

Mansfield, Simon

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 02 December 2021 09:54
To: reviews
Subject: Fwd: Submission to LG Boundaries Commission

Categories: Submissions, Simon

Dear Sirs,

Consultation Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England regarding the Electoral arrangements for the Mole Valley District Council, with specific regard to the current Ward of Headley and Boxhill.

THE COMMUNITY

The Mole Valley District Council Ward currently known as "Headley and Boxhill" is centred upon two contiguous rural villages situated next to each other at the top of a 200 metre hill in mid Surrey, almost equilaterally distanced from the more urban conurbations of Leatherhead, Dorking; Reigate and Banstead; and Epsom/Ewell/Ashted. They are bounded by the National Trust managed Headley Common, the Epsom Downs, and the Pebble Hill / Zig Zag Road escarpment down to the A25.

The twin community shares many services such as a common bus route, shared access roads, common food delivery operations, two village shops, two lively public houses, and one GP surgery. They also share common objectives in the maintenance of conservation, sustainability and green belt status.

The two villages form the ecclesiastical Parish of Headley with Boxhill, with a church in each village overseen by the Diocese of Guildford, with a shared Rector and Curacy, shared ecclesiastical parish council and a shared Service and Congregation Meetings programme.

Each area has its own elected civil Parish/Neighbourhood Council, and elects one single District Councillor every four years, from a voting population of just under 2000 adult residents - a role that has been held sequentially by Conservative and currently Lib Dem councillors. The community is a part of a single Surrey County Council ward, and the Mole Valley Parliamentary Constituency.

THE CHALLENGE

Mole Valley District Council has been considering its response to a Review by the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England, of the geographical and demographic alignment of the electoral Wards in the District.

MVDC has already submitted to the LGBCE a proposal for the Wards to be redesignated to provide for a reduction from the current 41 Council Members to only 39, with a balance of three Councillors for each of 13 Electoral Wards, relating to a target voting population of 5826 adult residents per 3-member ward.

Its challenge is now to identify the boundaries for such realigned Ward identities, whilst recognising the LGBCE Review criteria of

1. Delivering Electoral Equality for local Voters
2. Reflecting the Interests and Identities of Local Communities
3. Providing Effective and Convenient Local Government

The LGBCE has invited local residents and community representatives to submit their views about how this reformulation should be conducted.

THE RESPONSE

In the light of the Council and Commission's challenge, an **INFORMAL GROUP** of experienced and well informed local residents from the combined community of Headley and Boxhill have been discussing options and canvassing opinion, on a range of proposed solutions to the redesignation dilemmas. This paper is a summary of its considerations, from the perspective of its signatories, including past and current Parish and Neighbourhood Council Chairs, the current District and County Councillors, and led by two independent senior residents of the two villages.

DISCARDED OPTIONS

The Group has considered and **negated** several possible outcomes for the redesignation of the local Ward Boundaries of "Headley and Boxhill" and its neighbouring Wards.

A. A proposal to split the current Ward, and reposition Headley and its potential additional 100 or so voters from a new westerly housing development, into the South Leatherhead Ward, in order to add to the voting numbers of that ward up to the MVDC targeted total.

This alternative was strongly discarded as artificially putting together two very different communities, one very urban and the other very rural, with differing service, traffic and planning issues and unrelated community histories. This would fail to meet, and indeed be counter to all of the LGBCE core criteria set out above.

B. A similar proposal to incorporate Headley into the Ashted Ward for numerical purposes.

Again similar arguments exist about a lack of commonality and linkage between the communities, and the fracturing of the current close relationship between Headley and its close neighbour Boxhill.

C. An appeal to exceptionally retain the Single Member Ward arrangement for Headley and Boxhill that currently and historically has very effectively pertained.

The MVDC Report to Cabinet dated 22 November 2021 is noted to state that "it was acknowledged that the criteria of one or two member wards in the rural areas could overcome some of the issues" for this challenging situation. This would in many ways be the most acceptable solution in the eyes of the residents of the two villages, as they are seen to have so much "lived experience" in common with each other, and less with other neighbouring areas.

However, the Group was advised that this outcome was extremely unlikely to be the MVDC and LGBCE final view, as it signally fails to achieve the 13x3 Councillor/ Ward numbers sought by these organisations.

D. An appeal to create two 2-Member Wards locally, under the same MVDC Report acknowledgement as the above proposal.

There could be seen to be some similarity of issues and experience between the Headley and Boxhill community and the nearby Mickleham, and Westhumble communities, as they have both shared access and linkages with the National Trust Trust estate of Boxhill, causing similar issues such as traffic control at Public Holidays, Covid

shutdowns etc, and the cycling pressures resulting from their involvement in the 2012 Olympic Road racing events and the subsequent publicity and challenge for local and national cycle groups.

This could result in a Two 2-member Ward option with Headley and Boxhill linking with Mickleham and Westhumble, having just two Members between them, and Buckland, Betchworth and Brockham also retaining its current two member status.

A slightly different alternative would see Brockham joining with Headley and Boxhill, and Westhumble and Mickleham, to create the voting numbers needed for a three member ward, with Betchworth and Buckland remaining with a two member ward, or joining with others to become a 3-member Ward.- but local opinion might not want to split Brockham from the other two neighbouring villages' configuration.

Therefore despite considerable debate about these options, the Group as a whole determined that these might not be the best re-alignments for Headley and Boxhill's interests or the wider geographical, councillor coverage and community extensions of such alternatives.

FAVOURED OPTION

If the LGBCE review allows for a less than 3 Member Ward configuration, it is the Group's shared view that the interests and re-alignment logic for Headley and Boxhill is a Single Member Ward option.

However, if a three member ward with around 5,500 voter numbers is to remain the target, this would best be best served by :

An amalgamation of the current Headley and Boxhill one-member Ward with the Brockham, Betchworth and Buckland two-member Ward to create a single three-member ward of HB/BBB.

It is understood that this outcome would also be acceptable to the single Councillor currently voted for from Headley and Boxhill, and the Brockham, Buckland and Betchworth Councillors, to realign their roles for re-election by the whole new Ward of ca 5831 voters (very close to the MVDC Target voting population of 5826) with one Councillor being voted for at a time, on a three yearly cycle.

RECOMMENDATION

If the LGBCE requires that the overall configuration of Mole Valley be made up solely of 3-Member wards, then the Informal Group of Residents of Headley and Boxhill strongly recommends to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England that it should find in its Electoral review for the Mole Valley District Council, that the single member Headley and Boxhill Ward be amalgamated with the two member Brockham, Betchworth and Buckland Ward to create a new Ward with three MVDC Council Members.

With Regards from :

Sir Michael Pickard - Independent Co-Chair, Informal Group
William A Donnelly - Independent Co-Chair, Informal Group
Peter Denyer - Past Chair, Headley Parish Council
George Nixon - Past Chair, Headley Parish Council
Martin Williams - Chair, Boxhill Neighbourhood Council
Jeremy Johns - Planning Member, Boxhill Neighbourhood Council

Councillor David Preedy, also Chair of the Headley Parish Council, took part in the formulation of the Group's above submission, which was also used to form the Headley Parish Council's own submission, which reaches similar conclusions.