29 September 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Borough Boundary Review Consultation Response – Woking Borough Council - October 2014

This response sets out the formal views of Woking Borough Council (Council) on the Borough Boundary proposals published by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (from 15 July to 6 October 2014).

The Council is pleased to note that the Boundary Commission (Commission) has based its proposal substantially on the Council’s submission. However the Council regrets that the Commission has not fully supported the Council’s proposals.

The Council in its submission had incorporated a distribution of electors that reflected the known and proposed growth in the Borough and particularly its distribution across Wards. The Council is concerned that the Commission’s proposals appear to have disregarded the distribution of new electors as forecast by the Council in favour of a general uplift based on Office of National Statistics (ONS) projections. The Council is therefore concerned that the Commission’s proposals will result in an earlier need for another Boundary Review than would have been the case if the Council’s proposals had been adopted.

In noting the changes the Commission has made, particularly those to the areas to the north of the Railway, in respect of which the Commission has stated, “having visited the area, we have decided to depart from the Council’s proposals for certain wards, particularly to the north of the main railway line in order to better reflect community identities as well as transport and communication links”, the Council considers that the Commission’s view on local community does not align with its view, or the views of the people actually living in those local communities. The Council therefore requests that the Commission takes full account of the views of residents of the affected areas in respect of what they consider to be their local community before finalising its proposals.

However, in view of the Commission’s detailed report setting out the background to its proposals, the Council is minded to broadly accept the generality of the approach taken, subject to a number of changes it would specifically like the Commission to adopt, which, in the Council’s view, will secure better community identities wherever possible. The changes sought by the Council are set out below; maps supporting the proposals are attached.
Ward Names

With the exception of one ward, the Sheerwater Ward, the Boundary Commission has accepted the Ward names included in the Borough Council’s submission. Within the Council’s submission, the ward broadly equal to the new Sheerwater Ward was named Woking Central, to reflect its central location within the Borough. The changes proposed by the Commission extend this ward to the East of the Borough and it is understandable that the suggested name of Woking Central is no longer appropriate. However, it is considered that the suggestion by the Commission to name the ward Sheerwater does not fairly reflect the character of the Ward, which now covers the Borough’s Town Centre, the principal economic and transport location of the Borough, the Woodham area and parts of West Byfleet, as well as Sheerwater. In the Council’s view such a location specific name will cause confusion for the residents living outside of the core Sheerwater area. In view of this, the Council requests that the Ward name is changed to Canal Side to better reflect the main physical feature which runs through the length of the Ward and is readily recognisable by all communities bordering it.

Ward Boundaries

The Council considers that its requested amendments to the Commission’s Ward proposal will result in improving community identity within Wards without significantly disturbing the balance sought by the Commission and hopes the Commission is willing to adopt the amendments set out below without further change. Accordingly the Council requests that the Commission modifies its Ward boundaries in respect of the following Wards.

Hoe Valley

The area south of Moor Lane and including Rosebank Cottages has more in common with, and relates more to, the communities in Westfield (with their shared interest in Westfield Common which connects the communities), than to the wide ranging and distinct communities incorporated in the Heathlands Ward. It is therefore proposed that these properties be removed from Heathlands and included in Hoe Valley.

Similarly the area around Constitution Hill which is to the north west of Woking Park has more in common with and relates currently to similar character properties and communities in Mount Hermon. It is therefore proposed that these properties be removed from Hoe Valley and included in Mount Hermon.

It is estimated that these proposals would reduce the number of electors in the Ward by some 160 which would have a negligible net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from average to 2% below average.

Heathlands

The consequential effect on Heathlands arising from the change to Hoe Valley is to reduce the number of electors by some 200 which would have a modest net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from 6% below average to 9% below average. Whilst this variance from average is in itself significant it does properly reflect the more rural nature of the Ward and the greater travelling distances for Members connecting with electors.

Mount Hermon

It is proposed, as outlined in the proposals for Hoe Valley, to move the properties around Constitution Hill into Mount Hermon. This would add some 360 electors which would have a noticeable impact on the size of the Ward.

The Council therefore proposes that the Mayhurst area and the north east side of East Hill Road should join with their neighbouring properties and be incorporated in the Pyrford Ward.

It is estimated that the net effect of these proposals would increase the number of electors in the Ward by some 190 which would have a negligible net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from 1% above average to 3% above average.
Pyford

The consequential effect on Pyford arising from the change to Mount Hermon is to increase the number of electors by some 170 which would have a negligible net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from average to 2% above average.

Canal Side (Renamed from the Commission’s proposal)

The Ward, as proposed by the Commission, contains a number of different communities that do not recognise themselves as one. The Council recognises that across the Borough such a position is inevitable, indeed its own proposals accepted that the communities Heathlands would recognise their significant differences but would also recognise their common characteristic of being more rural than suburban. The Council accepts that it will be for the Commission to consider how much it takes account of the views of local people but considers that by renaming the Ward Canal Side it will assist the different communities either side of the canal to recognise their common interest in the canal whilst respecting their distinct differences.

Accordingly the Council has restricted its suggested amendments to the Ward to the minimum so as to address what it considers to be significant anomalies that, in the Council’s view, detract significantly from community cohesion. Two significant amendments are therefore proposed.

The area to north of the canal bordering the Chobham Road, incorporating The Grove, Ferndale, the Broomhalls and Brewery Road have a clear community identity with the Horsell Ward and should be removed from Canal Side and included in Horsell. This will move some 390 electors from Canal Side to Horsell.

The area to the west of Victoria Way, down Goldsworth Road to Morrison’s Superstore, including roads off Vale Farm Road, relate to Woking town centre which is included in Canal Side; the communities in the area close to the town centre do not relate to St Johns. It is therefore proposed this group of properties is moved into Canal Side. This will move some 590 electors from St Johns to Canal Side.

It is estimated that these proposals would increase the number of electors in the Ward by some 200 which would have a negligible net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from 2% above average to 5% above average.

Horsell

The consequential effect on Horsell arising from the change to Canal Side is to increase the number of electors by some 390 which would have a modest net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from 6% below average to 1% below average.

St Johns

The consequential effect on St Johns arising from the change to Canal Side is to reduce the number of electors by some 590 which would have a modest net impact on the size of the Ward by changing the variance from 3% above average to 4% below average.

Should the Commission wish to discuss in more detail any of the amendments set out in this response or discuss any further matters relating to its final proposals the Council will be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Morgan
Chief Executive

Councillor J Kingsbury
Leader of the Council

For further information please contact Frank Jeffrey on
Email