

Mims Davies MP updated submission to the Boundary Commission for England in respect of its 2023 review into the Parliamentary Boundaries in Mid Sussex

Please accept my deep apologies that covid prevented me from delivering this statement in person.

Currently with over 85,160 electors the Constituency of Mid Sussex has been asked to reduce in size by 16% to meet the current parameters set by the Boundary Commission of 73,393+/-5%.

This is truly a large disappointment to me and very many local constituents and businesses who are aghast at the current proposed changes which in my view do overly dissect Mid Sussex and will disconnect too many Mid Sussex communities.

I am determined we keep Mid Sussex District, and the future constituency, as closely together as possible and I would appreciate the Commission taking on board my views and those brought forward to me by my constituents, which I am representing.

The initial proposal by the Boundary Commission recommends substantial changes meaning the existing Mid Sussex Constituency on this current proposal has the possible loss of both East Grinstead wards (19,766) and High Weald wards (3,938) in the north. This first proposal also creates as a result a new potential Constituency of 'East Grinstead and Uckfield'. To balance this large reduction, it currently goes on to propose the possible addition to the Mid Sussex Constituency of both Hassocks (6,416) and Hurstpierpoint & Downs (6,480) in the south from the changes made in the West of the County.

I do disagree with the addition of both Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint & Downs at this point and explore this in more detail later. I believe that if this were to occur without essential local knowledge of these communities and further vital consideration, it could cause a disjoint in Mid Sussex as a whole.

Other submissions and speakers, at the Boundary Commission hearings, have proposed advocating an alternative proposal to create an East Grinstead and Crowborough seat. I believe this is a simply prosperous proposal. Particularly as the proposal includes moving Ardingly & Balcombe and High Weald into this 'East Grinstead & Crowborough' Seat. This is absolutely unacceptable in terms of keeping Mid Sussex District closely aligned and reflecting the true community links we have in our area. These communities, as I will go on to say, like the High Weald and Ardingly & Balcombe do look directly to Haywards Heath as their nearest town not East Grinstead, Crowborough or Uckfield, building on the clear point from Cllr Peter Bradbury and that the majority of residents in High Weald are in Scaynes Hill and Horsted Keynes and look to Haywards Heath for their facilities. The senior school provisions are within the Cuckfield and Haywards Heath area, as well as the newly re-opened Haywards Heath college providing their sixth form provision. All of the transport links head to Haywards Heath. It's been very odd that Ardingly & Balcombe has been within Horsham as a result of previous changes let alone the new consideration of another move to a new potential

constituency. In my view it's crucial that as many possible Mid Sussex District Council wards stay within the Mid Sussex constituency. It's time Ardingly & Balcombe were returned, and this is the best opportunity.

A key reminder is both East Grinstead and High Weald have been part of the Mid Sussex Constituency since 1983 and form an important part of the Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) area. I have been extremely privileged to be their MP since December 2019. It is therefore with very deep disappointment, and concern, I must perhaps accept this potential significant change. The move of Ardingly & Balcombe again further away from its rightful place is a change too far in my view and I believe those in the areas predominantly agree with me as they look to Haywards Heath as their main town and not Horsham or East Grinstead.

Having grown up locally in Horsham, with many friends and colleagues from my journey as a local councillor at parish and town level, initially in Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common, and on MSDC, plus as a resident and parent, whilst I do sincerely not want to lose any of my constituents from either East Grinstead or High Weald, I fully understand which areas link together most strongly through history or current services.

I can, however, understand this proposed move of East Grinstead into the new Constituency if only to balance the ask of reducing sizes of the electorate and achieving having similar numbers of seats across the country.

Turning to East Grinstead, the town benefits from its own schools, GP surgeries, railway station, theatre, and vibrant town centre, to highlight a few of its wonderful community assets and does not look directly to infrastructure in the very south of the Mid Sussex Constituency. In addition, it has the advantage of direct transport links to Uckfield via the A22. Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint, however predominately use Downlands as their school catchment and it's clear the northern part of Mid Sussex all looks to the centre of Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. Whereas as you move into Hurst and Hassocks they will look to a mix of areas for shopping and schooling. Such as using the Hollingbury supermarket in Brighton, rather than doing their shopping in Haywards Heath, unlike many of those in Ardingly, Balcombe and the High Weald who this is a natural catchment for.

I still therefore have very significant concerns over the potential move of High Weald out of the Mid Sussex Constituency into the new 'East Grinstead and Uckfield' Constituency. Unlike East Grinstead, I greatly feel this proposed change does not similarly work and this is explained further in this statement. Secondly, I also strongly believe as well through this review, this is the time to rightly return Ardingly & Balcombe back to the Mid Sussex Constituency. They have been moved around too much and the new move is wrong in my view. Plus, I note that geographically the new Constituency is VERY large too. As a constituency MP, in my view this current new seat, is pretty much unworkable as result. Again, I will say more on this later.

The current proposed move of Hurstpierpoint and rest of Bolney into the Mid Sussex Constituency works, and I do support this. As in my previous submission I reiterate, the

current boundary line between the Mid Sussex and Arundel & South Downs Constituencies causes frequent confusion to many residents with the boundary line falling awkwardly down the middle of local roads and also meandering around bends in the road. Fixing this is very welcome.

Confusion also occurs with residents that fall in the southwest section of the Mid Sussex Constituency around Albourne, the full inclusion of Hurstpierpoint and Bolney wards will absorb this section and make a more streamlined and more clearly defined suitable Constituency boundary, which also crucially aligns with the Mid Sussex District Council boundary. I strongly support this.

I confirm local businesses in this rural area reflect similar businesses that populate High Weald and the parts of Bolney that already fall within my Constituency. This area also forms the southwestern tip of the Mid Sussex District Council area therefore, keeping District Council and Constituency boundaries fully cohesive, for both businesses and residents. I would very much support Cllr Peter Bradbury's view that this must be ratified, and this is a pleasing potential outcome.

In my view the incorporation of Hassocks, into the proposed new Mid Sussex Constituency raises potential issues to my mind and must be reconsidered. Let me explain - Hassocks is a large standalone village. It is a much better fit as an anchor village to the nearby smaller Sussex villages, such as nearby Keymer, Ditchling, Westmeston and Plumpton, in the south of the new East Grinstead and Uckfield Constituency and are best kept together.

I am keen to reiterate my alternatives and the reasons why this would serve the area much better whilst still meeting the required constituency size with regards to the number of voters that are required. To keep the District as intact as much as possible and reflect the necessary changes in voter numbers within the constituency size required, I do recognise that changes must be made in a practical and logical way. This does not however mean that I am easily accepting of the loss of East Grinstead in this current proposal.

I have fully considered Rule 5 in Schedule 2, which provides a number of requirements for the BCE to take into account when proposing future constituency boundaries. It's important to note these include geographical considerations such as the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, existing local government boundaries, the boundaries of current constituencies, the importance of local ties that would be broken by changes to a constituency and also any possible inconveniences resulting from the boundary changes.

I respectfully request a solution is found where High Weald remains part of the Mid Sussex Constituency, alongside the rightful return in my view of the Ardingly & Balcombe wards to a new Mid Sussex Constituency, as they all look to Haywards Heath with their address, postcodes and links to the town as previously mentioned. This, I realise, will potentially take the Mid Sussex Constituency over the numbers of permitted electors.

I believe Hassocks, works well if included in the proposed new Constituency of ‘East Grinstead and Uckfield’. Despite other submissions to the contrary at the evidence sessions, I believe not including Hassocks along with Keymer village in the new constituency would be a mistake. They have their own unique identity and are part of an existing and linked, close community, benefitting from common services including a railway station, GPs, schools, and its own joint Parish Council which was established in 2000. The village life includes joint community events, and the needs of this community closely aligns with that of nearby Ditchling, Westmeston and Plumpton which is geographically closer, and which also has its own unique needs beyond Mid Sussex. They would all be better placed together in the same new constituency for their future requirements both economically and residentially. This would also add a better balance to the new East Grinstead and Uckfield Constituency and is more suitable geographically by anchoring a growing linked large village into the new Constituency which will add balance to the otherwise predominately too large rural area if Balcombe & Ardingly and the High Weald are included instead. This new Constituency proposed by the Boundary Commission is exceedingly large, and the current proposal does not work in my view as a result. It must be looked at again, I believe.

Hassocks has historically sat within the Lewes Constituency until the creation of the Arundel & South Downs Constituency in 1997. It’s key to note, as per my previous submission unlike Ardingly & Balcombe and the existing Mid Sussex wards of High Weald, residents in Hassocks do not look naturally to the MP of the Mid Sussex Constituency as a result. Many people in the community shop in Brighton and look to the coast rather than inland for their shopping and facilities.

The table below, shows how this balance can be made in regard to the numbers giving Mid Sussex and other adjacent Constituencies the numbers they need. It works very well geographically, does not split wards and works with existing local links and connections.

East Grinstead, Hailsham & Crowborough and Mid Sussex
Suggested changes

| Wards | East Grinstead & Uckfield | Hailsham & Crowborough | Mid Sussex |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Current Electorate | 76,303 | 70,015 | 72,255 |
| Ardingly & Balcombe | -4,749 | | +4,749 |
| High Weald | -3,938 | | +3,938 |
| Hartfield | -2,876 | +2,876 | |
| Hassocks | +6,416 | | -6,416 |
| New Electorate | 71,156 | 72,891 | 74,526 |

Mid Sussex District Council Boundary

Mid Sussex District Council is currently split over three different Parliamentary Constituencies: Ardingly & Balcombe falls in Horsham, Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint and some of Bolney fall within Arundel & South Downs and Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath, Lindfield, High Weald and East Grinstead within Mid Sussex. The proposed plan by the Boundary Commission continues this three-way split. My counter proposal of bringing back Ardingly & Balcombe into Mid Sussex, eliminates the Horsham Constituency thereby reducing the division down to two Constituencies: East Grinstead & Uckfield and Mid Sussex. This will reduce resident's confusion between both council and Parliamentary boundaries. Currently there is concern, as well as sometimes anger and often frustration, on behalf of residents when writing to MPs and delays to MPs whilst emails are redirected to the correct Constituency offices.

My electorate within High Weald, including Scaynes Hill and Horsted Keynes, which make up the larger villages, all have Haywards Heath in their address and have Haywards Heath related post codes. In a similar way, when Ardingly & Balcombe moved from the Mid Sussex to the Horsham Constituency, and as they too have Haywards Heath addresses and post codes, I currently, and I understand that The Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Soames before me, consistently receive(d) enquiries from constituents in these areas which I must direct to Jeremy Quin, MP for Horsham. This demonstrates residents still identify with the MP for Mid Sussex. Mr Quin greatly supports the return of the Ardingly & Balcombe wards returning to Mid Sussex as he believes it makes much more sense from a constituents' perspective due to their links with the town, from medical services to senior schools and MSDC as their local authority.

Residents of High Weald have a Haywards Heath address, they automatically align and fall in catchment areas for services that are provided in Haywards Heath which they cannot access in their villages for example doctors, dentists, senior schools, and young adults would attend the recently reopened local 6th form college in Haywards Heath.

In regards, transport links and bus routes from High Weald and Ardingly & Balcombe all radiate towards Haywards Heath, (e.g. Slaugham to Haywards Heath bus route) to access, for example, the Princess Royal Hospital and the catchment areas of doctors and local services. Cycle routes look to connect Scaynes Hill in High Weald to Haywards Heath to provide safer ways for the children from this area to cycle to school and college and to Haywards Heath train station.

Due to the current confusing zig zag nature of the current boundary between Mid Sussex and the Ardingly & Balcombe wards, including the village of Handcross (predominantly along the B2114) there is much confusion over who is in which constituency, as the boundary changes multiple times over the space of a few miles along the same road and even along the centre of the road. The inclusion of Ardingly & Balcombe and Handcross back into Mid Sussex and matching the District Council once again would eliminate this confusion for residents and MPs.

Turning to the local economy, the rural Mid Sussex villages of High Weald and Ardingly & Balcombe do not readily resonate directly with the business and community interests of East Grinstead, which is predominately retail with strong employment links to Gatwick. They are more closely aligned to the rural interests of Bolney and Hurstpierpoint & Downs which falls in the Mid Sussex District and look strongly to Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill as their main local towns.

My comments here also include reflections from talking to my constituents and many local Councillors on where they align themselves within the Constituency. As a further note Andrew Griffith MP, is also supportive of the move of Hurstpierpoint & Downs into the Mid Sussex Constituency.

I also would like you to note, that I confirm my strong support for the proposed retention of Hartfield within the Wealden Constituency, which works to keep the “Winnie the Pooh” legacy together, which I understand is incredibly important to many local residents and the current Wealden MP and all the changes I have advocated with this submission work well together.

In conclusion, my current proposal is focused predominantly on the Mid Sussex Constituency, but my submission connects positively to the Conservative Party proposal, my MP colleagues for the wider Sussex area as well as the proposal from Cllr Bradbury. I accept that even minor local changes have an impact on the wider Sussex area. Any effects have been addressed in the Conservative Party proposal.

In my ideal world, I would not at all like to disconnect East Grinstead from the wider Mid Sussex. I would heartily appreciate any way this could be avoided. I cannot fathom how this is workable given the current constraints of the review, and if a miracle happens, I will welcome it.

I have outlined a way in my sincere view that it is very possible to keep Mid Sussex’s current constituents more strongly aligned with the District and in fact increase that alignment plus keep more communities together.

My statement keeps the most possible existing Mid Sussex Constituency closely aligned to the District Council and works much better with local geography and our community attachments. The new Constituency next door truly is geographically very large and within it the various communities look in different directions. We must work to mitigate the problems of this initial new proposed seat.

I do strongly wish the future of the Mid Sussex Constituency is in the finest form we can achieve, so that it reflects community links and delivers the least disruption for my constituents.

Mims Davies MP