95 We are further proposing a Tovil ward that contains the entirety of Tovil parish. In order to provide for electoral equality and strong boundaries, this ward would extend to Loose Road and Armstrong Road to include the health club and skatepark north of Armstrong Road. This is the boundary proposed by the Council for their Tovil & North Loose ward. Additionally, we are proposing that the north-eastern boundary between Tovil and Central Maidstone wards would run along Brenchley

Road and Tovil Road. An arrangement which follows the parish boundary in this area, as proposed by the Council, would create an unclear split through the properties on Courtenay Road.

96 Our proposed Loose & Linton and Tovil wards will both be represented by two councillors and will have electoral variances of 10% and -9%, respectively, by 2027.

Park Wood

97 We received 16 submissions regarding this area from the Council, Councillor FitzGerald, Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council, Chart Sutton Parish Council and 12 residents.

98 The Council proposed a two-councillor Park Wood ward. This ward would be similar to the current Park Wood ward but with some small modifications. In the north-west, the Council proposed to extend the ward to the Wheatsheaf Junction to take in electors previously in Shepway North ward. In the south-east, they proposed to run the boundary between the industrial park and housing estate centred on Edmett Way. Finally, they proposed to use the entirety of Sutton Road as the northern boundary. The Council stated that developments to the east of the industrial park have a distinct identity and therefore did not propose to include them in Park Wood ward.

99 As discussed in the Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton section (paragraphs 127–133) , Councillor FitzGerald, Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council, Chart Sutton Parish Council and 12 residents proposed to move the Joy Wood estate from Park Wood ward to Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward. They argued that residents here consider themselves part of the Boughton Monchelsea parish community.

100 Following careful consideration of the evidence, we have been persuaded to place the Joy Wood estate in Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward as we consider that this best reflects community identity in this area. Subject to this amendment, we are adopting the Council's scheme for Park Wood. We consider that the Council's proposal offers clear and identifiable boundaries and allows for good levels of electoral equality.

101 Our proposed Park Wood ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of -5% by 2027.

Shepway

102 We received two submissions regarding this area from the Council and a local resident.

103 The Council proposed to join the current wards of Shepway North and Shepway South to form a three-councillor Shepway ward. They stated that this ward would unite the community of Shepway that had previously been split and uses strong and identifiable boundaries.

104 A local resident suggested a minor amendment. They stated that The Beams, currently in Downswood & Otham ward, is only accessible through Shepway North ward. They therefore proposed adding this road to Shepway ward. While we agree that this would be a sensible change, this small area is within Downswood parish. As a result, an arrangement which placed this area in Shepway ward would necessitate the creation of a parish ward for this area.⁶ Unfortunately, there are not enough electors in this area to create a viable parish ward. We are therefore unable to make this change.

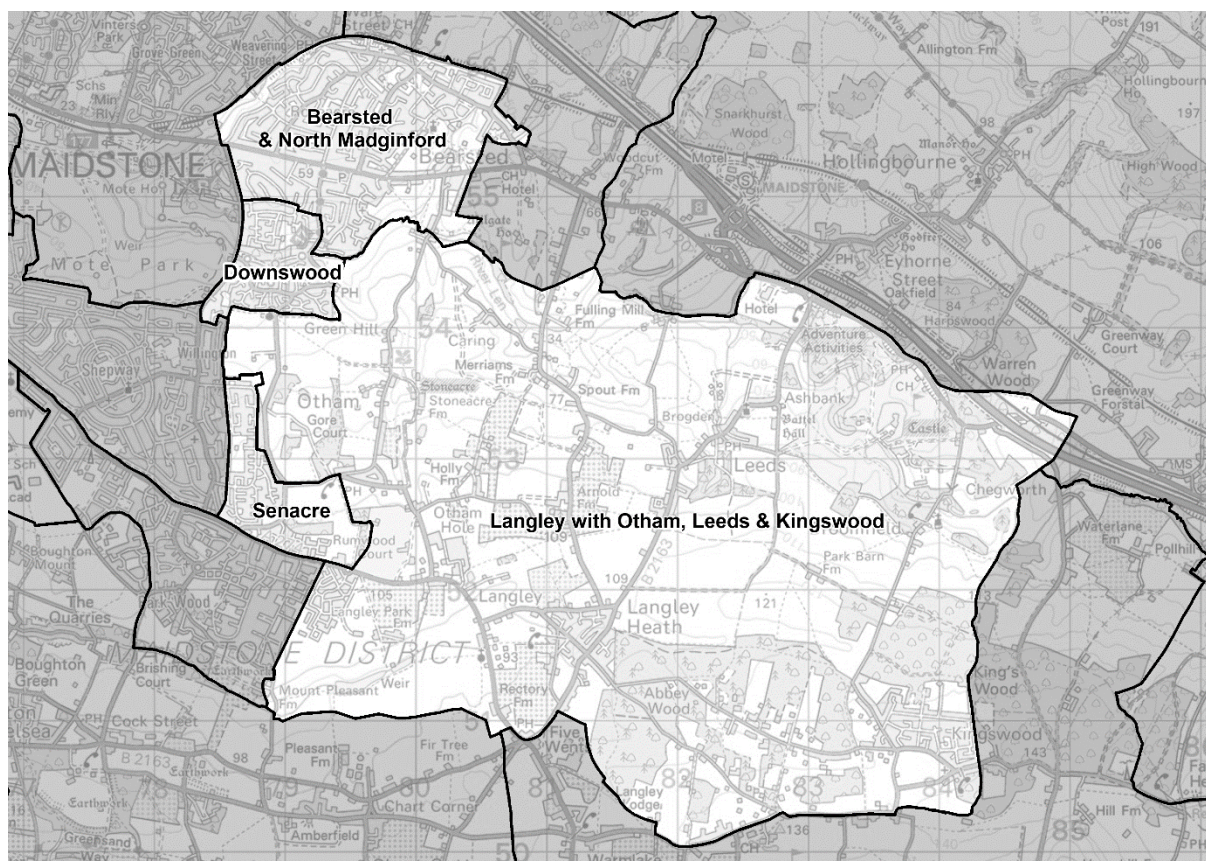
105 In order to provide for a clearer boundary and more effective local governance in this area, we are proposing to run the boundary between Shepway and Downswood along Willington Street and along a small section of Chapman Avenue, before running behind the properties fronting onto Ufton Close. This would ensure that residents in The Beams are not cut off entirely from Downswood ward and would create a clearer boundary for residents.

106 Subject to this amendment, we are adopting the Council's proposal for Shepway ward as part of our draft recommendations.

107 Our proposed Shepway ward will be represented by three councillors and have an electoral variance of -1% by 2027.

⁶ We will not normally recommend the creation of parish wards that contain no or very few electors (fewer than a hundred) unless it can be demonstrated to us that, within a short period of time, there will be sufficient electors as to warrant the election of at least one parish councillor. This is because each parish ward must by statute return at least one parish councillor. To do so, there must be a reasonable number of local government electors in the parish ward to make the election of a councillor viable.

East Maidstone



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Bearsted & North Madginford	2	3%
Downswood	1	-2%
Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood	2	5%
Senacre	1	6%

Bearsted & North Madginford and Downswood

108 We received three submissions regarding this area from the Council and two residents.

109 The current ward of Bearsted would have an electoral variance of 17% by 2027. Therefore, the Council proposed to move the area south of Egremont Road from Bearsted ward to Downswood ward. They stated that Egremont Road is a recognisable boundary and that it best identifies Bearsted from Madginford. We consider that this proposed ward well reflects the community of Bearsted.

110 As discussed in the Boxley Downs section, the Council proposed to include the housing on Barty Way, currently in Detling & Thurnham ward, in Bearsted & North Madginford ward. As residents here access into Bearsted & North Madginford ward,

we consider this a sensible adjustment. However, we are unable to make this change as it would result in an unviable parish ward in Thurnham parish. This change could be made in the future by a Community Governance Review conducted by the Council.

111 A local resident proposed to place the area of Bearsted, north of Ashford Road, in Detling & Thurnham ward. They argued that Ashford Road is a recognisable boundary in this area and that The Green is considered the centre of the Bearsted community. However, we note that this would combine a large urban area with rural-facing parishes. This ward would also have an electoral variance of 12%. We do not consider that the evidence provided justifies this level of electoral inequality and have therefore not adopted this suggestion as part of our draft recommendations.

112 The Council further proposed to create a single-councillor Downswood ward. This ward would encompass the entirety of Downswood parish and a large new development south of the parish boundary to the west of Church Road. While we understand why the Council placed this development in Downswood ward, this area currently does not contain enough electors to form a viable parish ward. We are therefore unable to expand Downswood ward south past the parish boundary. With the exclusion of this development, Downswood ward would have an electoral variance of -12%. In order to provide for a good level of electoral equality and a stronger boundary, we are proposing to extend the Downswood ward northwards to Madginford Road. We consider this to be a clearer boundary than Egremont Road.

113 A local resident suggested a minor amendment. They stated that The Beams, currently in Downswood & Otham ward, is only accessible through Shepway North ward. They therefore proposed adding this road to Shepway ward. As discussed in paragraph 104, we are unable to make this amendment without creating an unviable parish ward. However, we are proposing to run the boundary between Shepway and Downswood along Willington Street and along a small section of Chapman Avenue, before running behind the properties fronting onto Ufton Close. This would ensure that residents in The Beams are not cut off entirely from Downswood ward and would create a clearer boundary for local residents.

114 We have therefore been convinced to adopt the Council's proposal for Bearsted & North Madginford and Downswood wards, with the minor modifications discussed above. We consider that these wards offer the best balance of our statutory criteria.

115 Our proposed Bearsted & North Madginford ward will be represented by two councillors and Downswood ward will be represented by one councillor. They will have electoral variances of 3% and -2%, respectively, by 2027.

Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood

116 We received four submissions regarding this area from the Council, Green Party and two residents.

117 The Council proposed two single-councillor wards in this area. Langley ward would encompass the entirety of Langley parish and the developments to the east of Park Wood, and Otham, Leeds & Kingswood ward would take in Otham, Leeds and Broomfield & Kingswood parishes. They stated that the new Langley Park development is Langley orientated and separate from Park Wood. Additionally, the Council argued that their proposed Otham, Leeds & Kingswood ward reflected the rural nature of these parishes. However, due to the allocation of large developments, Otham, Leeds & Kingswood ward would have an electoral variance of -22%. We are not convinced that the evidence provided justifies such a high level of electoral inequality and we have therefore not adopted these two wards as part of our draft recommendations.

118 The Green Party proposed a Langley & Sutton ward which would group together part of Boughton Monchelsea parish and the parishes of Chart Sutton, Sutton Valence and Langley. They stated that this ward would respect the county divisions. However, this ward would have an electoral variance of -17% and is not supported by community evidence. We have therefore not adopted this ward.

119 We are instead proposing to unite the Council's proposed Langley and Otham, Leeds & Kingswood wards into a two-member Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood ward. This allows for a good level of electoral equality and groups together rural-facing parishes.

120 As discussed in the Downswood section, the Council proposed to include a large new development, currently within Otham parish to the west of Church Road, in Downswood ward. While we understand the logic of this proposal, this area currently does not contain enough electors to form a viable parish ward. This development will therefore be included in Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood ward.

121 Our proposed Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of 5% by 2027.

Senacre

122 We received two submissions regarding this area from the Council and a resident.

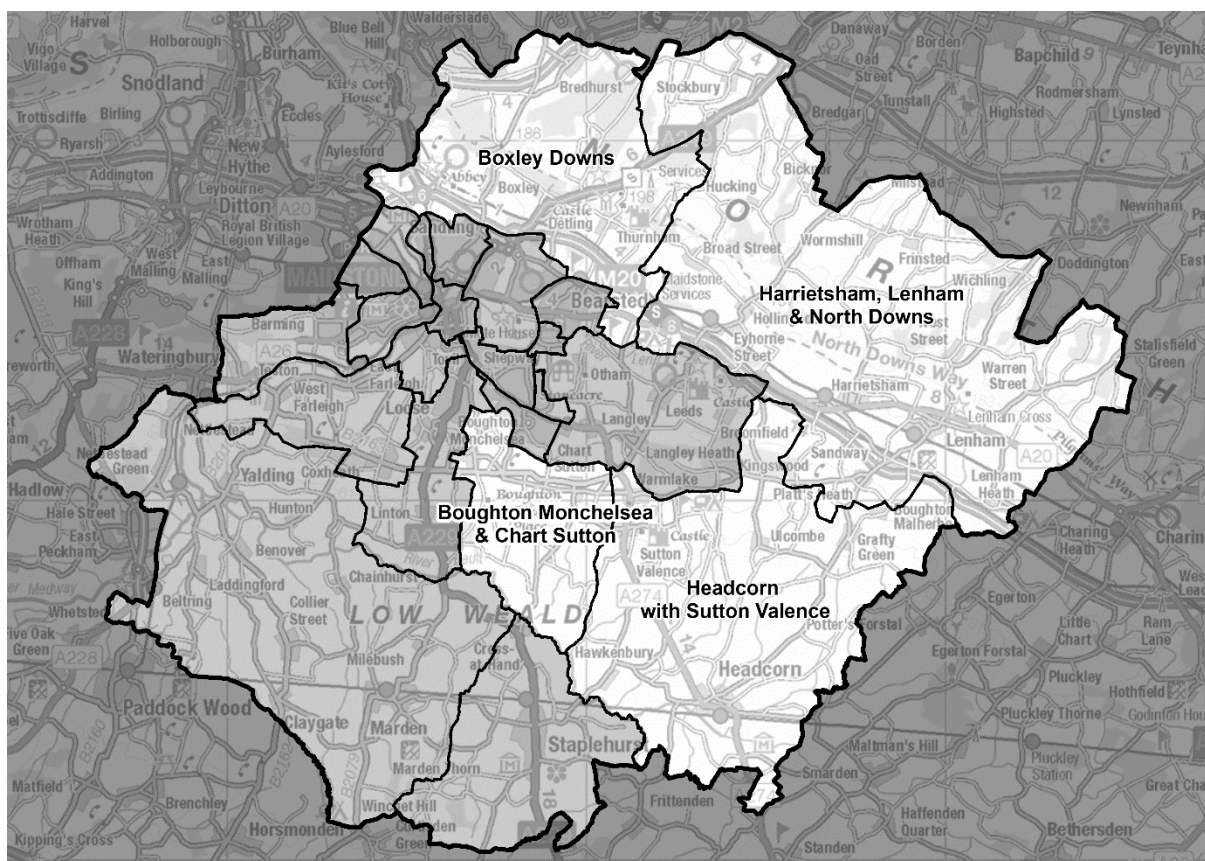
123 The Council proposed a single-councillor Senacre ward taking in the Senacre estate and new developments along Sutton Road. We consider that this ward utilises strong boundaries.

124 A local resident stated that the area between Sutton Road and Gore Court Road, known locally as the Buffkyn Way estate, should be moved from Park Wood ward into an Otham-facing ward to unite it with other developments north of Sutton Road. The Council include the Buffkyn Way estate in Senacre ward, uniting this area with the surrounding estates.

125 We consider that the Council's scheme provides the best balance of our statutory criteria in this area and are therefore adopting this ward as part of our draft recommendations. However, we are proposing a slight modification to the eastern boundary of Senacre ward. The Council proposed to run the boundary around the development north of Sutton Road and east of John Mills Way. However, this development is located within Langley parish. There are not enough electors in this area currently to form a viable parish ward and therefore we are unable to place this development in Senacre ward. The eastern boundary will instead follow the Langley parish boundary.

126 Our proposed Senacre ward will be represented by one councillor and have an electoral variance of 6% by 2027.

Eastern Parishes



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	1	9%
Boxley Downs	2	-5%
Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs	3	-5%
Headcorn with Sutton Valence	2	13%

Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton

127 We received 18 submissions regarding this area from the Council, Green Party, Councillor FitzGerald, Councillor Rigby, Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council, Chart Sutton Parish Council and 12 residents.

128 The Council proposed to split the current ward of Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton. They proposed linking Boughton Monchelsea parish and the area of Loose parish south of the junction between Old Loose Hill and Linton Road in a ward named Boughton Monchelsea & Loose. They further proposed to group together the parishes of Chart Sutton, Sutton Valence and East Sutton, as well as the western area of Headcorn parish, into a ward named The Suttions. They argued that Boughton Monchelsea and Loose parishes have strong community connections and share local issues. They argued that The Suttions ward also groups together parishes with similar local issues. However, we received a number of submissions,

discussed in paragraph 90, that strongly argued against splitting Loose parish and placing it with Boughton Monchelsea. Councillor Rigby argued that Loose and Boughton Monchelsea parishes are separate communities with few links and poor public transport between them.

129 The Green Party proposed to group together part of Boughton Monchelsea parish and the parishes of Chart Sutton, Sutton Valence and Langley in a ward named Langley & Sutton. They did not provide any community evidence to support this proposal. Additionally, this ward would have an electoral variance of -17%. We do not consider the evidence provided justifies this high level of electoral inequality and as such are not adopting this ward as part of our draft recommendations.

130 Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council, Chart Sutton Parish Council and Councillor FitzGerald all proposed that Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward should be retained as a single-councillor ward, with a minor change. They argued that this ward reflects the community, with common issues, transport links and community groups and activities across these two parishes. They further proposed to add in the Joy Wood estate, currently in Park Wood ward, to this ward. They stated that this area is part of Boughton Monchelsea parish and argued that residents of this area use facilities in Boughton Monchelsea, such as schools, churches and shops. Twelve residents supported this proposal.

131 Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council and two residents further suggested that the Furfield Park and Roman Way estates should also be included in Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward. However, this would result in an electoral variance of 22% for Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward.

132 Following careful consideration of the evidence, we are adopting the Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward proposed by Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council, Chart Sutton Parish Council and Councillor FitzGerald, as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that this ward best reflects the community evidence we received regarding the close community links between Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton parishes. The northern boundary of this ward will be the Boughton Monchelsea parish boundary to include the Joy Wood estate. However, we note that the parish boundary in this area is unclear around Oriel Grove and Stratford Drive. While the Commission does not have the power to alter parish boundaries, this could be changed later by a Community Governance Review conducted by the Council.

133 Our proposed Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward will be represented by one councillor and have an electoral variance of 9% by 2027.

Boxley Downs

134 We received three submissions regarding this area from the Council, Councillor Garten and a resident.

135 The Council proposed a Boxley Downs ward containing part of Boxley and Thurnham parishes and the entire parishes of Bredhurst, Detling, Stockbury, Huckling and Bicknor. As discussed in the Grove Green & Vinters Park section, we received a number of submissions arguing that the area south of the M20, currently in Detling & Thurnham ward, should be split from the rural parished area and instead be linked with Grove Green. The Council's proposal for Boxley Downs ward removes the area south of Ware Street from the northern rural ward and allows for a sensible urban-rural split.

136 The Council proposed to include the housing on Barty Way, currently in Detling & Thurnham ward, in Bearsted & North Madginford ward. As residents here access into Bearsted & Madginford ward, we considered this a sensible adjustment. However, we are unable to make this change as it would result in an unviable parish ward in Thurnham ward. This change could be made in the future by a Community Governance Review conducted by the Council.

137 A local resident proposed to place the area of Bearsted north of Ashford Road in Detling & Thurnham ward. They argued that Ashford Road is a recognisable boundary in this area. However, we note that this would combine a large urban area with the rural-facing parishes. This ward would also have an electoral variance of 12%. We do not consider that the evidence provided justifies this level of electoral inequality and are therefore not adopting this suggestion as part of our draft recommendations.

138 Councillor Garten argued that Hollingbourne parish has strong links with Huckling parish. Additionally, they argued that Huckling, Bicknor and Stockbury parishes should not be linked with parishes west of the A249 as these parishes would be physically isolated from the rest of the ward. They instead proposed to place these four parishes in a Harrietsham-facing ward. The Council's proposal included Huckling, Bicknor and Stockbury parishes in Boxley Downs ward.

139 Following careful consideration of the evidence, we are adopting the Council's Boxley Downs ward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to the modifications suggested by Councillor Garten to exclude the parishes of Stockbury, Huckling and Bicknor. We consider that this ward will best reflect the communities present in this area and further allow for an urban-rural split. Boxley Downs ward will therefore contain the northern area of Boxley parish and Thurnham parish, Detling parish and Bredhurst parish.

140 Our proposed Boxley Downs ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of -5% by 2027.

Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs

141 We received 93 submissions regarding this area from the Council, Councillor Cockett, Councillor Garten, Councillor Ratcliffe, Councillor Prendergast, Councillors J. & T. Sams (Harrietsham & Lenham ward councillors), Lenham Heritage Society, Harrietsham Parish Council, Hollingbourne Parish Council, Lenham Parish Council, Headcorn Parish Council, Boughton Malherbe Parish Council and 81 residents.

142 The Council proposed a two-councillor Harrietsham, Lenham & Hollingbourne ward combining the parishes of Harrietsham, Hollingbourne, Wormshill, Frinsted, Wichling, Otterden and part of Lenham parish. As part of this proposal, Lenham parish would be split along the railway line, with the northern area being placed in Harrietsham, Lenham & Hollingbourne ward and the southern area being placed in Headcorn ward. The propose Harrietsham, Lenham & Hollingbourne ward would have an electoral variance of 11%.

143 Ninety-two respondents argued against the Council's proposal, specifically the proposal to split Lenham parish between two wards. Respondents argued that residents of Platt's Heath and Sandway access facilities in Lenham, including shops and public transport, and that Headcorn is much further away with poor road access between these areas.

144 Lenham Parish Council proposed an alternative ward, which would incorporate the parishes of Harrietsham, Lenham, Wormshill, Frinsted, Wichling and Otterden. This proposal was supported by Boughton Malherbe Parish Council, Headcorn Parish Council, Councillor Prendergast, Councillor Ratcliffe and 29 residents. However, this would result in a ward with an electoral variance of 12%. Additionally, Hollingbourne parish would need to be added into the Council's proposed Boxley Downs ward, which would result in a variance of 18%.

145 Harrietsham Parish Council proposed to retain the current ward of Harrietsham & Lenham but also suggested combining the existing wards of Harrietsham & Lenham and North Downs. While the current ward of Harrietsham & Lenham would have a good level of electoral equality with an electoral variance of 3%, North Downs ward would have a poor electoral variance of -28%. Combining these two wards would result in a two-councillor ward with an electoral variance of 40%. However, with the allocation of an additional councillor, a three-councillor ward would have an electoral variance of -5%.

146 Councillor Garten suggested two wards, one combining the parishes of Lenham, Wichling and Otterden and the other including the parishes of Hollingbourne, Harrietsham, Frinsted, Wormshill, Bicknor, Hucking and Stockbury. These wards would have electoral variance of 22% and -21%, respectively. The councillor argued that Hollingbourne has strong links to Hucking parish, and that Hucking and Bicknor parishes should not be linked with the parishes west of the

A249 as they would be physically separated in such a ward. They further stated that Hollingbourne has different interests to Harrietsham and Lenham, and that Lenham parish should not be split, with new developments south of the railway line being cut off from Lenham in this scheme.

147 We had difficulty addressing all of these concerns. We have been persuaded by local evidence not to split Lenham parish between two wards as we do not consider such a split would reflect local communities. However, as discussed above, many of the proposals put forward would not result in good levels of electoral equality and splitting this area into multiple wards would prove difficult due to the population of this area being centred in Harrietsham and Lenham parishes.

148 Given these challenges, we investigated whether improvements could be made with a 49-councillor scheme. This would allow for a three-councillor ward combining Harrietsham, Lenham, Hollingbourne, Huckling, Bicknor, Stockbury, Wormshill, Frinsted, Wichling and Otterden parishes. This would keep Lenham parish united in a single ward, and would also reflect the community links between Hollingbourne, Huckling and Bicknor. Additionally, these parishes would not be linked with parishes across the A249, identified as a recognisable boundary by Councillor Garten.

149 Following careful consideration of all submissions, we are proposing a three-councillor Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs ward, as proposed by Harrietsham Parish Council. We are mindful that the communities included in this proposed ward may prefer to be represented by two wards. However, given we were unable to identify a warding pattern that achieves this while also providing for electoral equality, we are of the view that this proposal best reflects local communities while providing good electoral equality and the most effective and convenient local government under the circumstances.

150 This would result in the Council being represented by 49 councillors rather than 48. We consider that this allows for a better balance of our statutory criteria in this area and across Maidstone.

151 Our proposed Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs ward will be represented by three councillors and have an electoral variance of -5% by 2027.

Headcorn with Sutton Valence

152 We received five submissions regarding this area from the Council, Green Party, Boughton Malherbe Parish Council, Headcorn Parish Council and Ulcombe Parish Council. A number of residents also referenced Headcorn ward in relation to their opposition to splitting Lenham parish.

153 The Council proposed to group together the parishes of Boughton Malherbe and Ulcombe, along with the area of Lenham parish south of the railway line and the

area of Headcorn parish south-east of Headcorn Business Park. The Council described this proposed ward as geographically sensible. Ulcombe Parish Council strongly argued that Ulcombe parish should be included in Headcorn ward, with residents accessing public transport, shops and community groups in Headcorn.

154 The Green Party also proposed to split Lenham parish and place the southern area of Lenham parish in a Headcorn ward with Ulcombe, Boughton Malherbe, Headcorn and East Sutton parishes. They offered no supporting evidence for this proposal.

155 As discussed in the Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs section, the proposal to split Lenham parish and place part in Headcorn ward was strongly opposed, including from both Boughton Malherbe Parish Council and Headcorn Parish Council who supported Lenham Parish Council's proposal not to split Lenham parish. As such, we have not been convinced that the Council's proposed Headcorn ward reflects community interest and identity in this area and are not proposing to include part of Lenham parish in a Headcorn ward.

156 However, with the removal of Lenham parish, the Council's proposed Headcorn ward would have an electoral variance of -22%. We are therefore proposing modifications to provide for a better electoral variance.

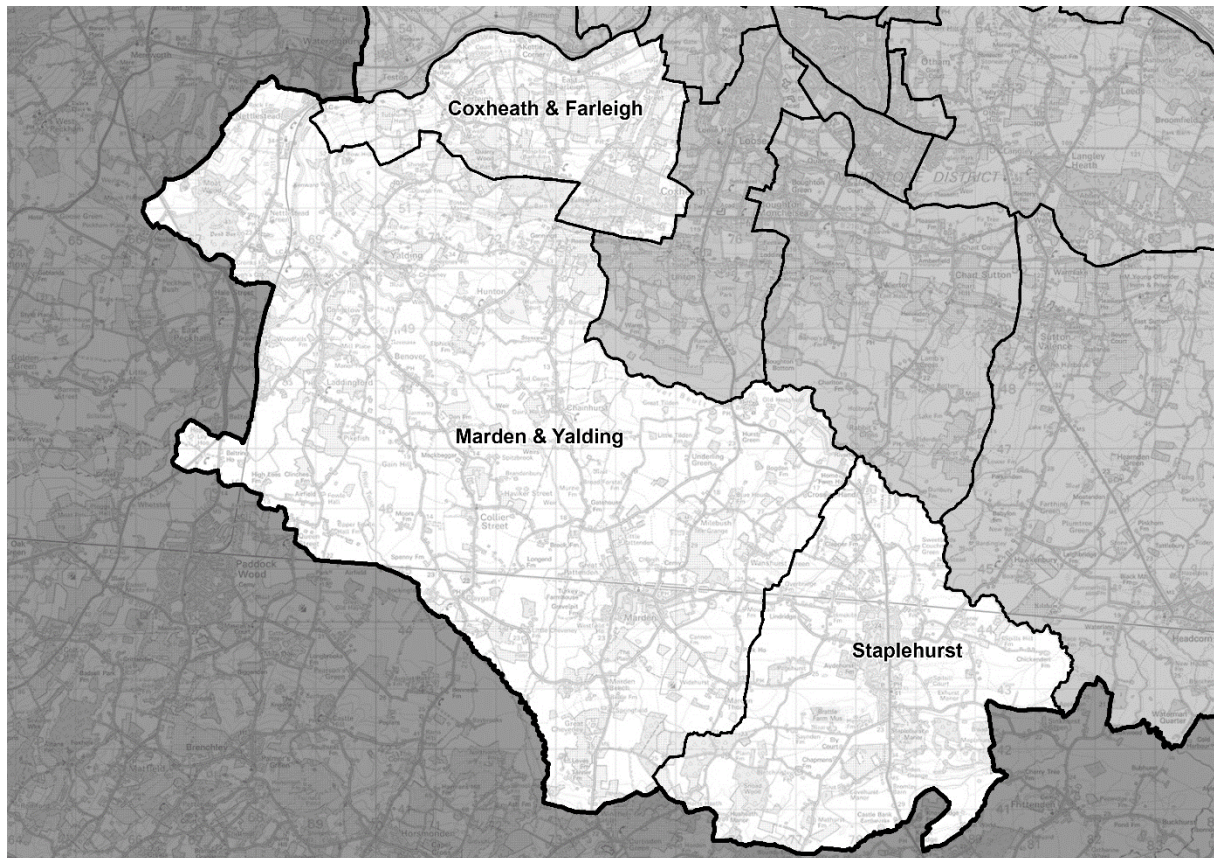
157 We are proposing a two-councillor Headcorn with Sutton Valence ward containing the parishes of Headcorn, Sutton Valence, Boughton Malherbe, Ulcombe and East Sutton. We consider that this ward best reflects community links in this area while further allowing for the inclusion of the entirety of Lenham parish in Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs ward. We further note that the A274 links the two main population centres of Headcorn and Sutton Valence, and that the ward name would reflect these centres.

158 This proposed ward would have an electoral variance of 13%. While this is a higher level of electoral inequality than we aim to achieve, we consider that this ward reflects the evidence we have heard from the local community and further provides effective and government local governance through the exclusion of Lenham parish.

159 We considered combining the single-councillor ward of Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton with Headcorn with Sutton Valence ward to create a large three-councillor ward. This would improve electoral equality, as this ward would have an electoral variance of 11%. However, we note the strong evidence for retaining Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton as a single-councillor ward (paragraph 130) and as such have not proposed this larger three-councillor ward at this stage. We would welcome views about Headcorn with Sutton Valence ward and the option to combine this ward with Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton ward.

160 Our proposed Headcorn with Sutton Valence ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of 13% by 2027.

Western Parishes



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Coxheath & Farleigh	2	5%
Marden & Yalding	3	-6%
Staplehurst	2	0%

Coxheath & Farleigh

161 We received three submissions from the Council, Green Party and a local resident.

162 The Council proposed a ward containing the parishes of Coxheath, West Farleigh and East Farleigh, named Coxheath & Farleigh. They offered little community evidence, and simply stated that this would be a good grouping of parishes.

163 The Green Party proposed to group Coxheath parish, Loose parish and the eastern area of East Farleigh parish into a ward. This ward would have an electoral variance of 18%. Again, they offered little community evidence and stated that this would be a good combination.

164 A resident suggested that Coxheath should be split from Linton and Hunton parishes, arguing that Coxheath is more urban than these rural parishes, and as such has different local concerns.

165 We have been convinced to adopt the Council's scheme for this area. It provides a good level of electoral equality and reflects the evidence we have received from a local resident regarding splitting Coxheath from the rural parishes of Linton and Hunton.

166 Our proposed Coxheath & Farleigh ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of 5% by 2027.

Marden & Yalding

167 We received eight submissions regarding this area from the Council, Green Party, Hunton Parish Council, Linton Parish Council, Marden Parish Council, Yalding Parish Council and two residents.

168 The Council proposed a three-councillor ward consisting of the parishes of Marden, Yalding, Collier Street, Hunton, Linton and Nettlestead, named Marden & Yalding. They stated that they considered splitting this ward into two wards, one containing Yalding and Nettlestead parishes and the other containing Marden, Collier Street, Hunton and Linton parishes. However, they stated that Hunton parish is more closely linked with Yalding than Marden, and that this configuration would split these parishes. The Council therefore argued for a large three-councillor ward.

169 Hunton Parish Council supported the Council's proposal for a three-councillor Marden & Yalding ward and stated that Hunton parish should be in a ward with Yalding parish.

170 The Green Party proposed a Yalding & Farleigh ward containing the parishes of Yalding, Hunton, Linton, Nettlestead, West Farleigh and the western area of East Farleigh. This ward would have an electoral variance of -12%. They also proposed a Marden ward containing the parishes of Marden and Collier Street. This ward would have an electoral variance of -21%. They offered no community evidence for these wards, and both would not offer good levels of electoral equality. We are therefore not adopting this suggestion as part of our draft recommendations.

171 Marden Parish Council proposed a ward containing the parishes of Marden, Collier Street and Hunton. They stated that their preference would be to have a ward containing solely Marden parish but acknowledged that this would not provide for good levels of electoral equality, with an electoral variance of 32%. Their proposed ward would have an electoral variance of -12%. However, we note that this proposal would split Hunton parish from Yalding, which the Council and Hunton Parish Council argued would not reflect community links in this area.

172 Yalding Parish Council supported the Council's proposal for Marden & Yalding ward. They argued that Yalding and Collier Street parishes have strong community links and that all parishes in this ward, aside from Linton parish, are affected by the common issue of severe flooding. They further stated that this grouping of parishes would positively impact service provision in this area.

173 A resident proposed two wards, one containing Hunton and Yalding parishes and the other containing only Marden parish. As discussed above, a Marden ward would have an electoral variance of 32%. A ward containing Hunton and Yalding parishes would have an electoral variance of -7%. The resident further argued that Linton parish should be placed in a ward with Loose parish, as they have similar concerns and are closely linked. As discussed in paragraph 90, we received further submissions regarding the strong links between Loose and Linton.

174 Linton Parish Council also stated that Linton parish should be linked with Loose and Boughton Monchelsea. They stated that these wards have a similar rural outlook and would be a good match.

175 Another resident argued that Yalding and Marden parishes are not a good match, as Marden parish is much larger and they have few links. Instead, they proposed to place Marden and Staplehurst parishes together in a ward with an electoral variance of 11%, and also combine the parishes of Hunton, Linton and Yalding to create a ward with an electoral variance of 9%. However, as discussed in paragraph 180, we have been convinced to retain Staplehurst ward and not to join this parish with any in the surrounding area. We are therefore unable to adopt this suggestion.

176 Following careful consideration of the evidence, we are proposing to adopt the Council's proposal for Marden & Yalding ward with a small modification. We consider that this ward provides a good level of electoral equality while also respecting the community links between these parishes, notably Yalding and Hunton. We are, however, not proposing to include Linton parish in this ward. This is following evidence we received regarding the close links between Linton and Loose, as discussed in paragraph 90.

177 Our proposed Marden & Yalding ward will be represented by three councillors and have an electoral variance of -6% by 2027.

Staplehurst

178 We received four submissions regarding this area from the Council, Councillor Perry, Staplehurst Parish Council and a resident.

179 All respondents argued that the current ward of Staplehurst should be unchanged. They stated that the boundary, which would be the same as the external boundary of Staplehurst parish, is clear and that Staplehurst is a self-contained community that often looks outside of Maidstone Borough for services.

180 We have been convinced to adopt the Council's scheme for Staplehurst ward, which would retain the current ward boundaries. We regard this ward as the best reflection of our statutory criteria.

181 Our proposed Staplehurst ward will be represented by two councillors and have an electoral variance of 0% by 2027.

Conclusions

182 The table below provides a summary as to the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality in Maidstone, referencing the 2021 and 2027 electorate figures against the proposed number of councillors and wards. A full list of wards, names and their corresponding electoral variances can be found at Appendix A to the back of this report. An outline map of the wards is provided at Appendix B.

Summary of electoral arrangements

	Draft recommendations	
	2021	2027
Number of councillors	49	49
Number of electoral wards	23	23
Average number of electors per councillor	2,624	2,984
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	9	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Draft recommendations

Maidstone Borough Council should be made up of 49 councillors serving seven three-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards and four one-councillor wards. The details and names are shown in Appendix A and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Mapping

Sheet 1, Map 1 shows the proposed wards for Maidstone Borough Council. You can also view our draft recommendations for Maidstone on our interactive maps at www.consultation.lgbce.org.uk

Parish electoral arrangements

183 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

184 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Maidstone Borough Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

185 As a result of our proposed ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Bearsted Parish Council, Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council, Boxley Parish Council, Otham Parish Council and Thurnham Parish Council.

186 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Bearsted parish.

Draft recommendations

Bearsted Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Bearsted North	11
Bearsted South	4

187 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Boughton Monchelsea parish.

Draft recommendations

Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Joy Wood	2
Langley Park	4
North	2
South	7

188 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Boxley parish.

Draft recommendations

Boxley Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Grove Green	5
North	6

South	2
South East	1
Woodlands	1

189 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Otham parish.

Draft recommendations

Otham Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Otham North	4
Otham South	5

190 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Thurnham parish.

Draft recommendations

Thurnham Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Thurnham East	3
Thurnham West	6

Have your say

191 The Commission has an open mind about its draft recommendations. Every representation we receive will be considered, regardless of who it is from or whether it relates to the whole borough or just a part of it.

192 If you agree with our recommendations, please let us know. If you don't think our recommendations are right for Maidstone, we want to hear alternative proposals for a different pattern of wards.

193 Our website has a special consultation area where you can explore the maps. You can find it at www.consultation.lgbce.org.uk

194 Submissions can also be made by emailing reviews@lgbce.org.uk or by writing to:

Review Officer (Maidstone)
LGBCE
PO Box 133
Blyth
NE24 9FE

195 The Commission aims to propose a pattern of wards for Maidstone which delivers:

- Electoral equality: each local councillor represents a similar number of electors.
- Community identity: reflects the identity and interests of local communities.
- Effective and convenient local government: helping your council discharge its responsibilities effectively.

196 A good pattern of wards should:

- Provide good electoral equality, with each councillor representing, as closely as possible, the same number of electors.
- Reflect community interests and identities and include evidence of community links.
- Be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries.
- Help the council deliver effective and convenient local government.

197 Electoral equality:

- Does your proposal mean that councillors would represent roughly the same number of electors as elsewhere in Maidstone?

198 Community identity:

- Community groups: is there a parish council, residents' association or other group that represents the area?
- Interests: what issues bind the community together or separate it from other parts of your area?
- Identifiable boundaries: are there natural or constructed features which make strong boundaries for your proposals?

199 Effective local government:

- Are any of the proposed wards too large or small to be represented effectively?
- Are the proposed names of the wards appropriate?
- Are there good links across your proposed wards? Is there any form of public transport?

200 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, we make available for public inspection full copies of all representations the Commission takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all representations will be placed on deposit at our offices and on our website at www.lqbce.org.uk A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

201 If you are a member of the public and not writing on behalf of a council or organisation we will remove any personal identifiers. This includes your name, postal or email addresses, signatures or phone numbers from your submission before it is made public. We will remove signatures from all letters, no matter who they are from.

202 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with the draft recommendations. We will then publish our final recommendations.

203 After the publication of our final recommendations, the changes we have proposed must be approved by Parliament. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in draft in Parliament. The draft

Order will provide for new electoral arrangements to be implemented at the all-out elections for Maidstone in 2024.

Equalities

204 The Commission has looked at how it carries out reviews under the guidelines set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. It has made best endeavours to ensure that people with protected characteristics can participate in the review process and is sufficiently satisfied that no adverse equality impacts will arise as a result of the outcome of the review.

Appendices

Appendix A

Draft recommendations for Maidstone Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2027)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Allington & Bridge	2	4,798	2,399	-9%	5,475	2,737	-8%
2	Barming Heath & Teston	2	5,584	2,792	6%	6,509	3,255	9%
3	Bearsted & North Madginford	2	5,672	2,836	8%	6,144	3,072	3%
4	Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	1	2,836	2,836	8%	3,257	3,257	9%
5	Boxley Downs	2	5,194	2,597	-1%	5,694	2,847	-5%
6	Central Maidstone	3	6,831	2,277	-13%	8,254	2,751	-8%
7	Coxheath & Farleigh	2	5,499	2,750	5%	6,251	3,125	5%
8	Downswood	1	2,704	2,704	3%	2,920	2,920	-2%
9	Fant & Oakwood	3	9,125	3,042	16%	9,791	3,264	9%
10	Grove Green & Vinters Park	3	7,608	2,536	-3%	8,201	2,734	-8%
11	Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs	3	7,611	2,537	-3%	8,503	2,834	-5%

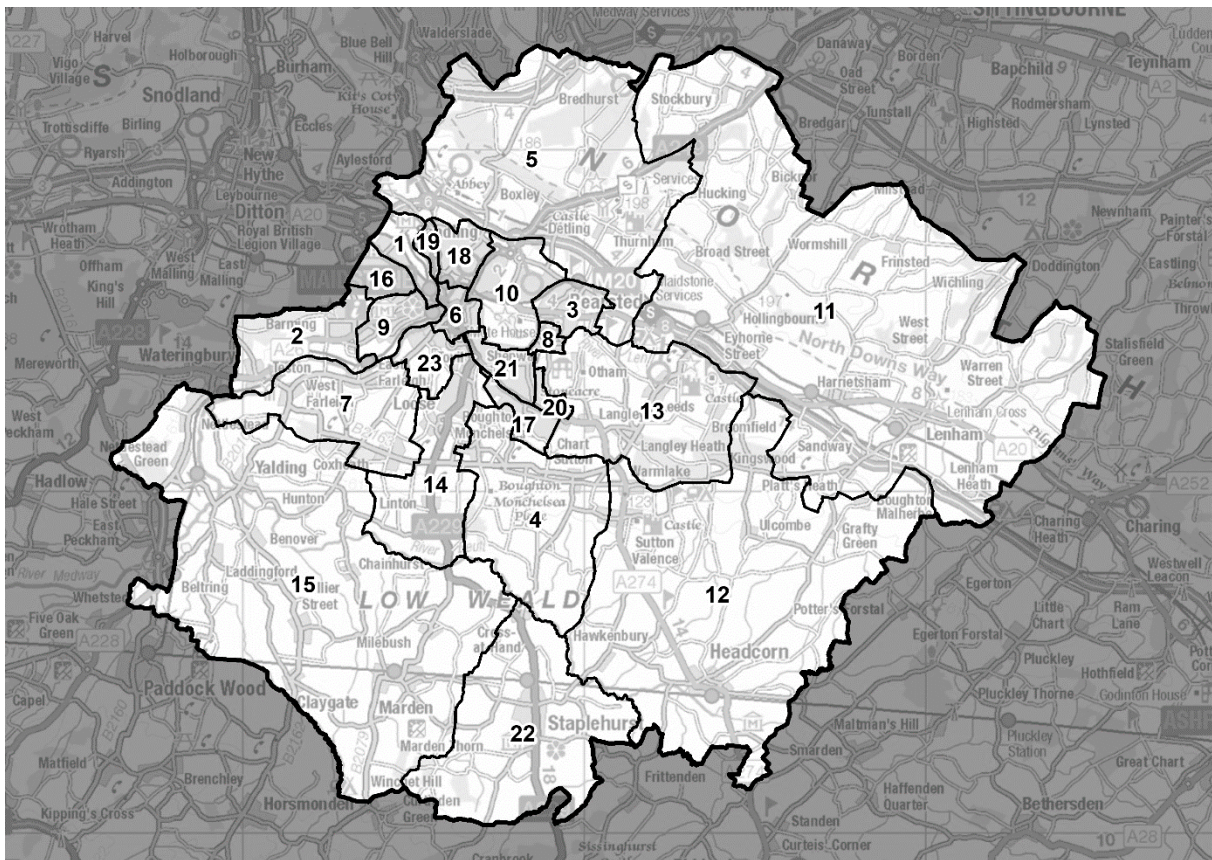
Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2027)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12 Headcorn with Sutton Valence	2	6,132	3,066	17%	6,719	3,360	13%
13 Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood	2	4,211	2,106	-20%	6,250	3,125	5%
14 Loose & Linton	2	6,135	3,068	17%	6,576	3,288	10%
15 Marden & Yalding	3	7,738	2,579	-2%	8,432	2,811	-6%
16 Palace Wood	2	5,855	2,928	12%	6,380	3,190	7%
17 Park Wood	2	5,059	2,530	-4%	5,676	2,838	-5%
18 Penenden Heath	3	7,851	2,617	0%	8,461	2,820	-5%
19 Ringlestone	1	2,050	2,050	-22%	3,297	3,297	10%
20 Senacre	1	2,244	2,244	-14%	3,169	3,169	6%
21 Shepway	3	8,157	2,719	4%	8,848	2,949	-1%
22 Staplehurst	2	5,307	2,654	1%	5,972	2,986	0%
23 Tovil	2	4,373	2,187	-17%	5,450	2,725	-9%
Totals	49	128,574	-	-	146,228	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,624	-	-	2,984	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Maidstone Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each electoral ward varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Appendix B

Outline map



Number	Ward name
1	Allington & Bridge
2	Barming Heath & Teston
3	Bearsted & North Madginford
4	Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton
5	Boxley Downs
6	Central Maidstone
7	Coxheath & Farleigh
8	Downswood
9	Fant & Oakwood
10	Grove Green & Vinters Park
11	Harrietsham, Lenham & North Downs
12	Headcorn with Sutton Valence
13	Langley with Otham, Leeds & Kingswood
14	Loose & Linton
15	Marden & Yalding
16	Palace Wood
17	Park Wood
18	Penenden Heath

19	Ringlestone
20	Senacre
21	Shepway
22	Staplehurst
23	Tovil

A more detailed version of this map can be seen on the large map accompanying this report, or on our website: www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/kent/maidstone

Appendix C

Submissions received

All submissions received can also be viewed on our website at:
www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/kent/maidstone

Local Authority

- Maidstone Borough Council

Political Groups

- Fant & Bridge Labour Party
- Maidstone Council Green Party
- Maidstone Council Labour Group

Councillors

- Councillor M. Cockett (Lenham Parish Council)
- Councillor M. FitzGerald (Chart Sutton Parish Council)
- Councillor P. Garten (Maidstone Borough Council)
- Councillor P. Harper (Maidstone Borough Council)
- Councillor J. Perry (Maidstone Borough Council and Staplehurst Parish Council)
- Councillor S. Prendergast (Kent County Council)
- Councillor A. Ratcliffe (Lenham Parish Council)
- Councillor P. Rigby (Loose Parish Council)
- Councillors J. & T. Sams (Maidstone Borough Council)

Local Organisations

- Lenham Heritage Society
- North Loose Residents' Association

Parish and Town Councils

- Barming Parish Council
- Boughton Malherbe Parish Council
- Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council
- Chart Sutton Parish Council
- Harrietsham Parish Council
- Headcorn Parish Council

- Hollingbourne Parish Council
- Hunton Parish Council
- Lenham Parish Council
- Linton Parish Council
- Loose Parish Council
- Marden Parish Council
- Staplehurst Parish Council
- Teston Parish Council
- Ulcombe Parish
- Yalding Parish Council

Local Residents

- 137 local residents

Appendix D

Glossary and abbreviations

Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral inequality	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. We only take account of electors registered specifically for local elections during our reviews.
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town council'
Parish (or town) council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
Town council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was set up by Parliament, independent of Government and political parties. It is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government.

Local Government Boundary Commission for
England
1st Floor, Windsor House
50 Victoria Street, London
SW1H 0TL

Telephone: 0330 500 1525

Email: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

Online: www.lgbce.org.uk

www.consultation.lgbce.org.uk

Twitter: @LGBCE