

Surrey

Personal Details:

Name: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]
Postcode: [REDACTED]
Organisation Name: (Member of the public)

Comment text:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing as a long-term resident of Weston Green near Thames Ditton in Surrey to object to the Boundary Commission's proposed changes to The Dittons division of Surrey County Council.

As I understand it, Surrey CC only proposed very minor changes to the divisions in Elmbridge and Elmbridge Borough Council did not see the need for any changes at all, neither did the local Surrey Councillors. Yet we are faced with some dramatic changes proposed by a National political party, supported by the Molesey Residents Association (who I doubt consulted their residents - they certainly did not consult the other local Residents Associations impacted by the changes, one of which - Thames Ditton & Weston Green RA - I am a member.)

Your main considerations are electoral equality, community identity and effective local government, but you appear to have disregarded all three in your proposal to separate Weston Green from Thames Ditton.

First, I believe the existing Dittons division represents a total number of people about 4% away from the Surrey average, yet the new division you are proposing will be 11% below it. I fail to see how moving farther away from the Surrey average improves electoral equality.

Second, our community of Thames Ditton & Weston Green has historically been served by one County Councillor (currently representing our own

RA for The Dittons division). This makes for efficient and effective local government. Your proposals will split our community in half, meaning that we will be represented by two County Councillors going forwards. I suppose it might be argued that this increases our local voice, but in practice it will be the reverse. This community will have to work twice as hard to make its views known and Residents will be confused as to which County Councillor to approach.

Most damaging of all, it risks seriously weakening the voice of independent councillors on Surrey County Council. It is hard enough for a small Residents Association like ours to find people to stand for elections and fund their campaigns, but if we have to find two candidates it will be almost impossible and prohibitively costly. Moreover, our voters will be split between two Divisions, meaning that our support is diluted. Please consider the impact of that for a moment. To my mind it looks like a National political party mischievously manipulating Division borders for their own ends by deliberately weakening the local independent vote in areas where they think they stand a chance against the Conservatives. That is not a step towards more effective local government, it is positively undermining it.

Third, and finally, the community identity of Thames Ditton & Weston Green will be damaged forever. Our twin parishes have been linked since before the Domesday Book was written (Weston Green was described then as a Manor within the parish of Thames Ditton.) We were twinned when local Councils were first formed in 1800s. We survived the building of the Hampton Court Way which sliced through our two villages 90 years ago and led to the creation of our Residents Association. We even managed to survive the carving up of our borough Wards in 2016 which saw Weston Green paired with Hinchley Wood, a neighbouring district with which we have very little in common and no history.

Throughout this time we have stood side-by-side, proudly defending our historic links with Thames Ditton, sharing a Residents Association, organising joint events and regular open meetings, producing a popular quarterly local magazine and considering ourselves part of a genuine community with real identity - something that is increasingly rare in urban boroughs bordering London.

If your proposals go ahead, 1000 years of history will mean nothing. Our community identity will be sacrificed for the convenience of short-term political gain.

I hope the Boundary Commission will take the time to consider these unpopular changes in the light of what I - and I'm sure others - have pointed out. Surrey CC and Elmbridge BC did not propose these changes. The Liberal Democrats did because they stand to gain by the proposal, but democracy and our local community of Thames Ditton and Weston Green stand to lose out immeasurably.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

Sent from my iPad

Attached Documents:

None attached