

Bookham Residents' Association response to the second stage LGBCE review of Mole Valley District Council.

Bookham and Fetcham

Please note: The Bookhams Residents' Association (BRA) is an apolitical voluntary membership organisation open to all residents of Great and Little Bookham. With a membership of over two thousand households, the BRA is "of the community and for the community". Its purpose is to be a voice for resident's views on local issues, and to help get things done to maintain and improve life in the Bookhams.

Response: The recommendations for Bookham and Fetcham locations suggest three, three member wards named The Bookhams, Fetcham, and Eastwick Park. These recommendations fail to meet two out of three principles the Boundary Review should be based on.

These are:

1. "ensuring that recommendations reflect Community identity"
2. "Provide arrangements that support effective and convenient Local Government"

In our previous submission (12th November 2021) we pointed firmly to the fact that Bookham and Fetcham are independent and easily identified communities and like many locations in Mole Valley have been in existence separately for over one thousand years. Each has its own long-established Church, their own shopping centres, and community halls, and celebrate their individual communities at separate "village days".

The Commission proposal to create a merged ward called Eastwick Park appears to be based on a visit during which, as there was no clear visible dividing space between the villages, an assumption appears to have been made that the villages are now one. This could not be further from the truth.

The new boundary between Bookham ward and Eastwick Park runs in the middle of Church Road Bookham High Street and The Dorking road. This splits Bookham into two parts with its main village church no longer in Bookham but in Eastwick Park. Also the shopping centre is again divided in the same way with half in Bookham, the other half in Eastwick Park. Unlike the current ward boundary which keeps the centre of Bookham in wards called Bookham, this boundary does not reflect Community Identity but splits it in two.

On the Principle that new wards should support effective and convenient local government these new wards again fail. Fetcham and Bookham are almost small towns, not villages (total population of Bookham about 12,000 and Fetcham 9000). Each has significant local issues. Some are long standing, some transitory but all needing careful consideration and understanding by Local Councillors. Fetcham for example has had a long running and difficult planning issue with buildings in the heart of the village, antisocial behaviour issues again close to the centre and a major development proposal affecting a key natural area called Fetcham Springs. In Bookham different problems occur. The local plan is impacting a

particular area of green belt along with a neighbouring Borough's plan to build over four hundred houses, effectively this is a new merged village on Bookhams boundary.

Bookham too has antisocial behaviour issues again different from Fetcham as well as a major development of a Youth Centre which has been controversial. All these events have taken considerable local Councillor and community engagement. Should the new Eastwick Park ward come into existence then that ward's Councillors would have to be fully aware of both these large conurbations issues which for voluntary, and by definition, part time councillors would not be either effective or convenient.

We would propose an alternative warding arrangement but still within the nine councillors recommended. This would be for two Bookham wards one of 3 Councillors the other of two. In Fetcham this would be for two, two member wards. We are open minded as to whether these wards would bisect East/West, or North/South. The key to our proposal is that it would meet all three of the Boundary Review principles of "ensuring that recommendations reflect Community identity", and "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 settlement that do merge and it is here that changes could be made A map suggesting where these locations are is attached.

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

If the LGBC were minded to ignore the views of the BRA and Fetcham Residents Association (FRA) then we hope LGBC describe the new ward as what it is, i.e. "Bookham North and Fetcham East" ward, not "Eastwick Park" which is meaningless to many.