Local organisation submissions to the Elmbridge Borough Council electoral review

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30 March 2015

The Review Officer (Elmbridge BC)
Boundary Commission
Layden House
76-86 Turmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

Dear Sirs,

Boundary Review, Hinchley Wood Ward, Elmbridge Borough Council

I am writing to you as a sometime Hinchley Wood resident and long-serving Group Scout Leader of 1st Hinchley Wood Scouts. I have great concerns about the proposed Borough ward boundary changes which I am sure will have a large negative effect on local democracy in the relatively small community of Hinchley Wood, which I lived in from birth and with which I have since had continuous involvement as a member and then leader in the local Scout Group.

Since the building of Hinchley Wood in the inter-war years it has been a ward, firstly of Esher UDC and subsequently Elmbridge BC and for many years has been represented by two Hinchley Wood Residents Association councillors. The current councillors both live in the community, are well known locally and are able to focus on Hinchley Wood issues.

The plan to split up the current Hinchley Wood ward and divide the representation between Long Ditton and Weston Green would mean that the village community is unequally divided on an arbitrary population-based geographical basis without regard to what is in those areas. For example, the parish church, the two large schools and some relatively outlying residential roads would fall into Long Ditton (which already has its own church and primary school) and would be right on the edge of the Long Ditton Ward, whilst the remainder of the community including the shopping centre, recreation ground, Memorial Gardens, railway station, much of the residential area and, yes, the Scout & Guide Headquarters would become a marginal area of Weston Green ward, which already incorporates other similar such areas and is mostly separated by main roads from Hinchley Wood.

The Scout & Guide Groups have benefitted, along with other local organizations such as the developing Community Hub at the church, from the close relations we have been able to develop with our local councillors, for example recently we have obtained a lease on some council land which we believe would not have been achieved without the support of our local democratic representatives.

Whilst not doubting the competence of any future enlarged ward councillors, it seems improbable that they would be able to focus properly on Hinchley Wood issues because they would by definition not be representing the whole community.

The current proposals, which were only narrowly approved by Elmbridge BC, I feel will not improve local democracy but are based more on a desire to try to fit diverse communities into a one-ward-size-with-three-councillors model.
There is a suspicion that these proposals could also have been influenced by political party influences, after all, splitting a community between wards is likely to reduce the number of local residents association candidates elected, to the benefit of other candidate groupings/parties, something I would suggest that the Boundary Commission should be aware of when considering such proposals.

I therefore strongly urge you to examine the current proposals and amend them such that the steadily growing and evolving community of Hinchley Wood retains effective representation by continuing to have its own ward and returning its own councillors to Elmbridge Borough Council, as in the past.

Yours truly,

Adrian Ducker
Group Scout Leader
The Review Officer (Elmbridge)
The Boundary Commission,
Layden House,
76-78 Turnmill Street,
London, EC1MS2G

Attention Mr. Hind (?)

Dear Sir,

Reduction of Wards in Elmbridge

Apologies for this late letter but this matter has not been brought properly to the attention of the public, in my opinion.

I write only with regard to the proposal that Oatlands and Ashley Park should be merged. I find this unacceptable. The two areas have their own identities, character and history. One is in Walton and the other in Weybridge. Each has for example its own War Memorial where separate services are held.

It would be far simpler to split Walton into 3 ‘new’ wards of around 6240 +/- 10% (18000 over all) Walton Society has put forward this proposal and it seems to be more sensible. Walton Central would be expanded to include Stompond Lane (The Links & Grange Place), Crutchfield Lane and Stuart Avenue, Cottimore Avenue & the Closes off; and the other roads leading West off Cottimore Lane such as Cottimore Terrace & Lancaster Court.

I see the current proposal as somewhat politically biased. A cynical view but I do feel this matter has been rushed and that better alternatives can be sought.

Yours faithfully,

John Cutts
Chairman
Hersham Residents Association
HRA active positive and non-political since 1971

HRA 31/03/15 Boundary Commission submission about ward boundary changes affecting Hersham

By email to
reviews@lgbce.org.uk
Local Government Boundary Commission
for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

31st March 2015

Dear Sir / Madam

Comments on Boundary Commission Proposals for Elmbridge – linked to suggested Hersham Ward Boundary changes discussed at an EBC meeting on Monday 16th March

Hersham Residents Association (the HRA) is a non-political organisation whose aims are to promote the interests of Hersham and its residents. We are therefore very keen to engage with the current discussion about the suggested changes to Hersham’s ward boundaries.

The purpose of this letter is to flag up HRA’s concerns to the Boundary Commission following a meeting at Elmbridge Council on 16th March which endorsed detailed proposals set out on the council’s website here, to redraw Elmbridge ward boundaries. The effect on Hersham would be a re-warding map which would be substantially at odds with most people’s current perception of Hersham.

This is linked to a plan to reduce the number of councillors across the council, which was suggested first by the council and now also by the Boundaries Commission. The HRA is not against the idea of reducing the number of councillors in principle; however we would not be in favour of the suggested reduction to 48 councillors if the resultant need to create population balance would mean that the long established boundaries of Hersham would have to be substantially redrawn.
It has been suggested that electoral boundary lines wouldn’t necessarily affect the identity of the areas affected, however we disagree. We feel the fact that Hersham currently has a shown electorate of 10,366 – but this would be reduced to 6,390 by the re-drawing of the ward boundaries is significant. We feel that this would substantially affect people’s perception of Hersham’s sense of place and status alongside neighbouring settlements of Esher, Walton and Claygate.

We also feel that very few people in Hersham would have known about the re-warding proposals discussed by Elmbridge on 16th March. This is not just because of the lack of public engagement, but also because the relevant maps posted on the council’s website where not delineated in colour. This meant that the existing and proposed boundaries were impossible to differentiate and clearly understand.

The small number of local people who have seen and actually understand what is being proposed have been very surprised at the outcome for Hersham. However, because few people really understand the situation, it seems likely that, without a clear steer from the Commission to re-visit the direction of travel established by the council, the suggested approach will be difficult to change.

**Key points and observations**

1. We are aware that re-warding is necessary within the Boundary Commission’s guidelines (for ‘election by thirds’ scenarios) to keep the number of residents per councillor roughly even. Unfortunately compliance with these ‘rules’ appears to result in breaking another key principle on which the Commission judges the acceptability of a re-warding scheme, namely that existing strong communities should not be broken up.

2. The HRA would point out that Hersham is a unique, strong and long established community, and any decisions about boundaries should take this into account. (Many of Hersham’s boundaries were established in 1859.)

3. Whilst the HRA would not wish to object to minor changes, perhaps in parts of the ward which might have less allegiance to Hersham, any substantial alternation of the long established natural
boundaries of rivers and railway lines in the North and East would we feel be undesirable and difficult to justify.

**Hersham’s community**

4. A recognised identity and sense of community are intangible, but very valuable. They are not easy to create, but easy to dismantle. At the moment, Hersham has a greater sense of identity and community than many other places in easy commuter distance of London. The characteristics of Hersham have been gradually established within the existing Hersham boundaries over many years of continuity.

5. We feel strongly that changing the current boundaries would have the effect of starting a gradual but profound erosion of people’s perceptions of Hersham as a place and community. Whilst we realise the suggested boundary changes relate only to electoral matters, we feel they would inevitably, over time, become interpreted more widely and start to define the village, through for example estate agent’s descriptions of properties, and the redrawing of local maps etc.

**Detailed comments on Hersham’s community**

6. The Longmore Estate is on the north side of Hersham with a boundary on the east with Esher. Moving this boundary to merge part of Hersham and part of Esher makes little sense because the majority of people in this part of the village would not feel they have a shared history or common identity with Esher. The sense of belonging to Hersham for people living on the Longmore Estate is strong - and we feel that many here are also likely to feel that their political identity would be overshadowed if they became part of a ward in Esher.

7. The natural boundary of the railway line in the Hersham Station area should be maintained not just because the people within this boundary have a clear sense of Hersham identity, but also because it is logical and easy to understand. Our reading of the current proposals is that the following would fall outside the boundaries of Hersham in future:

- Hersham Library,
- Hersham Youth Club
- Hersham Village Golf Club
- Hersham Station
A new Hersham boundary which did not include the above would seem illogical and surely difficult to explain and justify to local residents and visitors to Hersham.

8. We suggest that the current boundary of the railway line in the Walton Station area should also be maintained because the railway line here also forms a logical well established boundary which is easy to see and understand.

9. We are concerned about any proposal which would skew the geography of Hersham and lead to the undesirable result that the current Hersham Green Village Centre would no longer be in the middle of Hersham. In this context, ward changes which establish a boundary to Hersham which actually passes very close to what many currently regard as the village centre would seem illogical and undesirable.

Positive suggestions to the Boundary Commission

10. We are aware that an ‘election by thirds’ system where each ward has three councillors has a lot less inherent flexibility, and is much more likely to lead to some significant re-warding to satisfy the Boundary Commission’s guidelines. We also understand that there would be considerably more flexibility to delineate boundaries based on community allegiance under the ‘all-out electoral system’ where councillors are elected every four years.

Elmbridge Borough Councillors rejected the option of moving to an all-out electoral system’ at a meeting last year. However, we strongly suspect they did all not fully realise what it would lead to in terms of the resultant boundary changes.

We therefore suggest that the Boundary Commission might recommend that Elmbridge BC’s decision to reject the all-out voting system be re-visited - if a warding system cannot be created to the satisfaction of local residents and local groups such as the HRA.

11. Alternatively, the Boundary Commission might make it clear in their response to the Elmbridge council proposals that some flexibility in the number of councillors per ward would be allowed even under an election by thirds system to accommodate the exceptional circumstances which appear to apply in the case of Hersham.
12. Another possible way forward which we feel should be considered, would be the creation of a parish council for Hersham along the existing boundaries of what people currently recognise as Hersham. We suggest that the Boundary Commission should clearly refer to this as a positive and realistic option, given of course support from local residents.

The HRA would of course want to be fully involved in the continuing debate on this matter, and play a key role in helping to represent and engage with our membership and the wider Hersham community on this important issue.

As Hersham Councillors will know, know our Association has a long history of seeking to represent the general interests of people in Hersham since 1971. The continued long term existence of the HRA, is evidence in itself of Hersham’s community.

Our constitution sets out the aims of the HRA as follows:

‘To promote the interests of the residents of Hersham; to foster a spirit of goodwill throughout Hersham; to help the people of Hersham however and whenever possible.’ For more about the HRA and its activities – which provides evidence of Hersham as a community, please see the link to our website below.

Yours faithfully

David Lock
Chairman of the HRA
Hersham Residents Association
Elmbridge District

Personal Details:

Name: Clive Green
E-mail: 

Organisation Name: Hersham Village Society

Comment text:

We care the Hersham Village Society, an amenity and social organization with over 2,000 members. We are very much involved in the Hersham community and organise events throughout the year including Summer Fayres, Christmas Fayres and Public meetings lectures etc. Hersham has a strong community spirit and includes a large number or voluntary organisations from Scouts to WI, Football, Rugby, Golf, Cricket, Bowls and sports clubs etc. We have the main School mAcademy in our wards and three Junior schools as well as the Private Felton Fleet School. We are a small shopping centre including a large Waitrose and a new potential Lidl (STPP). The proposal by Elmbridge Borough council to split the Hersham wards is not welcomed as all the wards concerned look to and are close to the centre of the village and its amenities. The main ward boundaries for Hersham at the present time include a river and a railway line, these will be crossed by the proposed boundaries. Hersham Residents have access to two mainline train stations with a fast service to London and the south west. There are four local bus routes taking residents to either Staines or Kingston. Hersham Green which lies in the centre of the community is frequently used for local events, the Hersham Day Centre and Village Hall face the Green which is the centre point of the village. Also close by is the Hersham Shopping Centre and local shops. There are a number of local resident associations in Elmbridge, which work together for the good of the community but each retains their own independence to look after the interests of their chosen area. Hersham is semi rural and the majority of the housing lies in the north of the village, while in the south there are large private estates, farm land and a golf course. At the present time the wards of Hersham are close to the centre of the village where residents chose to shop and take part in community activities. There is also employment close to the centre of the village and the wards under threat. We do not believe that these ward changes are necessary and are only being forced on the electorate of Elmbridge because the Conservative administration wishes to cut down the size of the council. We believe that they should have sought public opinion first which they failed to do. We did a straw poll and the majority of residents in Hersham want the wards left as they are. They believe and have pride in their community and believe that these changes will bring about unnecessary harm to the community. The proposal to move a large area of Hersham North Ward (The Longmore Social Housing Estate) does not make sense especially as it mjeaqs crossing a river boundary. Likewise the other area proposed to be moved from Hersham North in Walton on Thames is also unnecessary and unwanted.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded
HINCHLEY WOOD RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATION

response to the

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

recommendation at the end of the Preliminary Stage of the

Electoral Review of Elmbridge Borough Council
1. Summary

The Hinchley Wood Resident’s Association (HWRA) was founded in 1932 to protect the amenities and further the interests of the residents and local businesses of Hinchley Wood. Today, the HWRA has over 2,000 members who work together to preserve and enhance the environment and quality of life. The strength of support for the HWRA and its’ councillors can be measured by the fact that Hinchley Wood has only been represented on Elmbridge Borough Council (and its predecessors) by HWRA councillors since 1932. The website of our thriving village can be found at www.hinchleywood.org.uk

The HWRA strongly objects to the proposal by Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), and supported by the LGBCE, to reduce the council size from 60 to 48. We believe that such a reduction will considerably increase the workload of the councillors and reduce the representation of the constituents, and all for a cost saving of around £50,000 per annum.

The ‘Elmbridge Borough Council Electoral Review – Council Size Submission to the LGBCE’ document (the EBC Submission) submitted in December 2014 has much detail on EBC, its governance and scrutiny together with a number of appendices, however we believe that it fundamentally misses the point on a number of key areas.

The key concerns of HWRA are:

- The EBC Submission did not take into account Parish councils
  - The table in section 2 ‘Rationale for electoral review’, under the heading ‘Benchmarking with Other Surrey Districts’ fails to note that there are approximately 80 parishes and 660 parish councillors across 6 other Surrey districts
- The EBC Submission did not take into account expected developments and population increases
  - The known and expected developments in Elmbridge will quickly render the EBC Submission figures redundant and will result in the constituents per councillor quickly becoming unworkable
- A reduction in Council staff/budget is not positively correlated with a reduction in councillors
  - Contrary to the inference by EBC that a reduction in EBC provided services and budget should lead to a reduction in councillors, we believe that the opposite is true and that such a reduction will lead to a greatly increased workload for councillors
- Elmbridge has a higher than average number of residents aged over 65
  - These residents are less likely to use the electronic methods of access information and services and therefore more likely to make direct contact with councillors
- A reduction in councillors from 60 to 48 will result in a significant reduction in the identities of some of the villages and communities within Elmbridge
  - Whilst the drawing of ward boundary lines are not the focus of the LGBCE at this stage, a reduction in councillors to 48 will, by necessity, mean that a number of villages and communities will be forced to split/merge and may find themselves being represented by councillors who are not part of their community
- We do not believe that 48 councillors will be able to run the council and provide sufficient independent scrutiny

Therefore we propose that the council size should only be reduced to 54 or, at a minimum, 51.
2. Detailed discussion of each concern

2.1 The EBC Submission did not take into account Parish councils

The EBC Submission and the table in section 2 ‘Rationale for electoral review’ under the heading ‘Benchmarking with Other Surrey Districts’ indicates that a 20% reduction in the number of councillors from 60 to 48 would “broadly result in a total number of councillors comparable with other Surrey authorities”. It would appear that EBC have arbitrarily decided on 48 because a) it is divisible by three, and b) they feel that 51 or higher “would not add value to the review”, without undertaking any real calculation of the actual number of councillors required to support the constituents and the council employees.

The EBC Submission has completely ignored the workload taken by Parish councils and their councilors. Parish councillors have an important role to play in the administration of services to the residents, and they provide these services in conjunction with the borough/district councillors.

Parish councils form a key part of the democratic process and give constituents a say at a very local level. Parish councils usually have planning groups which work with residents on planning applications before they get to the borough/district councillors. Parish councilors are available to discuss parish issues with the residents, thereby removing the need to involve borough/district councilors.

For example, Claygate parish council has four committees: environment, highways & transport, planning, and communications. These committees undertake a number of roles which in other wards are done by the borough councillors. Therefore these parish councillors should be considered when comparing Elmbridge to other Surrey districts.

The following table shows the effect the inclusion of parish councilors has on the number of electors per parish and borough councillor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Total electorate*</th>
<th>Council Size</th>
<th>Electors per EBC councillor</th>
<th>Parish councilors</th>
<th>Total EBC and parish councilors</th>
<th>Electors per total councillors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woking</td>
<td>73,848</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2,051</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelthorne</td>
<td>75,574</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,938</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmbridge</td>
<td>97,994</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2,042</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsom &amp; Ewell</td>
<td>57,954</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,525</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runnymede</td>
<td>63,471</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1,511</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1,511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reigate &amp; Banstead</td>
<td>102,487</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2,010</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey Heath</td>
<td>65,869</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,647</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mole Valley</td>
<td>68,484</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1,670</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waverley</td>
<td>94,654</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1,661</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>106,319</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2,215</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tandridge</td>
<td>60,141</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures taken from the EBC Submission

This shows that reducing the Council size to 48 puts EBC 50% above the average number of electors per councillor/parish councillor of 1,128. Even with 54 or 51 Councillors EBC is still above average.
Ignoring the parish councillors and taking EBC councillors only, a reduction to 48 would place EBC third in the table behind Guildford and Woking and 14% above the average of 1,790 electors per member and 22% above the median of 1,670. In our view this does not equate to being broadly in line with other Surrey districts.

Furthermore a comparison with other ‘nearest neighbour’ authorities as set determined by CIPFA shows that Elmbridge would be significantly above the average and median of these authorities as well:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Total electorate*</th>
<th>Council Size*</th>
<th>Electors per councillor</th>
<th>Parish councillors**</th>
<th>Total councillors</th>
<th>Electors per total councillors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Albans</td>
<td>112,000</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1,931</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brentwood</td>
<td>74,000</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiltern</td>
<td>79,000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Bucks</td>
<td>53,000</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1,893</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevenoaks</td>
<td>72,000</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures taken from each Authority website
** Figures based on an average of 7.7 councillors per parish, being the average across Surrey

2.2 The EBC Submission did not take into account expected developments and population increases

There are a number of known developments across Elmbridge. EBC’s own target is a minimum of 2,568 additional homes by 2026, although they have an estimated potential of 2,800. In addition there are two potentially significant developments in Walton and Hersham which are expected to add a further 1,300 additional homes.

Elmbridge has seen a significant amount of ‘backfill’ in recent years, a trend which is likely to continue considering the average plot size in Elmbridge is above the national average. Average garden sizes in Elmbridge are approximately 530m² compared to approximately 135m² nationally.

As noted in 2.4 below, Elmbridge’s percentage of residents aged over 75 and pensioners living alone are above the national average. As these pensioners move into the increasing number of retirement properties being built, their large houses are being sold to young families, thereby increasing the population of the borough above that noted above.

2.3 A reduction in Council staff/budget is not positively correlated with a reduction in Councillors

The EBC Submission notes several changes to the Council’s service responsibilities, one of which being the reduction in the Council’s workforce. However we believe it is counterintuitive to suggest a positive correlation between a reduction in the number of Council employees and the number of

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1 Elmbridge Borough Council Annual Monitoring Report 2014
2 Office of Deputy Prime Minister Land Use Categories report 2001
3 English Housing Survey – Housing stock report 2008
councillors required. To the contrary, the direct experience of our current and past councillors has shown that this reduction has significantly increased the amount of work being undertaken by our councillors, to fill the gaps being left by the reduced council workforce.

The EBC Submission provides a number of statistics relating to the work load of councillors, suggesting that councillors are generally happy with the current work load. However, the amount of time being spent each week on council business has been increasing over the past couple of years. We believe that if councillors are being asked to represent a significantly increased number of constituents then either the time spent by councillors on council business will continue to increase or the ability to represent each constituent will decrease.

With the current number of councillors, they can assist the Officers where they can, however a reduced number of councillors will mean that the officers will get less assistance meaning a more inefficient process. Our councillors spend a significant amount of time getting involved in local issues such as planning, highways and boundary disputes. In several cases negotiations by our councillors has saved EBC and its officers considerable time and potential litigation costs. We believe that reducing the number of councillors will actually increase the costs of the council well above the amount saved in the review.

The EBC Submission statistics on the work load of councillors shows that the time spent on council business varies between 7 and 40, indicating a wide disparity in both the commitment of councillors and the representation of constituents. We are concerned that reducing the number of councillors will increase this disparity still further, with those doing the least number of hours still doing the same whilst those local councillors who passionately support their local area becoming overloaded and unable to fully support the constituents who elected them.

The EBC Submission notes that there is a trend for younger people and women to be less involved in local politics and that EBC has been active in promoting the opportunity for these groups. However these groups will be less likely to want to become councillors if the work load is seen as making them full time jobs.

2.4 Elmbridge has a higher than average number of residents aged over 65

The EBC Submission shows that the percentage of residents aged over both 65 and 75 is above the national average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elbridge</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents aged over 65</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents aged over 75</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, although the number of one person households is the same in Elmbridge as it is nationally (29%), the percentage of pensioners living alone is above the national average\(^4\).

\(^4\) ONS 2001 Survey
One of the rationales put forward by the EBC Submission for the review is the changing way in which residents’ access information and services. Whilst this usage of the electronic self-service platform has generally been a success, the high number of pensioners either without access to computers or not able to use them as confidently as younger generations means that the number of pensioner constituents still requiring direct access to councillors has not decreased over the same period. This has been experienced directly by our own councillors who continue to get calls from pensioners who can’t access the EBC electronic services.

**2.5 A reduction in Councillors from 60 to 48 will result in a significant reduction in the identities of some of the villages and communities within Elmbridge**

Whilst the drawing of ward boundary lines are not being considered by LGBCE at this stage of the process, a reduction in Councillors to 48 will, by necessity, mean that a number of villages and communities will be forced to merge and may find themselves being represented by Councillors who are not part of their community.

The EBC Submission notes that Elmbridge Borough has 5 main towns and 8 villages and communities, which are “all distinctive in character”. It further notes that “Members strongly associate with the distinct communities of the Borough...”.

Each of the five main towns (Cobham, Hersham, Molesey, Weybridge and Walton-on-Thames) is currently split into between two and four wards. These internal boundaries can easily be redrawn to allow for the reduced number of Councillors without affecting the character of the community.

The village of Claygate is protected by its parish status and therefore is unlikely to be affected by the review.

In the various plans already drafted by EBC and the final version proposed at the Council meeting on the 16th March, there is clear evidence of significant redrawing of boundaries such that the villages and communities of Thames Ditton, Weston Green, Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton will be broken up and/or merged, with roads arbitrarily moved from one community to another to create wards of approximately equal size.

Hinchley Wood Residents’ Association has represented the community of Hinchley Wood on Esher District Council from 1932, with 2 seats from 1933 to 1974 when Elmbridge Borough Council was created. It then held all 3 seats until 2000 when the Boundary Commission gave 30% of our ward to Long Ditton. At present Hinchley Wood has the highest number of electorate per councillor in Elmbridge. We strongly object to the reduction in councillors to 48 as this will definitely lead to the break up and merger of Hinchley Wood with surrounding communities.

We believe that the level of review undertaken by EBC and the LGBCE so far has not taken into account sufficient review of all indicators “which identify and build up a map of communities” (Para 4.1 of the LGBCE Technical Guidance) and that a reduction in Councillors from 60 to 48 will result in
an arbitrary redrawing of boundary lines resulting in the break up and/or merger of villages and communities which are “all distinctive in character”.

LGBCE themselves have previously stated that “We aim to ensure that new electoral division boundaries also reflect the interests and identities of Elmbridge’s various communities”\(^5\). Making wholesale changes to community ward boundaries to satisfy an arbitrary reduction in the number of councillors from 60 to 48 seems to be completely at odds with LGBCE’s own views.

Furthermore such arbitrary redrawing of boundaries goes against the EBC Submission which notes that “… the 8 villages and communities of Claygate, Hersham, Hinchley Wood, Long Ditton, Thames Ditton, Oxshott and Stoke D’Abernon, which are all distinctive in character” and “The Borough recognises these towns and villages as distinct communities…”. Each of these villages and communities have their own identity, shopping centres, churches and schools and trying to break up or merge them would be detrimental to the cohesion and interests of each community. It would appear that far from supporting the identities of these villages and communities, EBC is looking to break them up.

LGBCE has already accepted the concept of the community boundaries for Thames Ditton and Western Green following the 2011 decision not to alter the county council boundary of The Dittons. If LGBCE goes ahead with the reduction in council size to 48 with the consequent requirement to arbitrarily redraw community boundaries, once again LGBCE would be accepting a defective proposal and disregarding the identity and interests of our communities.

2.6 We do not believe that 48 Councillors will be able to run the council and provide sufficient independent scrutiny

The EBC Submission states that the cabinet and committees will be reduced proportionately with a reduction in councillors from 60 to 48, which will still ensure compliance with legislative requirements. The EBC Submission also states that no councillor can be involved in scrutinising a decision that they have been involved in making.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at EBC was recently reduced from three separate committees down to the current single committee. This committee is currently constituted with 17 councillors, which will be reduced to 13 or 14 going forward. We believe that this number is too small to be effective and carry out a sufficient level of scrutiny and oversight considering the large number of committees and working groups that the councillors will have to support.

The EBC Submission expands at great length on the roles and responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It also lists the various other committees including planning, audit & standards, licensing, countryside group, finance, disciplinary (x2) and appointments. In addition there are a number of working groups which exist as required to support the day to day running of the council. On top of this there are 33 outside bodies to which the council appoints representatives.

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\(^5\) Archie Gall, letter published in the Surrey Advertiser, 16 September 2011
It is our opinion that splitting all this work between 20% fewer councillors will make it impossible to operate an effective Overview and Scrutiny Committee as there won’t be sufficient councillors to scrutinise a decision that they have been involved in making. Furthermore it will result in significantly increased work for each councillor and significantly reduced representation for each constituent.

3. Conclusion

Considering the following points:

- The invitation to the Boundary Commission to review the number of councillors was only supported by 26 out of 60 councillors at the meeting in April 2013.
- The last Boundary Commission review in 2000 agreed that 60 was the correct number of councillors.
- The EBC submission ignores the role of parish councils.
- The population and electorate has increased by over 10% since 2000.
- Elmbridge has an above average number of pensioners both in total and living alone.
- Councillors work load has been increasing over recent years consistent with the reduction in Elmbridge employees.
- Councillors work load will increase further still with a reduction in councillors to 48.
- The distinctive character of some villages and communities will be lost.

We believe that reducing the number of councillors to 48 will result in less electoral fairness, the interests and identities of some communities being disregarded and a less efficient delivery of local government.

The publication of the proposed ward boundaries by EBC on the 16th March shows that EBC is intent on destroying the ward of Hinchley Wood. This intentional and wilful breaking up of a community that has a real identity, has natural borders, is supported by the vast majority of its constituents and has all the facilities necessary to support its population has no rational basis. It does beg the question as to why Hinchley Wood was selected for being broken up – in the absence of any other reason we can only conclude that it is because HWRA is a separate political party on EBC.

Hinchley Wood is a strong and vibrant community which is focussed on the shops just by the cross roads of the A309, Manor Road North and Manor Road South. EBC’s proposed boundary changes effectively split the community of Hinchley Wood in half right across its centre.

We believe that there is sufficient justification to keep Hinchley Wood ward as a single community. Effective representation for Hinchley Wood currently works well with two councillors and therefore we believe that the correct solution is to keep Hinchley Wood as a two councillor ward. This will result in electoral fairness for Hinchley Wood electors and will protect the interests and identities of the community.
Subject: MOLESEY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION - Boundary Commission Submission

Dear Sir

I write on behalf of the Molesey Residents' Association, in response to the proposals put forward to the LGBCE, as submitted by Elmbridge Borough Council.

We believe that the Council's submission is flawed, where equality of representation has superseded the remaining criteria - to reflect the identities and interests of local communities, deliver effective and convenient local government, and minimise the change from existing local boundaries. The submission from the Residents' Group on Elmbridge Borough Council complies with all the criteria in the technical guidance notes, and we would wholeheartedly support their plans for changing ward boundaries across the Borough.

At present Molesey is a defined community, comprising 3 x 3 member wards and a total electorate of just over 15,000. We acknowledge that, by reducing the number of councillors, the number of wards will have to be reduced from the current 22. With the proposed average ward size across the Borough of approximately 6,200 voters, Molesey falls between two stools, not large enough to maintain the status quo, and too large to comply with the current ward pattern.

Reluctantly, therefore, we are minded that 2 x 3 member wards would be the only option, whereby the borders of the current North and South Molesey are extended eastwards, absorbing a significant part of Molesey East. Clearly, we are disappointed that Molesey East - as a name and as a ward, is disappearing, but we sincerely hope that this area stays within the "Molesey" community, being absorbed into the new North and South Molesey wards.

Consequently, it seems totally bizarre to us that the Council's proposed Molesey boundaries do not take into account the Hampton Court Station and Jolly Boatman site. This area has been the subject of a most contentious planning application over several years, in which MRA councillors have been deeply involved. They have built up a vast amount of knowledge to ensure that any future development will be the right one for Molesey. The residents themselves identify with this site as being part of Molesey, and have been very supportive of the Molesey Residents' actions over many years. The idea of suggesting that it should be moved out of the ward shows that the current Council's proposals are predicated on numbers - and not on community identity. We understand that a new planning proposal may be forthcoming, and we believe that it would be essential that the local knowledge and experience acquired by the local councillors will be crucial to be governance of this part of the Borough.

The Council's submission has put forward the name "Molesey Riverside" as a suggested ward name. This was not supported by the Molesey Residents' Councillors on the Council. The potential changes to ward boundaries will be disruptive as it is to the residents. And as the new boundaries are being extended eastwards we see no reason to move away from "Molesey North" and "Molesey South", the existing names and which are understood by the electorate. We see no necessity to create a new "florid" name for the sake of it.

Molesey Residents Association currently has eight Borough Councillors on Elmbridge Council, and supplies the two Surrey County Councillors for the divisions - West Molesey and East Molesey & Esher. I have attached - for your information - a brief history of our Association.

Yours faithfully

Nigel Cooper
Chairman
BRIEF HISTORY OF MOLESEY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

50 years ago, when Molesey came under the then Esher District Council, the public was not allowed to attend council meetings. Molesey residents were hence unaware when there was a plan going through the (Conservative dominated) council to demolish all the houses in Palace, Wolsey and Arnison Roads and replace them with high-rise London overspill housing.

When, at a very late stage, Molesey residents discovered the truth of what was proposed, there was a huge outcry and the plan was eventually dropped – and the area is now a conservation area!

The victorious residents decided that the only way to ensure that in future they knew what was going on and to have a say in council affairs was to put up some of their own for election to the council. They had great success and, in 1965, formed the Molesey Residents Association and the MRA now represents the whole of Molesey with 8 MRA Councillors on Elmbridge Council and 2 MRA County Councillors on Surrey County Council.

We are nothing to do with any political party and our sole concern is to do our best for what is right for Molesey, which is exactly what we have stood for ever since the MRA was formed all those years ago.
Dear Mr Hinds,

The PCC of St Christopher’s Church and Community Hub of Hinchley Wood feel we must write to you to express our concern and disagreement with the proposed changes to the Elmbridge Borough Wards.

Over the years, the church has played a big part within our community and has recently been recognised as a Community Hub for the village of Hinchley Wood. As a community hub, our buildings are used by all members of the community whether for a children’s party, to vote, give blood, exercise, and dance or simply connect with others in our area. We have very close links to both of the high performing schools within the area holding services and concerts in our areas and allowing GCSE student’s freedom of our hall for drama practice.

As a community, we know that our thoughts and issues will be well represented on the Council, as most importantly they are understood by those representing us. We have no natural links with either Long Ditton or Weston Green, not even the churches link together except for special occasions such as Lent, as we are all villages with our own needs and issues.

The church is a central part of the community helping with the annual Armistice Parade bringing the local schools, Scouts, Guides together a community of Hinchley Wood to honour those who have fallen. We also run a Community carols service at the church where the local shops and schools support us in the afternoon with refreshments and choirs. We use this service for the residents to help those in our Diocese who are less fortunate by bringing gifts for children to open on Christmas Day.

People who live in Hinchley Wood feel part of a community because that is how we, the schools and our local shops make them feel. We are a village not a town and we care for those around us and are passionate about the issues we face in the village. The residents have defended projects that will disrupt that feeling, like McDonalds and embraced those that will make us stronger.
We understand the need to reduce the overall number of representative, but as each of the areas being discussed are villages not town, surely a more practical option would be to have 2 council representatives for the 3 areas rather than 3 representatives for 2 wards.

It cannot be in the best interests of any community to be split into new boundaries where your thoughts and concerns will not be properly represented by those you vote to speak on your behalf. Hinchley Woods needs will always be different from Weston Greens and Long Dittons which is why we have our own Churches, Schools and Scouting / Guiding Troops all focussed on delivering against the needs of our community not someone else's.

Kind regards,

Tracey Warren & Mark Schuringa
Church Wardens
Dear Sir/Madam,

**Electoral Review of Elmbridge**

I write on behalf of Thames Ditton & Weston Green Residents’ Association, founded in 1934, which is a strong locally based non-party political organisation concerned with protecting the amenities and furthering the interests of the inhabitants of Thames Ditton and Weston Green. Through regular meetings, social activities, our magazine and website we keep in touch with residents' views and we raise and spend funds for the benefit of the community. With five Residents’ Association councillors on Elmbridge Council and one Surrey County Councillor we work to ensure that decisions are based on the needs of local communities and on good management rather than on party politics. Last year we had a paid up membership of some 1,100 households representing over 2,000 members.

We note the Boundary Commission stated in its News Release for Elmbridge 3rd February 2015 (our underlining):

6. For councils, like Elmbridge, that hold elections in three years out of every four, the Commission has a responsibility, set out in legislation, to devise a pattern of three-member wards across the whole authority. Such a ward pattern means that every elector would have the same opportunity to vote in local elections each time they are held. However, the Commission is able to move away from a uniform pattern of three-member wards – on a ward by ward basis - if it believes an alternative arrangement would better meet its other statutory criteria: to deliver electoral equality for voters, to reflect the interests and identities of local communities and to promote effective and convenient local government.

Looking at these criteria, all proposals for 3 member wards in Thames Ditton, Weston Green, Long Ditton and Hinchley Wood breach the criteria for reflecting the interests and identities of local communities and of promoting effective and convenient local government.
Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities:

- A merger of Hinchley Wood and Weston Green would involve two different communities, with separate Residents Associations, different parish churches and separated by the main London - Portsmouth railway line, the commons and the Portsmouth Road.
- When considering merging Weston Green with part of Hinchley Wood, we should point out that the Boundary Commission review for Surrey County Council in January 2012 stated: "We found the evidence relating to community identity and interests compelling and are persuaded that dividing the area of Weston Green would be detrimental to a community that demonstrated strong links with Thames Ditton. We have therefore decided to modify our draft recommendations accordingly."

Promoting effective and convenient local government:

- Elmbridge Council’s proposals to merge Hinchley Wood with Weston Green and part of Esher ward, and to merge Thames Ditton with East Molesey would cut across County Council divisions. For example, at present the Hinchley Wood ward has one county councillor which it shares with Claygate and Oxshott; Weston Green ward has another county councillor which it shares with the Dittons; and the Esher ward has a county councillor which it shares with East Molesey. However under the council’s proposals for 48 x 3 councillor wards, the single Elmbridge ward created by combining parts of Hinchley Wood, parts of Esher and Weston Green would be served by 3 county councillors.
- The council’s proposals for the new Weston Green and Hinchley Wood ward would also cut across the Council’s eight settlements as set out in the Local Plan Core Strategy. These settlements form the basis of local plan policies: Weston Green and Hinchley Wood are in the Long Ditton, Thames Ditton, Hinchley Wood and Weston Green settlement while Esher is in a different settlement. The allocation of the Community Infrastructure Levy is also based on these settlements.

Our Association supports the proposals put forward by Councillor Stuart Selleck on behalf of the 21 Residents’ Group Councillors on Elmbridge Council for 14 three councillor wards and 3 two councillor wards as they will reflect the interests and identities of our local communities and also promote effective and convenient local government.

Yours faithfully,

Rhodri Richards
Chairman
Thames Ditton & Weston Green Residents’ Association
The Walton Society

Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

31st March 2015

Dear Sir

Electoral Review of Elmbridge Borough Council

I write as acting Chairman of The Walton Society, our Independent Residents Association representing more than one thousand members. The Society, whilst dedicated to preserving the important historical features of Walton, also has a wider interest in environmental conservation including the impact of the growth in traffic, parking, speeding and traffic congestion issues. We have followed with close interest the discussions about the proposals for an electoral review over the past few years as Council policy has a significant bearing on the issues the Society and its members are concerned with.

We are extremely concerned about the Council's plans to redraw the ward boundaries so that the northern part of Hersham would be included in one of the Walton wards, and that significant parts of Walton Central ward and Walton South ward would be hived off to become part of Oatlands ward. We are particularly concerned that the electors of Walton Central ward living in roads such as Sandy Way and Ashley Park Crescent - only approximately 200 meters walk from Walton town centre, The Heart - would then find themselves in Oatlands Ward whose heart is a mile or so to the west.

Our members and many other residents in Walton are outraged that this would also mean that the historic War Memorial situated in Walton High Street, the focal point for large gatherings at Remembrance Services and the adjacent 19th century Ashley Church of England Primary School, both situated in the centre of Walton and a great part of the established Walton life for over a hundred years would no longer be in Walton. Instead the strange proposal is that they become part of Oatlands Ward which already has its own long established War Memorial and Primary School in the centre of Oatlands.

We believe our members would strongly prefer that all of Walton is kept within wards wholly bounded by the existing external boundaries of Walton, as is proposed in the submission made by Cllr Selleck on behalf of the Residents group of Councillors. We have not seen or heard any arguments for the Council's proposals which satisfactorily explain why their set of boundaries should be preferred.

We therefore strongly recommend to you that you adopt the warding pattern set out in Cllr Selleck's submission as it much more closely reflects local community identity and interests, which is one of your important statutory criteria.

Yours sincerely

Melvyn Mills

www.thewaltonsociety.org.uk
31st March 2015

The Review Officer (Elmbridge)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG
(By email to)

Dear Sirs

REVIEW OF ELMBRIDGE WARD BOUNDARIES

The Society welcomes the reduction of the number of Borough Councillors in Elmbridge from 60 to 48 and supports the concept that wards should be split so that each councillor represents an equal number of the electorate within an appropriate margin. Additionally care must be taken to ensure that historical and logical ward boundaries should remain as far as practical.

Referring to the proposals for Weybridge Wards (currently Weybridge North, Weybridge South, St. George’s Hill and Oatlands Park) the Society wishes to make the following brief comments on the draft ward changes attached¹:

- It is agreed in principle that the majority of Weybridge North and South should be combined with a new name of Weybridge Central;
- The expansion of the current St George’s Hill (taking over some parts of the current Oatlands and Weybridge South) does not generate any apparent anomalies. However it is considered essential that the historical name of St George’s Hill should be retained perhaps coupling it with Brooklands; again because of its historical significance. The Society proposes that a new ward name along the lines of “St George’s Hill and Brooklands” would be appropriate.

It is appreciated that a full public consultation will take later this year; at that time the Society will make more detailed comments on the draft proposals issued by the Local Government Boundaries Commission.

Yours faithfully

Dave Arnold
Chairman Weybridge Society

¹ This is the only information seen by the Society on the proposed ward changes being considered by Elmbridge Borough Council
Electorate Figures as at 23/2/15

Total Electorate = 99,833
Average Electorate per Ward = 6,240
+10% Variance = 60,864
-10% Variance = 57,616

New Warding Pattern
First Draft for consideration by Electoral Review Member W.C. on 4 March 2015
(N.B. Electorate numbers indicated on map are provisional.)