



Windlesham Parish Council

Ms Sarah Murphy
Review Officer (Surrey)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG



11th February 2011

Dear Ms Murphy,

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF SURREY

Thank you for your letter of 11th January announcing the start of the consultation stage of the review and inviting suggestions for divisional arrangements for the county. We have studied the LGBCE Technical Guidance (April 2010), the News Release of 11th January and Briefing Sheet No.1, and we have considered various alternatives for the Parish of Windlesham.

We note that Surrey County Council currently has 80 elected members, some of whom cover very large geographical areas, particularly in the south of the county. There are also 29 divisions that exceed the county average by more than +/-10%, an imbalance that you intend to reduce or eliminate.

You state that the LGBCE is minded to recommend that the number of county councillors should remain at 80 although the final recommendation may change. We respectfully suggest that this is the wrong approach. We believe it would be better to aim at an optimum pattern of divisions which, once established, would determine the size of the council. We had also hoped that this would produce a reduction in the size of the council with consequential cost savings in administration.

This civil Parish comprises the villages of Bagshot, Lightwater and Windlesham and currently has a total electorate of 13,247.

At present Windlesham Parish Council is well served by two county councillors but we are extremely concerned at the artificial boundary that split the parish between two electoral divisions at the previous review in 1999. The western part of Lightwater was assimilated within the Bisley, Chobham and West End Electoral Division which was contrary to all the stated parameters of the review other than the overriding desire to achieve numerical balance. This area, the Lightwater West Ward, is widely separated from those other villages by a large block of unpopulated heathland, it has no topographical or geographical connection with them, neither is there any obvious affinity between its electors and those in the other communities. This was more than a little confusing for residents, and some those who took the trouble to enquire about the reason for change expressed incredulity and derision at the arbitrary delineation, comparing it to "the judgement of Solomon". The situation is further complicated by our having a three tier system of local government – county, borough and parish. The omission of the village name of Lightwater from the

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enlarged Bisley, Chobham and West End Electoral Division was rather unfortunate but much less important than the attendant disadvantage of Lightwater West being subsumed by another division with which it had no apparent connection. It is our firmly held view that the merits of retaining a distinct boundary far outweigh the need to provide greater numerical consistency.

We appreciate that the LGBCE is faced with a variety of challenging issues in balancing the rules where they conflict but we respectfully urge the Commission to rectify the current absurd situation in which those living on one side of part of Ambleside Road are separated from those on the other, while further down the same road the situation changes yet again. To this end we have carefully considered several options, one of which was to divide the village of Windlesham that has two areas of concentrated population density – the village centre and the Snows Ride estate. However, we have dismissed this alternative because it is as divisive as the current situation in Lightwater and would also entail drawing the boundary along a well-populated road.

As you undoubtedly appreciate, the civil Parish of Windlesham is constricted by the county boundary to the north, unparished urban communities on the west and one single adjoining electoral division, leaving little scope for improvement. However, we have identified another, more cohesive, linkage of the six villages in the Borough of Surrey Heath that fully accords with the LGBCE intention to form county electoral divisions with good electoral equality. Our proposal is to group the villages of Bagshot, Windlesham and Chobham as one electoral division, and Lightwater, West End and Bisley as another. Using current electoral role figures, the two new divisions would be just 6% and 2% respectively above the county average, both well within the preferred +/-10% tolerance. We understand that predicted population growth for the next few years will not significantly affect these ratios.

The combination of Bagshot, Windlesham and Chobham would be a natural coalescence, and so too would Lightwater, West End and Bisley. The divisional boundaries would then be coterminous with existing Borough and Parish Ward boundaries and would better reflect community identity.

Therefore we respectfully urge the LGBCE to be sympathetic to our concerns and re-absorb Lightwater West into the bulk of the village for county elections by the alternative grouping of the six villages as suggested above.

This, we believe, would achieve a more equitable situation and would be in accordance with the need to reflect community identity as well as meeting other criteria in the Technical Guidance.

Yours sincerely,



T. R. S. Price
Clerk to the Council

Copies: County Cllr Stuart MacLeod
County Cllr Mrs Lavinia Sealy
Chief Executive - Surrey Heath Borough Council