Rowlands Castle Parish Council

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Emily Starkie - Review Officer (East Hampshire)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Sent by Email: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

11 December 2017

Dear Madam

Response to Consultation on LGBCE's Review of East Hampshire District Council (with reference to the Southern Wards of Horndean and Rowlands Castle)

At its meetings on 6 November and 4 December 2017, Rowlands Castle Parish Council (RCPC) considered LGBCE's draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) after its Review of the area. Such recommendations include proposals to alter the boundaries of Horndean and Rowlands Castle Wards.

RCPC agrees with the recommendation to enlarge the Rowlands Castle Ward to include the hamlets of Idsworth and Finchdean (and surrounding areas). However, RCPC objects to the recommendations to include also those parts of Horndean to the east of the A3(M) in Rowlands Castle Ward, and for the Ward to be represented by 2 district cllrs. These latter recommendations are both unexpected and unwelcome, for the reasons set out below.

It is understood LGBCE's Review of East Hampshire was occasioned by concerns of electoral inequality. It is also understood LGBCE's Review and subsequent recommendations aim to:

- Improve electoral equality so each councillor represents a similar number of voters
- Reflect the identify and interests of local communities
- Provide effective and convenient local government, helping councils discharge their responsibilities effectively.

RCPC recognises that the number of voters in each ward should be as equal as possible and ideally within 10% of being equal so that district councillor representation is seen to be fair.

General Objections

The recommendations to include parts of Horndean in Rowlands Castle Ward neither reflect community identity nor, as a consequence, provide for effective and convenient local government. They split an existing cohesive community in Horndean and place part of it with Rowlands Castle, a settlement that is separated from Horndean by some distance across fields and woodland. Thus Horndean village centre would become part of Rowlands Castle Ward, even though our two communities are very different in identity and culture. It would be hard for a Rowlands Castle-based District Councillor (DC) to be properly aware of any matters particular to Horndean (and vice versa), and consequently the electorate might well feel improperly represented in one or other of the 2 settlements.

The recommendations are seemingly based on an inaccurate assessment of the A3(M) as a significant boundary and the need to equalise electoral numbers but without regard to the actual layout of the community on the ground. RCPC considers parish boundaries to be the building blocks for communities and that district wards should be based on those boundaries. These recommendations would lead to the mis-alignment of Rowlands Castle's Parish and Ward boundaries, which may confuse residents.

Specific Objections:

1. Horndean and Rowlands Castle are two Parishes separated by a large tract of open countryside and woodland that forms a natural barrier and boundary between the two communities. Both Parishes are demographically very different and each has a marked cultural difference. For most electors, there is little contact between the two areas save to drive through them to other destinations.

2. The recommendations would have the effect of artificially attaching a portion of the Horndean community with that of Rowlands Castle when there is no natural affinity between the 2 settlements. Each has its own shops and other facilities and residents in both communities will not be happy with such a change, seeing it as quite unnecessary and pointless. In addition, the area to the east of the A3(M) would still be under the auspices of the Horndean Parish Council as part of the (correctly identified) Horndean community; indeed the Parish Council's Offices are located in this area. However, at district level, it could be under the auspices of one or two Rowlands Castle-based councillors with no knowledge or affinity with the area. That cannot be good local government.

3. In accordance with its earlier submission prior to the formal Review, RCPC is pleased with the recommendation that Finchdean and Idsworth should be incorporated in Rowlands Castle Ward, because those areas do form part of the Rowlands Castle community. There is no wish to incorporate any other settlements or communities within the Ward.

4. It is felt strongly that local government is best delivered by single-councillor wards where the electorate can identify with a specific individual elected as their representative at district level. By the same token, the ward councillor is clear as to their remit and accountable as such. Neither EHDC nor other organisations requested a change to more multi-councillor wards, because they are seen not to be as effective in delivering clear and unambiguous representation as a single-councillor ward. Had RCPC been aware of any intention by LGBCE to move EHDC so strongly into such wards, then the effects on residents and the District would have been considered and strong representation against this approach would have been included in RCPC's earlier submission. In its draft recommendations, LGBCE offers no explanation, rationale or justification for placing so many residents into multi-councillor wards.

5. The proposed 'Rowlands Castle' two-member Ward might easily elect both councillors from either the Horndean or Rowlands Castle Parishes. As the two are not only separated geographically but differ in demographics, culture, history and other ways, there would be a tendency, in this case, for one or the other's set of interests to predominate, leading to ineffective and defective representation of electors in the 'subordinate' community.

6. Whilst collecting rural villages together into either single- or multi-member wards may be effective when the constituents broadly share the same rural approach to things that is not the case with Horndean and Rowlands Castle. The former is predominantly urban in character sharing a long urban boundary with Havant Borough Council while Rowlands Castle is much more like a rural village, even having its own village green at its centre, which Horndean does not.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your Consultation on this matter.

Yours faithfully

Lisa Walker
Clerk to Rowlands Castle Parish Council

CC: D Cllr Malcolm Johnson (for Rowlands Castle Ward)
T Horwood (Exec Director, East Hants District Council)