

Local Government Boundary Commission for England's

Review of Mole Valley District Council Wards.

Fetcham Residents Association response

to the LGBCE Second Stage proposals for

Fetcham & Bookham.

Fetcham – a Village and a Community.

The Fetcham Residents Association's first response to the LGDCE's invitation for suggested Ward boundaries was submitted during December 2021. Then, as now, we consider the interests of the 9000 residents of Fetcham, of whom some 1,022 households are subscribing Members of the FRA.

We enjoy a close working arrangement with our present four District Councillors in considering issues that may be of concern or interest to ALL residents of Fetcham. This is achieved irrespectively of the current Fetcham East – Fetcham West ward boundary that bisects the more central residential area as well as our schools, churches and the main modest, but thriving, shopping center at its core. An on-line survey of Fetcham residents, conducted during December 2021, revealed that over 87% of respondents said they felt proud to live in Fetcham, with 96% feeling safe in the village. Excluding pandemic affected 2020 & 2021, our AGM's held in the Village Hall, have for some years now been 'full houses' of 120+ participants ... reflecting a shared interest in local issues that are distinct from those of immediately neighbouring Leatherhead and Bookham.

In our first stage response, we sought to address the stated Ward requirements whilst also attempting to protect the Fetcham community spirit.

Second Stage Response

The three member ward recommendation for a single Fetcham ward and a single Bookham ward (renamed The Bookhams), involves the addition of a third new, Eastwick Park ward, created with populations of existing Fetcham & Bookham residents within arbitrarily drawn boundaries.

Our understanding is that four statutory considerations are required to be given equal weight...

- 1) The need to secure, as nearly as possible, equal ratios of electors to councillors in each ward.
- 2) The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and in particular the desirability of fixing boundaries which are easily identifiable and do not break local ties.
- 3) The need to secure effective and convenient local government
- 4) The desirability, for elections by thirds, of securing that number of councillors for each ward is divisible by three where possible, in order to enable voters to participate in annual elections.

The recommendation fails in two of the four counts.

- No regard is given to the identity and interests of two long established and differing communities (Consideration 2) compounded by proposed boundaries that...
 - ... are arbitrarily drawn.
 - ... break local and very practical ties.
 - ... creates a set of residents in an Eastwick Park ward that have no community focus, or arguably the need for one. They may be expected to continue to regard either Fetcham or Bookham village centres as their centres.
 - ... our first response had already stated could not be recommend or supported due to the moving of the westerly Fetcham ward boundary to such close proximity with our village's Junior school and Churches.

- Effective and convenient local government (Consideration 3) will be significantly compromised.
 - In addition to established Resident Associations for the Fetcham & Bookham communities each liaising with their respective three Fetcham or Bookham Ward councillors, BOTH RA's will need to ALSO be liaising with the three Eastwick Park ward councillors.
 - No one set of Ward councillors be able to speak for either all Fetcham or all Bookham residents
 - Eastwick Park ward councillors would need to be addressing the needs of two differing groups and needs of residents.

Instead, disproportionate weighting has been applied to the requirement to satisfy the equality of electoral numbers (Consideration 1) and the desirability for elections by thirds (Consideration 4) ... to the apparent exclusion of the other statutory considerations.

Counter Proposal

The FRA shares with the Bookham Residents Association the view that attempting to consider ONLY the electoral numbers and a one size fits all electoral process applied across all Mole Valley, is not capable of delivering a ward structure across the Fetcham and Bookham communities that will have any meaning, be respected or be workable.

In conjunction with BRA, the FRA proposes an alternative warding arrangement that at least maintains the nine councillors recommended across the two communities.

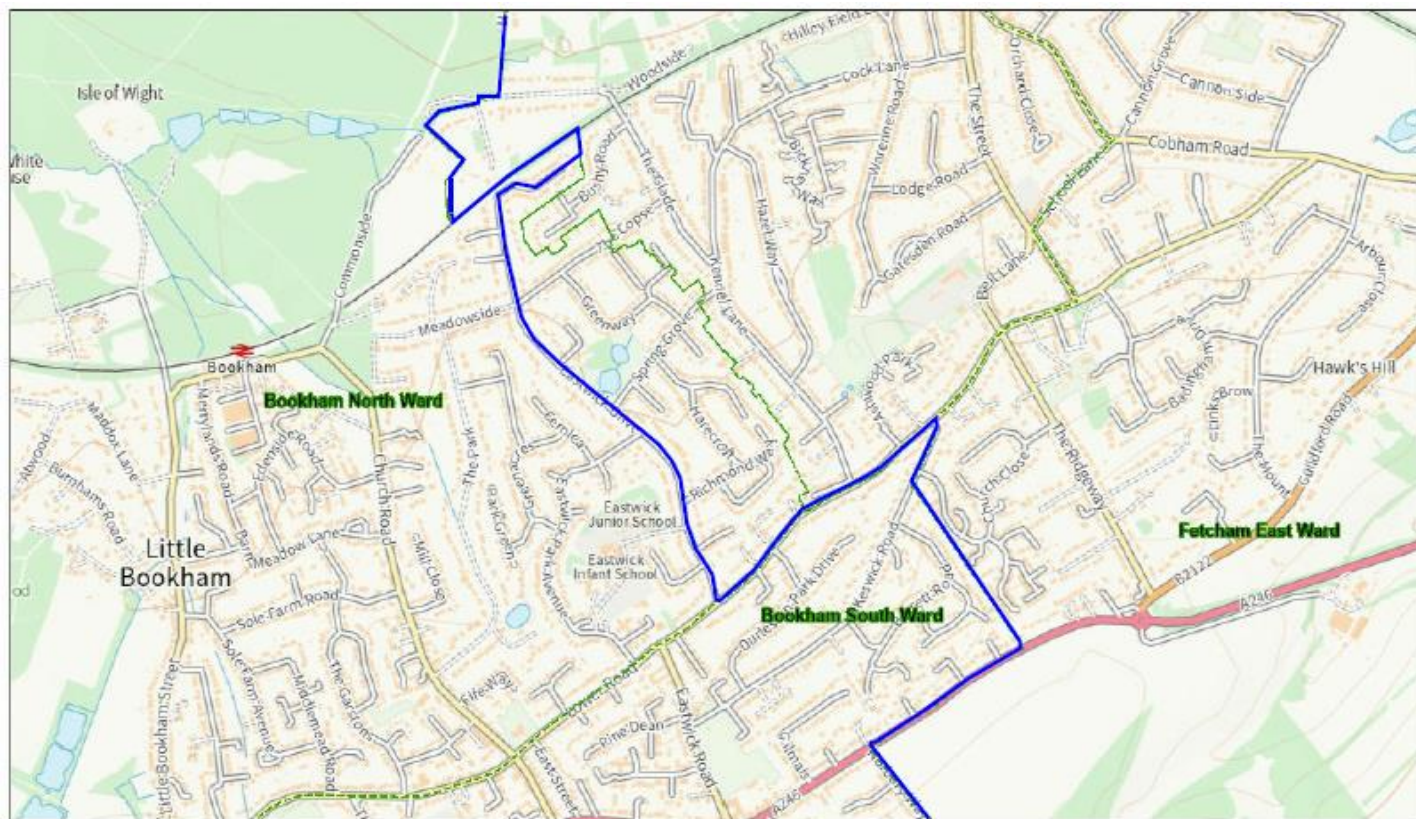
This would be for two Bookham wards, one of three councillors the other of two councillors. In Fetcham there would be two wards, both of two councillors.

We are open minded as to whether these wards would bisect East/West, or North/South. We would expect the respective Fetcham and Bookham ward councillors to work together for the good of their combined community, not just for the electorate in their own ward.

The key to our proposal is that it would meet all of the Boundary Review principles of "equal ratios of electors to councillors are readily achieved"; "ensure that recommendations reflect Community identity"; "provide arrangements that support effective and convenient Local Government", as well as the "divisible by three" number for the Council as a whole.

As part of our proposal, it is appreciated that to approach electoral equivalence in numbers some properties in Bookham may have to move to the Fetcham wards. As the LG Boundary Commission noted there is an area between both settlements that do merge and it is here that changes could be made.

A map suggesting where these locations are is displayed below and is also provided separately.



The dashed green line is the current West/East ward boundary between the main Fetcham & Bookham residential areas. The blue solid line represents a proposed West/East boundary

In addition to addressing electoral equivalence issues, we believe that the suggested minor amendment would go part way towards returning to the 1994 ward boundary and Fetcham's Ecclesiastical Parish boundary, within that limited area.

There is clear precedent to support the solution we propose. In the recent LGBC review of St Albans, which also has the key determinant of a three yearly cycle of elections, two member and single member wards were agreed because of local circumstances

On behalf of the residents of Fetcham and Bookham , and for the health of our community identity and effectiveness of our local government, we urge the Boundary Commission to adopt our proposal.

Richard Bradfield

Planning Issues – Fetcham Residents Association
4th June 2022