

AN OPEN LETTER: *from* IVAN GREEN

Dear Reader,

On hearing the repeated rumblings of a nationwide revision of local government which will include the removal of one of the present administrative tiers, and noting the hectic propaganda the County is putting out, at no little cost, it must be noted, it is surely time to consider, with some sense of urgency, our own position as a District Council.

Our three ancient boroughs with their mayors, and the rural district with its chairman, were arbitrarily forced together by dictate of Parliament and though we have made progress towards becoming a cohesive entity, we need to gain a closer sense of community, of belonging together and, of vital importance, we need to be in full control of our own affairs.

But what is to be done? The first essential is that we must realise that this amorphous district whose titular head is a chair person, is a viable administrative unit, but it is not, and probably never will become, an inspiring, unifying force.

There is really only one answer. The Dover District must take the plunge, follow the enormously successful example of others, of which Tonbridge is a notable very recent example, and be constituted as a borough with a mayor at its head.

This mayor would join the other three mayors of the old towns as the senior partner, the first among equals, and so bring them, and the new regime together, and harness, for the public good, the many centuries of tradition and goodwill which each, the old and the new, possesses individually.

To spread the responsibility, the awareness of communal entity, and the honour, among as many of our citizens as possible, the mayor should be strictly limited to one year of office only, and it would be an added bonus if the holder of the office could sometimes be a much respected non-political local citizen or, if that was unacceptable to the political parties, perhaps the mayor could refrain from overt political activity during the year of office, so as to be seen to be really the leader of us all, and not merely the nominee of a faction.

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The appointment of a chairman of committees would solve many administrative difficulties in this respect. The mayoralty could, upon occasion, and with goodwill, be offered to a member of one of the opposition political groups.

To bring democracy still nearer to the people, all the viable local communities should be constituted as parish councils, following the very successful example of River.

The next step, and it is vital, must be that our new borough must become a unitary authority, and thus assume control of our own affairs instead of, as at present, having to submit to the dictates of the county colossus at Maidstone.

We are actually very well placed to become a unitary authority straight away, since we have a homogenous area, a common tradition, and an efficient local government organisation, now centred in modern accommodation at Whitfield, and functioning efficiently.

But, it may be asked, what will all this cost at a time of severe depression and financial stringency? The answer is, surprising little, providing that the expensive junketing indulged in by some authorities is avoided.

After all, there is absolutely no justification, and certainly no excuse, to indulge in costly celebratory dinners, or to entertain, or offer freedoms to, a few distinguished or socially desirable individuals whom we shall possibly never see again, to mark our change in status. After all, if the appointment of honorary free-men is considered to be essential, we have plenty of local citizens eminently suitable for, and worthy of, public recognition.

What could be better than an assembly for the general public in one of our public open spaces to which every citizen, and not merely a chosen few, would be welcomed and where the new mayor could be presented to the people for whom, for the year, the mayor will be their leader and chief citizen?

Is this mere pie in the sky? Politically undesirable? Socially doubtful? Financially impossible? Not so. It is there for the taking, providing we have enough statesmanship and goodwill to seize it. Have we?

I write as a private citizen and not the nominee of any political or administrative group, hoping soon to be a citizen of our new borough.

Sincerely,

IVAN GREEN