



Whiteley Village

A century of caring for the elderly

**Review Officer (Elmbridge)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
14th Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP**

13 August 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

I am writing to ask the Local Government Boundary Commission to reconsider its boundary proposals in respect of the review of Elmbridge Borough Council.

Specifically, the Whiteley Homes Trust, which owns and manages Whiteley Village, requests the Commission to make it part of Hersham Village Ward rather than Weybridge and St George's Hill Ward.

This request is based upon two of the Commission's three rules:

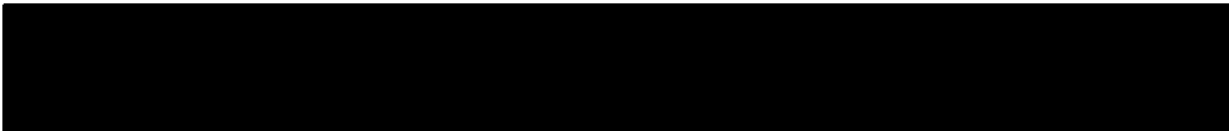
1. It would be a very much better reflection of the interests and identities of the Whiteley Village community.
2. It would deliver more effective and convenient local government.

Social and economic data

While we note you treat social and economic data with caution, we think that there is a compelling reason to take them into account in this case. Whiteley Village is unique; most of its homes are almshouses for older people of limited means.

Under the proposal, it would be dominated by the remainder of the proposed Weybridge and St George's Hill ward. As this includes some of the most affluent areas in the country, the contrast is extreme.

There would be a serious risk that elected councilors for the proposed ward would not have empathy for the residents of the Village, and not represent them well.



History and status of Whiteley Village

Whiteley Village is wholly owned by a charity, the Whiteley Homes Trust. This was established to implement the will of William Whiteley, who died in 1907. He left a legacy of £1 million for *'buildings to be used and occupied by aged poor persons...as homes in their old age.'*

The Village is geographically distinct, set in over 200 acres of grounds owned by the charity. It is thought to have the largest single collection of almshouses in the country. It is a conservation area and in the green belt.

In addition to 262 cottages for independent living, it has a 51 extra care flats and two care homes. It also has facilities used by many local people from outside the Village – including a nursery, two mother and toddler groups, several sports clubs, a youth drama and music group, a fine arts society and scouts and guides.

Today, the charity accepts applications from retired people who are homeless or have an urgent housing need, and who lack the resources to find suitable accommodation themselves. Over 90 per cent of the cottage residents qualify for housing benefit. The remainder are likely to do so over time, as they will only have modest capital funds which will inevitably erode because their income will also be modest.

There are nearly 500 retired residents of limited means living in the Village. There are several aged over 100 years old. By definition, they are vulnerable people. A few members of staff, a few self-funding residents of the care homes, and the occupants of eighteen other houses also live in the Village. Only sixteen properties, in a single mews development on the periphery of the Village, can be sold on the open market. All of the other properties are rented from the Trust.

Surrounding area

The Village is separated from the St George's Hill estate by Seven Hills Road. The contrast between them could hardly be more stark.

St George's Hill is a 964 acre private estate with some 420 houses. It is not open to the public; access is strictly controlled by gates. Local laws require each house to have at least 1 acre of grounds (source: Wikipedia). A quick glance at Rightmove shows few properties on the estate for sale at under £3 million, and many for over £10 million.

More generally, Weybridge has some of the least deprived areas of the country. By definition, Whiteley Village caters to some of the most deprived in our society – elderly people of limited means.



Interest and identities of the Whiteley Village community

Partly because of the physical boundary of Seven Hills Road and the inaccessible St George's Hill estate across it, Villagers naturally gravitate towards Hersham for shopping, social activities and access to local public services. For example, the Hersham surgery provides most, if not all, GP services in the Village.

This is reinforced by the only bus route (564) in the Village. This starts in the Village, and runs through Hersham to Walton. There is no public transport that goes towards Weybridge.

Effective and convenient local government

Linking Whiteley Village to Hersham would provide better democratic accountability for three main reasons:

1. Access to public meetings or activities in the proposed ward would be extremely difficult for Villagers who do not have a car – the majority. Access to Hersham is possible by bus.
2. Elected councilors for the proposed ward would be likely to give priority to the interests of the majority of voters. In contrast to residents of Whiteley Village, these will be well above average wealth for the country as a whole, and relatively low users of local public services. The wording in your proposals suggests that you have included Whiteley in a ward that *'mostly comprises the St George's Hill area of Weybridge'* to make up electoral numbers. We consider that there is a serious risk that the residents of Whiteley Village would, in effect, be disenfranchised. This would undermine rather than improve 'electoral equality'.
3. Historically, the councilors for Hersham have been excellent ambassadors for the charity, as well as engaged and interested representatives for the Villagers. They regularly attend community events in the Village and have demonstrated considerable empathy for the charity and its aims. The Trust is about to embark on a significant development programme, driven partly by the parlous state of one of the care homes and partly by a wish to meet the needs of the increasing number of elderly people of limited means. In doing so, it aims to develop a modern concept for almshouses, in conjunction with national bodies. Because of the sensitivity of Whiteley Village as a conservation area, it is important that the strong links and mutual understanding we have with the elected representatives of Hersham are maintained during the development period, which will be over five years.



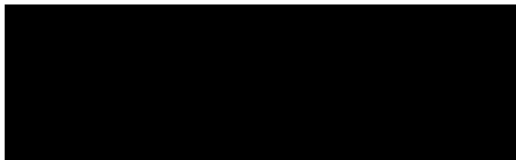
Conclusion

The Whiteley Homes Trust feels strongly that Whiteley Village should be a part of Hersham Village ward.

If the current proposals stand, it considers that the democratic interests of vulnerable people, who are the overwhelming majority of people living in Whiteley Village, will be at risk.

The Trust therefore asks the Local Government Boundary Commission to reconsider its proposals, and make Whiteley Village a part of the Hersham Village ward (perhaps renamed Hersham and Whiteley Villages Ward).

Yours faithfully,



Peter Wilkinson CBE
Chair

cc:
Dominic Raab MP
Elmbridge Borough Council

