Dartford Borough Council’s Response to Draft Recommendations for New Electoral Arrangements for the Borough
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s (LGBCE) draft recommendations for new electoral arrangements for the Borough.

On the whole, the Council supports the LGBCE’s recommendations, however, in some areas the Council considers that the recommendations do not truly reflect the local communities and therefore within this response to the consultation, the Council has provided further evidence of community links. In addition, the Council also considers that some slight adjustments are required to some of the proposed boundaries to reflect natural boundary or road lines.

This document has been prepared as Dartford Borough Council’s formal consultation response on the LGBCE’s draft recommendations. The document sets out the Council’s response against each new ward in turn and provides an explanation where the Council considers an amendment is required, together with a clear rationale and evidence to support this. The Council is of the opinion that its response reflects community links and locally recognised boundaries whilst providing warding arrangements that meet the statutory criteria of:

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

INTRODUCTION

The Council made its submission to the LGBCE on warding arrangements for the Borough on 4 December 2017, in accordance with the LGBCE’s timetable. This submission proposed 19 wards. It considered future development; reflected community identities as highlighted by local amenities and facilities; and also reflected any natural or man-made physical barriers that marked the boundary between different communities. It also put forward names for the proposed wards to better reflect the constituent communities of the proposed electorate area.

The Council is pleased to see that the LGBCE has largely reflected the Council’s proposals within its draft recommendations. Whilst accepting that some of the changes made to the Council’s proposals by the LGBCE do make sense, there are nevertheless some instances where the Council feels strongly that either the LGBCE’s proposals do not reflect the existing community identities or where suggested boundary lines need to be amended slightly to follow natural boundaries or road lines.

The following pages set out the Council’s response to the LGBCE’s draft recommendations on a ward by ward basis.
Although the Council would like to see the areas of Greenhithe, Ingress Park and Knockhall separated into two different wards, it is accepted that the elector variance for 2023 does not support this proposal, and therefore the Council supports the recommendation for a three-councillor ward.

EBBSFLEET

The Council supports the recommendation for a three-councillor ward as per its original submission.
SWANSCOMBE

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward as per its original submission.

STONE CASTLE

The Council supports the recommendation for a three-councillor ward but seeks one amendment on Cotton Lane so that the centre line is used as the boundary line for the whole road. The boundary line has been drawn around a group of buildings to the east (Stone Lodge Bowls Club and Dartford Judo Club). These are not residential properties and should be included in the adjoining proposed Stone House Ward.
STONE HOUSE

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward with the amendment as set out in the comments for Stone Castle.

BRIDGE

The Council supports the recommendation for a one-councillor ward as originally proposed. Although it does create a 15% variance by 2023, the characteristic and physical boundaries mean that it could not be split across two wards.
HEATH

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward with a minor alteration to its original submission. It is proposed that 120 & 122 Shepherds Lane be included in the proposed West Hill Ward so that they are in the same ward as the neighbouring residential properties on Shepherds Lane.

NEWTOWN

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward and that the name remains spelt as one word - Newtown.
**PRINCES**

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward.

**TEMPLE HILL**

The Council supports the recommendation for a three-councillor ward but requests that the boundary to the South is adopted as per the Council’s original submission. Whilst the Commission’s extension of the boundary line at Mill Pond Road affects no residential properties, it puts the signal box for a national railway line into a separate ward from the train station. Adopting the Council’s original proposed boundary to the South would correct this.
TOWN WARD

The Council strongly supports the recommendation that the proposed three-councillor ward is adopted, subject to a change in the boundary line set out in the comments made for Brent Ward.

The importance of creating opportunities to unify the town centre in the face of ongoing change cannot be overstated. Everything the Council does, and every ambition it has for empowering local people in the face of significant growth pressure, is predicted upon recognising the ‘Town’ as a cohesive and inclusive area that reflects the expression of the people who live there. Quite apart from the strong case to be made for geography and topography (the Town rests in a valley that creates its own natural boundaries) the Council feels strongly that the Town must not find itself divided into places that are experiencing growth, regeneration and improvement, and those that are not.

In its initial explorations, the Council did consider the partition of the Town into smaller administrative units, but strongly rejected it, on the basis that it flew-in-the-face of our clear desire to build a stronger and more resilient community by sharing the benefits and opportunities presented by growth. Dividing the Town into smaller wards creates a very real concern that inequalities in growth, opportunity and investment may emerge between them and hamper the integrated regeneration that the Council has placed at the heart of its policies for some time.

The Town Centre is unique in its setting and historical character with an Edwardian Park located within it and the River Darent which runs through it. There has been significant recent investment and it has excellent public transport links with a growing entrepreneurial economy and commercial floor space.

A significant number of new homes are planned to be developed and the Council’s vision for the area is set out in the Dartford Town Centre Framework. This demonstrates a clear vision for the area, with the aim of delivering a step change in the environment and evolving to meet the needs of the growing population which should be reflected in the ward boundaries.

The major plans for the Town Centre will see the residential characteristics change and develop over time. Trying to separate this area into smaller wards would not create a greater identity or ownership of the surrounding areas or allow residents to have a say in proposals as they come forward.

The proposed ward pattern takes into consideration the principal gateways into the Town Centre: -

Station Arrival – the station provides the primary pedestrian gateway, via train, to the town centre with a pedestrian bridge over Home Gardens.

Eastern Gateway – East Hill and Overy Liberty provide the eastern gateway into the town centre core, with Overy Liberty Bridge, Acacia Hall Complex and Holy Trinity Church providing a distinctive gateway character at this point.

Western Gateway – the entrance from West Hill creates a gateway into the town centre at the junction with Highfield Road, Westgate and Spital Street.

Southern Gateway – Southern access into the town centre is predominantly via Lowfield Street, although pedestrians and cyclists can access the town via Central Park.

Northern Gateway – housing growth to the north of the railway line has increased movement under the railway viaduct.

The digital terrain model (Fig.1) shows the height from sea level and demonstrates the physical characteristics of the area. It demonstrates that the
town centre is a natural valley and it therefore makes sense to keep this as one ward.
WEST HILL

The Council supports the recommendation for a three-councillor ward with the minor alteration to its original submission for 120 & 122 Shepherds Lane be included in this ward.

The boundary review carried out in 2001, combined the previous Miskin and Gundulf wards to form the principle of this ward, utilising strong boundaries and combining similar communities. The West Hill Hospital site has now been developed and has integrated well into the surrounding community which shares community facilities such as a health centre, churches and schools.

JOYDENS WOOD

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward as per the Council’s original submission with one amendment to St Barnabas Church on Tile Kiln Lane being moved to this ward where it would have more community linkage.
MAYPOLE (LEYTON CROSS)

The Council supports the recommendation for a one-councillor ward with one amendment to St Barnabas Church on Tile Kiln Lane being moved from this ward to Joydens Wood where it would have more community linkage.

The name however is proposed as Leyton Cross Ward which is what the area is referred to locally. This name can be traced back on local historic maps to 1860.

SUTTON-AT-HONE

The Council supports the recommendation for a one-councillor ward with the minor amendment as set out in the comments contained within the proposals for Wilmington & Hawley Ward.
WILMINGTON & HAWLEY

The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward with the inclusion of the residential properties at Royal and Hawley Road. However, the Council seeks that the boundary line is amended as shown.

The boundary to the north east should also be amended as described in the comments on the proposed Brent ward.

BEAN & VILLAGE PARK

The Council supports the recommendation for a one-councillor ward which includes the area of Lane End Parish Ward, with one amendment to the boundary line at the rear of Ladywood Road and Coombfield Drive as shown.

The name should remain as previously proposed to avoid any elector confusion with the duplication in using ‘Darenth’
The Council supports the recommendation for a two-councillor ward, but seeks an amendment to the boundary line as per the Council’s original submission to the west of the ward. The proposal used the River Darent as the boundary line and this is felt to be a better natural barrier to use. This would then encompass the vicarage into the same ward as Holy Trinity Church and also would not split the Acacia Hall redevelopment site.

The Council have pledged to redevelop the Acacia Hall site (Cabinet 8/12/16 Item 11) to transform it into a high quality welcoming and easily legible site, and to provide an enhanced level of town centre car parking that allows easy access to the town centre so it would seem sensible that the site lay within the Town Ward. The current proposed ward boundary line runs through the centre of the Grade II listed Mansion House and divides the development site.

To the South, the Council asks that the borough ward boundary continues with the River Darent as the natural boundary until it reaches the A2. Although this affects the Parish Hawley Ward, this will be addressed in the Community Governance Review currently being undertaken and no residential dwellings are affected.
The Council wish to put forward an amendment to the proposed one-councillor ward proposal. To the north, the boundary line should end at the centre of the M25 (Fig. 5) not the Darenth Parish boundary line of Lane End Ward as proposed. The Council is currently undertaking a Community Governance Review which will consider moving this boundary line to this point. Other than a walkway under the motorway at the proposed boundary line, there is no crossing point and therefore there is no community linkage here. In addition, no residential dwellings are located within this area.
LONGFIELD, NEW BARN & SOUTHFLEET

The Council supports the recommendation that the proposed three-councillor ward is adopted.

Following comments regarding Darenth Community Primary School, it is felt that it should remain in the neighbouring ward. It is identified as Darenth in the title of the school, and in discussing the issue with the school they confirmed that a majority of their students reside in the Darenth area.
**Parish Electoral Arrangements**

The Council is currently undertaking a Community Governance Review to ensure that parish and town council governance in the Borough continues to be robust, representative and able to meet the challenges of population growth. This review will ensure that the changes reflected in the wider Borough warding review are also reflected in the parish warding arrangements.

The Council would like to make the following comments on the LGBCE’s draft recommendations for parish electoral arrangements:

**Stone Parish Council**

The proposal to divide the parish into two large parish wards does not reflect the community interests of the parished areas. This also would not provide for effective and convenient local government – if a by-election were to be called, there would be significant costs involved due to the size of these wards.

**Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council**

The parish should be divided into four separate wards, with Greenhithe and Knockhall being separated into two separate wards. This would offer a more effective and convenient local government arrangement, reflecting the differing communities in these areas.

**Wilmington Parish Council**

The suggested name of ‘Princes’ for one of the parish wards could cause confusion as one of the borough wards is also proposed to have this name. There is very little change to this parish ward and therefore it is recommended that either the Orange Tree Public House is moved back into this ward and the current name of Orange Tree is retained, or the name ‘Powder Mill’ is used instead as the road at the centre of this ward is Powder Mill Lane.