

Draft Recommendations

Submission prepared by Tatsfield Parish Council

5 August 2023

INTRODUCTION

Tatsfield Parish Council ('the Council') has prepared this submission in response to draft recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('LGBCE' or 'the Commission') to challenge its proposal to create a new three-councillor Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey ward.

Tatsfield Parish Council accepts the Commission's working hypothesis that 'in each review of local authorities that elect by thirds, we will aim to deliver a pattern of three-member wards.' **However**, the Council also looks to the Commission's own technical guidance which states that the three-Councillor objective should be met "as far as is practicable".

The Council argues that in proposing to create a new three-member Limpsfield and Tatsfield & Titsey ward, the Commission would be artificially combining two communities that have little or no connection with each other, either topographically or socially, with the result that the second and third criteria set out in the 2009 Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act would **not** be met.

The 2009 Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act, Schedule 2, paragraph 2 (3) states that in order to make recommendations for District Council ward boundaries, the LGBCE "must have regard to:

- a) the need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of members of the district council to be elected is, **as nearly as possible**, the same in every electoral area of the council,
- b) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and in particular - (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and (ii) the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties,

- c) the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and
- d) in the case of a district council that is subject to a scheme of elections by halves or by thirds, or that has resolved to revert to being subject to such a scheme under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (c. 28), the **desirability** of securing that each electoral area of the district council returns an appropriate number of members of the council.”

COMMUNITY When the Local Government Commission for England undertook the last review in 1998, it created the single councillor ward of Tatsfield & Titsey, recognising that “Tatsfield and Titsey is a relatively **self-contained** area”. That assessment stands true today. So, with regard to criterion b) above, regarding local communities the Council challenges the Commission’s proposal for a new three-member ward as it believes this will lead to the loss of Tatsfield’s strong sense of community. This is evidenced by Tatsfield’s geographical location, its history and strong sense of **self-contained** identity.

Tatsfield is a small, rural, close-knit community in the northeast of the district, with the vast majority of the residents residing in the northern end – the defined village. The rest of the parish is predominantly rural (fields and woodland) being set in the Green Belt. Tatsfield can trace its origins back to the Domesday Book which provides evidence of Tatsfield’s existence as a settlement of 26 houses. Tatsfield’s association with neighbouring Titsey goes back until the end of the 14th century when it was in the hands of the Uvedale family, who had already resided at Titsey for a hundred years. The Uvedales sold Titsey to the Gresham family around 1540 and Tatsfield was later conveyed to the Greshams in 1638. Between 1801 and 1881, Tatsfield’s population was roughly constant, varying between 139 and 187. Then came the break up of the estates in the north of the parish into small plots ideal for Londoners to buy. They were encouraged by rumours that Tatsfield would soon be connected to the growing railway network. This aspirational project did not come to fruition. Nonetheless, within 30 years, the population had risen to more than 900 as more and more people purchased plots and built homes. At this time, a second railway scheme was proposed. This too failed

and meant that Tatsfield remained a small, relatively isolated community up to and into the 21st century.

Tatsfield's sense of isolation has been reinforced over recent years by its vulnerability to extremes of weather – the snows of 1947 and 1963 and 1987's snow and hurricane, which were covered in the national media. Frequently, in inclement weather, Tatsfield is all but cut off from the rest of the district, particularly via the two routes down to Limpsfield. This isolation is further reinforced by its location. The village is essentially 'out on a limb' geographically with housing on its northern border merging with the built-up area of Biggin Hill (London Borough of Bromley) but with a stretch of more than two miles of open countryside separating the village from its nearest Tandridge neighbours – Limpsfield and Woldingham. Indeed, public transport favours travel into Biggin Hill and London – a seven days a week bus service run by TFL provides more than 30 journeys a day Monday to Saturday and more than a dozen on Sundays. By contrast, there are only four weekday bus journeys to Oxted, adjacent to Limpsfield and no service on Sundays.

Tatsfield's strong sense of identity and relative isolation is apparent by the large number of activities/events throughout the year and the thriving community groups. These include:

- The Art Group
- Badminton Club
- Cubs, Beavers, Scouts and Explorers
- The Fairtrade Group
- Horticultural Society
- The Not So Young Club
- Short Mat Bowls
- Tatsfield Allotment Community Group
- Tatsfield Bridge Club
- Table Tennis Club
- Tatsfield Martial Arts
- Tatsfield Singers
- Tatty Knitters
- The Vern Group

- Women's Institute

As well as annual events or regular activities which bring the community together:

- Christmas Carol Singalong
- Curzon Country Cinema
- Fair Trade Tea Tents on the Green
- Horticultural Shows
- St. Mary's Church teas
- St. Mary's Flower Festival
- Art Group exhibitions
- Tatsfield Beer Festival
- Scout Fete
- Tatsfield Singer's concerts
- Village Remembrance Service
- Plus, many quiz nights and other fundraising events

Tatsfield's Neighbourhood Plan is currently at Regulation 15 and is the community's vision for the future of the parish. The tenets of that vision are: that by 2033, Tatsfield will have retained and even strengthened its strong community spirit and will continue to provide an excellent quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the parish. Where suitable, new development will have been supported to meet the needs of the local community whilst retaining the parish's semi-rural character and separate identity. The parish's beautiful and functioning village centre will have been strengthened and valued with local services and facilities maintained and improved. The precursor to the emerging Neighbourhood Plan was the Village Appraisal, published in 2013, being the fifth undertaken since 1979.

Tatsfield has a variety of communication tools designed to inform, protect and strengthen the community links. The most notable, and longest running, is the Parish Magazine. Annually there are ten editions and this has been the case since its inception in around 1910. Aside from the Parish Council's website, there is also a Village website which covers all aspects of village life and the thriving Facebook page 'Tatsfield Talk'. Through these communication tools, as

well as posters and videos, the Parish Council recently highlighted the LGBCE's review and draft recommendations and polled residents over the course of two weeks. There were 179 responses to the survey which is a statistically significant 11.5% of the electoral population. However, with 800 households in Tatsfield, it could also be argued that 22% of the population responded. 99% of all the responses stated that they wanted Tatsfield and Titsey to remain an individual ward. The reasons given by residents are reflected in this submission.

EFFECTIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT The Council further challenges the Commission's draft recommendation on the grounds that if the proposed new three-member ward was adopted, it would not fulfil the third criteria c) above of the 2009 Local Democracy Act for 'the need to secure effective and convenient local government'. The Council strongly believes that, if adopted, it would place an undue burden on its district councillors. The transport routes in and out of Tatsfield and the road networks to the furthest reaches of Limpsfield would make travelling across the ward extremely difficult and time consuming for all three district councillors. It is approximately 9 miles from the north of Tatsfield to the south of Limpsfield with car journey times varying between 30 and 45 minutes. The number of meetings within Tatsfield alone, combined with the plethora of community groups and village events would be prohibitive if combined with similar duties in Limpsfield. Tatsfield and Titsey has been represented by an independent, local resident district councillor for the past two decades. At one parish election, that sense of 'difference' was marked by the success of a group campaigning under the name 'Tatsfield First'. The benefit of Tatsfield and Titsey being a one-member ward has allowed the Tatsfield resident district councillor to focus on the numerable local issues, particularly around, but not limited to, planning and Green Belt protection where local knowledge and links are invaluable. Being a local resident has also allowed the councillor to belong to several of the local organisations referred to above. Any one councillor having responsibilities across both parishes would be unduly and unreasonably onerous.

The Council believes that very little has changed in Tatsfield, or indeed the District, since the 1998 review. In 1998, in creating a one-member ward for Tatsfield and Titsey, the projected electoral balance for 2002 was 1,474, with the variance from the average being 0%. If Tatsfield and Titsey were allowed

to remain a one-member ward, the current elector numbers would be 1,566 (with a variance rate of 0%) and the 2028 projections would be 1,695 (again, with a variance rate of 0%). In retaining Tatsfield and Titsey as a one-member ward, perfect electoral equality would be achieved. The proposal to link Tatsfield & Titsey with Limpsfield would result in a worsening of electoral equality (a minus 5% variance now and in 2028). Whilst the Parish Council accepts that in leaving Tatsfield & Titsey and Limpsfield as separate wards it would worsen Limpsfield's electoral equality to -8%, it strongly supports its assertion that the harm that would be created by merging the two parishes would be far greater than an additional -3% electoral equality for Limpsfield, which is still within the accepted variance of +/- 10%.

In addition to the undue burden on ward councillors referred to above there is the minority position that Tatsfield and Titsey would be in by being combined with Limpsfield whose elector numbers outweigh Tatsfield and Titsey's by two to one. That could well lead to the unacceptable situation of Tatsfield not being represented at all by a locally-based councillor.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Parish Council, supported by the wider community, strongly objects to the Commission's proposal to create a new three-member ward by combining Tatsfield & Titsey with Limpsfield. Tatsfield is a unique and isolated parish, centred for the most part in the defined village to the north of the parish and having no significant links with Limpsfield or other areas in Tandridge.

As a single-member ward, Tatsfield and Titsey already has and would, by the Commission's own calculations, continue to have perfect electoral equality. Little has changed in the intervening years between the last review and this one. Due to the topography and existence of the Green Belt which surrounds Tatsfield, the community will continue to maintain its isolation and sense of separateness from other neighbouring parishes.

Additionally, 99% of electors commenting in Tatsfield have firmly supported the Parish Council's stance to remain a single councillor ward, citing reasons of strong local community and having no affinity with Limpsfield and concerns that the proposed change would leave Tatsfield inevitably disadvantaged, with potentially no real voice or representation at district council level. They are

also cognisant of the unnecessary workload that would burden councillors covering the proposed larger ward which is wholly inconsistent with effective and efficient government. Mention has also been made of the remarkably similar situation in Woldingham which has already been granted single-member status.

In the light of the fact that the criteria laid down in the 2009 Act referred to above cannot adequately be met by combining Tatsfield and Titsey with Limpsfield, the Parish Council is clear that the Commission must now overturn its draft recommendation and permit Tatsfield and Titsey to remain as a single-member ward.