

# WOT! LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGAIN? 121

JACK WOOLFORD

The Dover Society has written to Sir David Cooksey, replacement Chairman of the Local Government Commission, as follows:

"For your information I am enclosing a copy of our Society's response to the original Commission and from it you will see that our clear recommendation was that status quo should remain.

Our Society was pleased to note that in his final Report and Recommendations the Commissioner confirmed his acceptance of our views.

Consequently we were the more disconcerted when the Government sacked the Commissioner, changed the rules and attempted to foist its determination to split Kent on to the new Commission. We do not, however, doubt your equal determination to maintain your proper independence and accordingly we shall be obliged if you will kindly take the following views into account.

## 1. IN GENERAL

- 1.1 The proposal to create Unitary authorities in Gravesend-Dartford and Rochester-Gillingham which will split Kent in two, will enhance Government centralisation and further erode local authority power and independence.
- 1.2 Because of its proximity to the European mainland, Kent is geographically and economically the National and South East Regional Gateway, located in the very heartland of the "Golden Triangle". No English county is so immediately and directly affected by membership of the European Union and there is an undoubted need for a

county-wide strategic overview vis-a-vis France and the Pas de Calais. Three smaller authorities would carry much less weight in Europe and might become rivals for European assistance.

- 1.3 The enormous KCC investment in producing the County Structure and other plans would be wasted and Kent, no longer a whole, would have different Structure Plans.

## 2. IN PARTICULAR

- 2.1 The alleged rationale of the new proposal is subservience to the convenience of the Thames Gateway proposal, another commercially dominated quango, which until very recently systematically ignored amenity societies with their long-established communitarian knowledge and expertise.
- 2.2 The proposal is internally inconsistent. Thameside includes Swale which is not in Rochester-Gillingham, and the Gravesend-Dartford area south of A2 is not in Thameside.
- 2.3 In addition to the further costs of creating new authorities, the rump County Council must either increase rates or reduce services: probably both.
- 2.4 No one at county, district or popular level wanted this last time round. What, apart from the Government, has changed its mind?

In conclusion, the Society asks that the clearly expressed democratic view for the continuation of Kent County Council in its current form be respected".

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