

Burgh Heath Residents' Association.



REIGATE AND BANSTEAD 2018 WARD BOUNDARY
REVIEW

FINAL REPRESENTATION TO THE LGBCE
BY THE COMMUNITY OF BURGH HEATH

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INTRODUCTION

THE COMMUNITY OF BURGH HEATH

Burgh (Burr) Heath is an ancient community that grew up at the intersection of drovers' routes from the Weald to London and to Kingston upon Thames, its pond providing watering for cattle. Today it is an important intersection between the A217 and A240 roads conveying motor traffic to the same places. At this place is a Shell petrol station which has one of the largest, if not the largest, turnover in the country. Shell chose this as one of the first replenishment points for electric vehicles.

Today it is a relatively small community of about 1400 people. Despite being crossed by today's busy traffic routes it has retained its integrity. An aerial view emphasizes that it is an island bounded by common and the metropolitan Green Belt, physically separated from our neighbours. It has a useful shopping parade including a post office, there is also a Little Waitrose supermarket, the whole is classified by the Borough as a local shopping centre. The community has a well used Comrades and Social Club as well as a village hall that commemorates the many men that the village lost in the First World War; it has a busy programme of activities. St Mary's is the village church but has a congregation drawn from a wide area, it too offers a regular social programme and a meeting place.

The first telephone exchange in the Banstead area was located at Burgh Heath which gave this name to the local telephone area, albeit with Burgh pronounced Borough for convenience.

The Residents' Association is active socially and provides a valuable focus for interactions with the Borough Council and neighbouring communities. It considers planning issues, protection of the Green Belt, commons matters including the pond, local transport issues, not to mention ward boundary matters. It is an active member of the Federation of Banstead Residents' Associations.

THE PRESENT ELECTORAL CONFIGURATION

The present ward, Kingswood with Burgh Heath, has sub-divisions that reflect its component communities; its name respects the individuality of Burgh Heath (KBH1).

	Sub-division	Ward	Electorate (2017)	Electorate (2023)
BH1	Burgh Heath	Kingswood with Burgh Heath	618	645
KBH2	Area near to QE hospital	Kingswood with Burgh Heath	164	171
KBH3	Kingswood	Kingswood with Burgh Heath	2790	2977
KBH4	Lower Kingswood	Kingswood with Burgh Heath	2180	2280

The other sub-divisions correspond to a small area based on what was the Queen Elizabeth Hospital near to Banstead, Kingswood and Lower Kingswood. Relations between the three representative residents' associations are good; all belong to the Banstead Federation of Residents' Associations and regularly attend its meetings.

The three main sub-divisions are linked by the A217 creating a ward that some see as being overly long. Nevertheless, it is an arrangement that works well from an electoral point of view. The three ward councillors are always happy to come to residents' meeting when invited. The prime shared concern of the Burgh Heath and Kingswood sub-divisions is the preservation of the Green Belt which links us.

Burgh Heath and Tadworth and Walton wards have worked together on the deregistration of common land and share information on planning concerns and the lack of public transport. Burgh Heath and Lower Kingswood are less closely linked perhaps because of their remoteness and geographical separation. Links between Kingswood and Lower Kingswood are closer because they are adjacent

Burgh Heath sees no reason to disturb the present ward configuration.

THE EMERGENT PROPOSALS

These remarks only concern matters in the north of the Borough. The North Downs escarpment is a significant physical barrier to social and political intercourse. The plans that have emerged from the Borough and the LGBCE have all incorporated a link between Kingswood (KBH3) and Chipstead. We do not understand the reason for this. We have written to our councillors and to the Leader of the Council, in order, to seek the reason. There have been only two replies, one a holding response, the other declared that "we had to start somewhere". Both were unsatisfactory and unhelpful. It is rumoured that the link is justified in part by the ease of communication that the railway provides, Kingswood being the next stop after Chipstead. Any regular traveller would confirm that passengers rarely travel one stop on this line, so this justification would be specious.

The borough stated in its draft final submission to the LGBCE that "In order to inform this response, all 51 Reigate & Banstead Borough Councillors has(sic) undertaken community engagement activities". This statement is certainly not true, at least as far as BH is concerned. When asked if this was the case generally, representatives of the five other RAs present at the recent Federation meeting confirmed that engagement activities had not occurred in their areas either.

We cannot tell what was made of letters to councillors that had been sent by representatives of Burgh Heath as they were not even acknowledged. Our definite impression was that the council was keeping its distance, we suspected that councillors were under instruction not to engage until the council's ideas had crystallised.

The nascent link between Kingswood and Chipstead has been of great importance because of its numerical repercussions. In order to create a suitably sized ward, a number of anomalous and surprising proposals have been made. These included the splitting of Kingswood with its village centre transferred to Tadworth and Walton in company with Burgh Heath. At a later stage when this had been reversed, Lower Kingswood was transferred to Tadworth and Walton instead, despite the two having very little affinity, being geographically separate. All of this was to facilitate the link to

Chipstead. The reason for this has not been declared. All of these propositions would cause the break-up of the existing Kingswood with Burgh Heath ward. These chaotic suggestions have made it difficult for Burgh Heath to respond constructively and one is left wondering what advantage would result from dissolving the existing ward and linking Kingswood with Chipstead.

ARRIVING AT A PROPOSAL FROM BURGH HEATH

Soundings of the community have been made and a group of twelve established residents with a thorough knowledge of the area came together to discuss preferences under the auspices of the residents' association.

Making no assumption about a need to associate Kingswood with Chipstead a clear preference was to retain the ward as it is for reasons that have already been referred to, especially preserving the link between Kingswood, KBH3, and Burgh Heath, KBH1. The latter is because of their adjacency and a shared interest in preserving the band of Green Belt that separates them. Kingswood Village and Burgh Heath are linked by footpaths that provide access to Kingswood Village and Kingswood Station, originally Kingswood and Burgh Heath, with a walk of just less than 20 minutes

The group was also asked about their preference were Kingswood and Chipstead to be associated. Two possibilities had been proposed by the borough council that would produce a ward with the requisite number of electors. One was to move Burgh Heath and that part of Kingswood north of the railway, including the village centre, to the Tadworth and Walton ward. Apart from the absurdity of detaching Kingswood from its village centre, there was little enthusiasm from Burgh Heath for the link to Tadworth because of a lack of adjacency and few common interests. The other possibility that was seen by the group as more attractive, was to retain Burgh Heath within the Kingswood and Chipstead ward, accepting the necessity of Lower Kingswood being linked to Tadworth and Walton, unsatisfactory as it seems. This is effectively the latest proposal from the council.

In summary, two possibilities emerge, to leave the ward as it is or to bring Chipstead with Woodmansterne into the same ward as Kingswood Village and Burgh Heath. The first possibility works effectively and is well understood by local people. The second is based on a premise that has not been justified but despite its shortcomings it would meet the needs of Burgh Heath.

In the event of a new ward emerging that contains the four communities, consideration should be given to the number of councillors that should be deployed to "cover" a relatively large and dispersed ward. In terms of load on the councillors this makes greater demands than most other three councillor wards and in terms of representation of its people one could reasonably argue that they are being short changed even though the overall electorate is at the required level. It is our recommendation that this new ward should be assigned four councillors instead of three. We well realise that one cannot in practice assign one specifically to each community.

THE NAME OF A NEW WARD

If a new ward were created that incorporated Chipstead, Woodmansterne, Kingswood and Burgh Heath there would be great unhappiness if the name of our community did not appear in the ward name. Besides the loss of the name from the system for local representation the name is important in maintaining a public impression of where Burgh Heath fits geographically and administratively.

From a practical point of view, it is important that the Burgh Heath community name should not be subsumed under the name Kingswood, just as for Woodmansterne vis à vis Chipstead. Burgh Heath is not Kingswood; it often has very different needs. It is very easy for local administrators to assume that what is good for Kingswood is good for Burgh Heath, indeed our experience is that we are often forgotten in consultations, both by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Surrey County Council, most notably in transport planning. A peripheral, but possibly important example is the omission of Burgh Heath from a list of community names maintained by Age Concern Banstead. A further example was the loss of Burgh Heath post office, now reinstated; this appears to have been based on an assumption by remote officials with little knowledge of the area, that what serves Kingswood, serves Burgh Heath.

Omitting the name Burgh Heath would be a retrograde step that would discredit what is a well integrated, vibrant community with its own distinctive needs and characteristics. It is accepted that a ward name that incorporated the names of all four of its component communities would be relatively long but we believe that this would actually enhance bonding and strengthen relationships in the new ward. We offer "Kingswood, Burgh Heath, Chipstead and Woodmansterne" as the name.

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8 August 2018