

# Surrey

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## Comment text:

FAO: The Review Officer

To introduce myself, I'm Jez Langham, Ward Councillor for Elmbridge Borough Council in Long Ditton - representing the Liberal Democrat Party. I will explain exactly what happened to lead me to this note, partly by way of helping you understand, but also because I wish to be as transparent as possible with local residents. I will be posting this on the local resident facebook page, with the aim of encouraging others to send you their thoughts.

I'm writing having discussed the suggested changes with my fellow ward councillors, Neil Houston and Liz Laino and also with the Chair and Secretary of our party, David Steeds and Gill Smith - who submitted the recommendations that have clearly been integrated into the present proposals for the divisions of Surrey County Council. I also have a close working relationship with Nick Darby (Thames Ditton Residents Association), our local Surrey County Councillor and have discussed this with him. Liz, Neil and I also have a close working relationship with Thames Ditton Residents Association EB councillors as we are in coalition with them on Elmbridge Borough Council. We sit on the East Area Planning Sub-committee, for instance. East Molesey, incidentally, is in a separate sub-committee with West Molesey, Hersham & Walton.

The changes to boundary suggestions made by our party Chair and Secretary were driven by the Liberal Democrats' recent experience in campaigning in support of Ashley Tilling, now elected County Councillor for Walton South and Oatlands. His division embraces parts of 5 (five) different wards - making it an administrative nightmare - and with little of the defining characteristics mentioned by the Commission i.e. clear borders, geographic clarity etc..

The work our Chair and Secretary have done is thorough and I support it. However, I was unaware of the split being suggested for our area in The Dittons - Thames Ditton and Long Ditton. This is my fault in not looking through the original document when sent to me - it was the time of the local elections, and I thought it would mean a few tweaks - not anything as major affecting our area as has been suggested - and I would have the period later in the year (now!) to comment if need be. So when I did find out about the suggestion and that this aspect had been accepted recently, I was surprised, disappointed and worried. Surprised because I wouldn't begin to consider splitting The Dittons myself, disappointed because I had missed it and that the recommendation had been accepted in theory - and worried, to be brutally honest, because I knew a furore would be coming! I wrote to our Chair on the subject a fortnight ago and on Wednesday of this week it was agreed that I would approach the Boundary Commission with a suggestion.

Subsequent to my initial fears as to the reaction locally, similar to my own, we have also had a meeting of the Long Ditton Residents Association, where the views about keeping the Dittons together have been made very clear. Everyone in the locality refers to 'The Dittons'; - in Wikipedia the joining of the Dittons is referred to in medieval times, when the manors of Anne Gould in Thames Ditton and Thomas Evelyn from Long Ditton were joined by their marriage. The local Scout group my sons attended is known as The Dittons - the Scout Leader has a song about 'The mighty mighty Dittons'! The local magazine, 'About Thames Ditton' is distributed throughout both Thames Ditton and Long Ditton, equally. Around 3000 houses on each side of the Portsmouth Road. I could go on. It is as united an area within Elmbridge as I think you could have - given the disparate nature of the various towns, villages and communities that make it up.

In fact the close neighbouring aspect of many Elmbridge communities, combined with major arterial roads in defining different geographic areas, leads to many of the difficulties in creating divisions - as previous nodal geographic areas and villages have been split. For example, Hinchley Wood is divided by the A309, between Manor Road North, running to Sugden Road in Long Ditton and Manor Road South, running into Oaken Lane. I would argue that the A309 is a much more dividing presence than that of the Portsmouth Road for instance. Just as major a divide is created by the Hampton Court Way, running through Weston Green.

So, whilst I support wholeheartedly the fantastic work done by our Chair and Secretary in aligning wards with Divisions as much as possible in Elmbridge overall, I cannot agree with the resulting split of The Dittons. In planning we are guided by the balance between benefit and harm - and I would firmly suggest that the harm of splitting The Dittons as an administrative area for Surrey County Council is far greater than the benefit of combining Thames Ditton with East Molesey and Long Ditton with Hinchley Wood.

So what do I suggest instead? I don't know about numbers in terms of equal electoral areas, but I can suggest a natural geographic area, defined as suggested by major dividing features.

Taking in my point above about major roads (also a key factor mentioned by the boundary commission) it would seem to me that there is a very clear geographic place defined by the A309 Kingston By-Pass, all the way around to Hampton Court Way, joined by the Scilly Isles Roundabout as its hub. It has Long Ditton and Thames Ditton at its centre, then adds the majority of Hinchley Wood. If you follow the triangle down to the Scilly

Isles roundabout, it would also include the Montgomery Avenue estate.

I would therefore take the rest of Hinchley Wood along Manor Road South and add that to Claygate, given the link to Oaken Lane. I would also take the rest of Weston Green, along Ember Lane down to Lower Green and add that area to East Molesey, linked as they are by Ember Lane going in to Bridge Road. That would seem much more natural than linking the whole of Thames Ditton to East Molesey, which is divided by Hampton Court Way and the river bridge by Hampton Court station.

Clearly there may be knock on effects in terms of numbers, but I would have thought if East Molesey should be twinned with a greater part of any other ward, it should be West Molesey? This would seem to make a lot more sense - both geographically and from a name point of view than the current arrangement with Esher. If that means a section of West Molesey is added to Hersham, that would also seem to make more sense?

Overall, I would like to thank our Chair and Secretary for the work they have done in making the wards and divisions aligned so much better throughout the Borough, but would ask, if we can, to retain The Dittons as it has been for centuries. I recognise this has knock on effects to the surrounding area, but believe that little can be done about the role played by our main roads in splitting previously recognised villages - and in fact it makes more sense to accept the role they play in defining areas, rather than trying to integrate them within divisions.

Many thanks, Jez Langham

On behalf of myself, Liz Laino and Neil Houston  
Elmbridge Borough Councillors for Long Ditton

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## **Attached Documents:**

*None attached*