

From: Councillor Daly <Councillor.Daly@molevalley.gov.uk>
Sent: 07 June 2022 08:59
To: reviews
Subject: Mole Valley Review: managing the Bookham/Fetcham boundary

Categories: Submissions, [REDACTED]

As an alternative to the LGBCE's proposals for Bookham and Fetcham, I resubmit my suggestions below from the previous stage of the review, which unfortunately were not considered by the LGBCE.

As I warned in my earlier submission, the LBGCE's proposals have proved controversial because they move the established boundary between Bookham and Fetcham, contrary to the statutory requirement to reflect community identities and interests. I support the submissions by the BRA and the FRA requesting a version of Option 1 below.

My comments on the LGBCE proposals as they stand are as follows:

- a) a degree of inequality, as proposed, is acceptable to minimise the movement of electors between Fetcham and Bookham;
- b) if the LGBCE is unwilling to change its proposals, the proposed boundary down the Ridgeway (which is further away from Fetcham village centre) is significantly "less bad" than further extension of Bookham wards down Kennel Lane into the heart of Fetcham – but hopefully both can be avoided;
- c) Bell Lane is part of Fetcham, and so it cannot be right to have homes there in a Bookham ward;
- d) homes along the rural part of Cobham Road are part of Fetcham, so again it cannot be right to have homes there in a Bookham ward;
- e) an East-West split for the Bookham wards makes more sense if the Bookham wards are to be extended into Fetcham;
- f) I have no specific objection to the use of the word Eastwick (or Eastwick Park) in the name of the proposed Bookham East ward as it does reflect historical and indeed many existing connections, but I believe that to allay residents' concerns the ward name should start with Bookham in order to underline that this is predominantly a Bookham ward.

Regards

Cllr Elizabeth Daly
Bookham South ward

From: Councillor Daly <Councillor.Daly@molevalley.gov.uk>
Date: Thursday, 13 January 2022 at 16:27
To: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England <reviews@lgbce.org.uk>
Subject: Mole Valley Review: managing the Bookham/Fetcham boundary

Introduction

This is well past the deadline for representations, but I felt it might be helpful to share with LGBCE two options for dealing with the sensitive Bookham/Fetcham boundary in its mapping proposals, which do not appear to have been put forward by other respondents.

The MVDC submission points out that the projected number of electors for the existing Bookham and Fetcham wards can support only nine councillors instead of the current ten; and even then this is 4%

below the average ward size for 39 councillors. MVDC suggested a pattern of three 3-member wards, with one combined ward for Fetcham, and two wards for the Bookhams (divided either North-South as now, or potentially East-West).

However, whatever the internal Bookham split, the Bookham-Fetcham boundary would have to move substantially to the East to reflect the reduction in Fetcham councillors from four to three ie 4/10ths (40%) of the area to 3/9ths (33.3%), with hundreds of Fetcham residents (with KT22 postcodes) forced into one of the Bookham wards. Furthermore, the location of this boundary would be particularly sensitive for the two active residents' associations – the Bookhams' Residents Association (BRA) and the Fetcham Residents Association (FRA). In addition, there is a neighbourhood plan covering the area of the existing Bookham wards but not Fetcham.

The idea of an East-West split of the Bookham wards was put forward to finesse this potential turf war, with the Bookham East ward named neutrally "Eastwick Park", both to reflect the historic origins of the area and to mitigate the inevitable unhappiness for Fetcham residents and the FRA of losing territory to Bookham. However, there are a couple of other options that could avoid this conflict altogether.

Option 1: retain two 2-member wards in Fetcham

Firstly, LGBCE could depart from the pattern of three 3-member wards in order to better reflect the separate community identities of Bookham and Fetcham. The obvious approach here would be to retain two 2-member Fetcham wards (as now), and reduce one of the Bookham wards to 2 members, thus retaining 9 councillors in total.

Fetcham councillors would then represent 4/9ths of the councillors for the area (ie 44.4%) rather than 40% as now, potentially allowing the Fetcham wards to expand slightly to retake some of the Fetcham residents lost to the Bookham wards at the last boundary review - a point of continuing complaint for some residents!

The Bookham ward reduced to 2 members would either be the proposed Bookham East ward (Eastwick Park), or the existing Bookham South ward, which is already well under the average size for a 3-member ward. A 2-member Bookham East ward would have a more satisfactory boundary with both the Bookham West ("The Bookhams") ward, along Church Road and Crabtree Lane, and the two Fetcham wards, broadly reflecting the KT22/KT23 boundary.

If a North-South divide is preferred for the Bookham wards, it is worth noting that there is quite a large gap between the populated areas in Bookham South. Woodlands Road and the neighbouring homes along Guildford Road, Rectory Lane and Manor House Lane (all in the historic village of Little Bookham) are separated from the nearest homes in Groveside/Hawkwood Rise/The Lorne (all in Great Bookham) by a half-mile stretch of Green Belt along the A246, and this is matched by the Recreation Ground along the Lower Road boundary. Indeed Little Bookham residents currently in Bookham South arguably have more in common with their neighbours across the Lower Road in Bookham North, than with the residents in the rest of Bookham South. So it might make sense to transfer these electors into the Bookham North ward ("North and Little Bookham" perhaps?).

Option 2: expand Leatherhead South into Fetcham

Alternatively, LGBCE could transfer some of the voters currently in Fetcham East into an expanded Leatherhead South ward, which would enable the new combined Fetcham ward to retain roughly the existing boundary with the Bookham wards.

This would bring the combined population of the Bookham/Fetcham wards down to support just eight councillors instead of nine. One of the Bookham wards would have to reduce to two councillors as described in Option 1 above. The three councillors in the new Fetcham ward would represent 3/8ths (ie 37.5%) of the combined Bookham/Fetcham area, rather than 40% as now, but the transfer of just enough voters to Leatherhead South would enable the new Fetcham ward to retain roughly the existing Bookham/Fetcham boundary.

I recognise that this in turn creates a further boundary issue between Fetcham and Leatherhead. The first tranche to be transferred would be Elmer Cottages, Sunmead Close, and Guildford Road up to the roundabout with Cobham Road. If this is not enough, the boundary would have to extend up Hawks Hill, and/or along Cobham Road as far as The Mount (where the start of Fetcham Village is officially signposted).

How would these residents feel about being included in a Leatherhead South ward? This would need to be tested in consultation, but it is worth noting that the existing Leatherhead South ward already crosses the River Mole into the Fetcham Grove area up to the railway line, and many Fetcham residents naturally look towards Leatherhead and the River Mole. Homes near the corner of Cobham and Guildford Roads are closer to the commercial centre of Leatherhead, which many can see directly from their homes, than they are to the commercial centre of Fetcham (the junction of The Street and Cobham Road). Leatherhead Football Club, Leatherhead Cricket Club and the Leatherhead Leisure Centre are all based nearby at Fetcham Grove. Leatherhead Fire Station is off the Cobham Road.

The railway bridge over the Guildford Road is itself significant, because Network Rail, which owns the bridge, has allowed it to become infested with pigeons, but has successfully defended a private damages claim. The Council's joint Environmental Health team, having taken legal advice, have concluded that they have no enforcement powers under the Environmental Protection Act because there is no nuisance to neighbouring properties – only to pedestrians! – and therefore there is no statutory nuisance as defined in the Act. Currently the bridge forms the boundary between three wards: Leatherhead North, Leatherhead South and Fetcham East. It might be more convenient if the bridge fell within one ward (Leatherhead South), so could be the focus of one group of councillors.

The existence of the River Mole as a natural boundary, and a suitably neutral name, might also reassure residents and the FRA that they have only been lent to Leatherhead, not permanently transferred as might be the case with a substantial alteration to the Bookham/Fetcham boundary (apart from tidying up).

I cannot predict what the impact of this would be on LGBCE's wider mapping proposals in Leatherhead, but this is the only sensible way that voters can be transferred into or out of the Bookham and Fetcham area in order to produce a sensible warding pattern for Bookham/Fetcham boundary. There is no other convenient road crossing over the River Mole, because the Downs fall away sharply to the South so there is no other scope for transfers to or from the rest of the District.

Conclusion

I hope you find these suggestions helpful. I realise that the legislation requires LGBCE to consider the "desirability" of securing three member wards, but it also requires LGBCE to consider the "need" to reflect community identities and boundaries, as well as the "need" to secure effective and convenient local government. As the relevant Minister made clear when the "desirability" of securing the appropriate number of councillors was introduced into the legislation in Parliament, there is a distinction between "need" and "desirability". If the statutory needs cannot be met, then ultimately we need to be prepared to depart from three-member wards.

Regards

Cllr Elizabeth Daly
Bookham South ward

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