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From: Councillor Harper <Councillor.Harper@molevalley.gov.uk>
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To: reviews
Subject: Mole Valley Review
Attachments: Boundary Commission response.docx
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Dear Commissioners, please find attached input.

Councillor David Harper
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Mole Valley District Council
[REDACTED]

(he/him)

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**Ashtead
Independents**



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3rd June 2022

Dear Commissioners,

A statutory criterion is to provide equal electoral representation in terms of voters per Councillor (v/C). In the process so far, weight has been given to the 'desirability' of 3 member wards which has caused the objective of the statutory criteria to get worse rather than better under this review.

As I understand it, the number of voters per Councillor (v/C) is a statutory criterion which takes priority over the desirability of 3 member wards.

Today with 7 Councillors, Ashtead is -7% below the average v/C with 7 Councillors and 42 Members.

Moving forward with 39 Members total and proposed 6 for Ashtead

- For 2023 for current population is +9%
- For 2027 for future population is +9%

Planning to fail in this statutory criterion is surely wrong?

The number of Councillors at Mole Valley is moving downwards from 42 to 39 and one of the reductions is in Ashtead. This is also incomprehensible to residents given that the population of Ashtead has increased markedly since the last review and almost every resident has had a small development within their vicinity. From the chalk pit to Parsons Mead, every resident sees development on the ground and yet the number of Councillors representing them is proposed reducing. The Mole Valley Local Plan directs development to the North of the District. Having directed it there for 20 years, how can it now work out that the Ashtead is one of only 2 areas to have its representation made worse?

Cllr Harper is a member of Ashtead Independents, [REDACTED]

Reg. No. RPP 3587845

This plan is not going to be supported by residents. Rather than increasing engagement it's going to be seen as some concocted plan to reduce Ashtead's representation.

Compare this to Leatherhead which has 6 Councillors now and is minus 14% below the average.

Although there is significant development projected in Leatherhead, and especially Bull Hill, there has to be some doubt that this can be delivered by 2027- which is only 4 years from 2023. Even if that development is delivered on time by 2027, most of the period will not have those residents voting- and Leatherhead ends at -7%. Any small slip in any one building and the -7% won't be met. Surely the boundary commission must have some references for how long build-out takes?

This illustrates that for most of the period 2023 to 2027 Ashtead will be under represented and Leatherhead will be over represented.

The Council will enter a period from 2023 when

- In Ashtead with 6 there are 1912 v/C (even with 7 it's 1639 v/C)
- In Leatherhead with 6 there are 1508 v/C
- A difference of 406 with 6 – and still Ashtead is higher v/C if it retains 7!

It is not right to have a review that makes a disparity worse rather than better.

The projections for 2027 have some weight, but they are a forecast, and will be out of date the day after they are set. Just because its local government doesn't make the forecast a fact.

The increase in voters in Leatherhead is dependent on a developer moving as planned- which is never going to be true. They are very likely to agree to a requested schedule which schedule is for the Inspector of the Local Plan, but in the end the build rate will move slower for commercial reasons. Mainly to ensure prices don't drop bringing forward a huge number of properties at the same time. Churchill Homes in Ashtead on A24 starting selling new apartments in 2016 – 6 years ago. They still haven't sold them all. That was from after construction was finished. 6 years to sell around 30 voter spaces. 2027 is only 4 years after the review is implemented and it's proposed there will be 1788 more voters by then (1806 minus 1508 times 6).

1788 increase in new voters is the proposal in Leatherhead from 2023 to 2027. You can imagine Developers will perhaps aim to sell to 200 voters a year (which takes 9 years) and this is after appeals and judicial reviews, then water, electric, gas and services are delivered and connected and the buildings constructed. Just the mundane task of getting a meter connected to a new home is currently taking 10-12 weeks. 1788 is 19% increase in voters. In my opinion, the 2027 figure is just a paper figure and is extremely unlikely to occur due to the commercial impact of such rapid growth on property selling prices. Ask any estate agent in Leatherhead! It's understood the draft Local Plan has these figures in, but that is just a plan. What is delivered is never the same.

The increase in voters in Ashtead is 12697 minus 11472 times 6 equals 1225 which is 10% increase in voters.

Ashtead has more voters than Leatherhead to start with and a far higher historical natural build rate due to it being characterised with large back gardens that are constantly being infilled. For evidence of this see the Mole Valley CIL accrued or see historical build rates. By comparison, Leatherheads significant growth in voter numbers largely depends on large build out at Bull Hill and Swan. It is quite feasible that Ashtead actually grows the number of voters faster in practice because the number of new homes is a lower percentage of the total in Ashtead. Furthermore, any delays in Ashtead's strategic green field development is only a percentage of the natural build rate. The ability for Ashtead to absorb higher build rates is higher than Leatherhead because the impact on house selling prices will be less.

It is essential the boundary commission add appropriate risk factors to build-out rates which will surely impact the decision on electoral fairness.

It's fairer now for Ashtead to retain 7, and with suitable risk factors, still looks more fair for 2027.

In this scenario, if the build in Leatherhead takes 3 years to bring the first homes forward, then there might a range of 300-500 voters added by 2027 (150 to 250 voters per year).

300 added and 6 Leatherhead Councillors makes 1558 v/C.

500 added and 6 Leatherhead Councillors makes 1591 v/C.

Both these figures are still below Ashtead's current v/C with 7 Councillors (which is 1639 v/C) and no construction.

300 added and 5 Leatherhead Councillors makes 1869 v/C.

500 added and 5 Leatherhead Councillors makes 1909 v/C.

When Ashtead is 7 Councillors, and the delivery estimated is faster relative to Leatherhead because it's on a larger existing installed base figure then 350 to 550 might be the range.

350 added and 7 Ashtead Councillors makes 1688 (vs 1558 in Leatherhead)

500 added and 7 Ashtead Councillors makes 1717 (vs 1591 in Leatherhead).

Or the gap between v/C representation under this model

Ward/Councillors	300 or 350	500 or 550	300 and zero	500 and zero	
Ashtead/ 6	1970	2003	1912	1912	
Leatherhead/ 6	1558	1591	1558	1591	
Difference in v/C	412	412	354	321	Less fair
Ashtead/ 7	1668	1717	1639	1639	
Leatherhead/ 5	1869	1909	1869	1909	
Difference in v/C	201	192	230	270	More fair

It's fairer to do 7 in Ashtead and 5 in Leatherhead.

Cllr Harper is a member of Ashtead Independents,

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Even in the case where Ashtead built none and Leatherhead delivered 500!

Coming to whether or not it's feasible to merge wards across Ashtead and Leatherhead. The boundaries of the of Ashtead and Leatherhead are highly fixed due to both being encircled by Green Belt on all sides and especially between, where the Green Belt prevents merging in order to retain each settlement's unique identity. Sharing wards or splitting wards across the divide to achieve 3 Councillors per ward is therefore highly implausible.

Furthermore, Ashtead/Leatherhead, not only has Green Belt preventing merging, but also a motorway counting 12 lanes in places.

My proposal therefore to meet the statutory criterion would be to make Ashtead North a 4 member ward with some boundary changes perhaps within Ashtead to share the voters evenly across Ashtead.

An alternative would be to return to the existing 2, 3, 2 member wards, but this means some residents won't vote every year.

And adjust Leatherhead in a balancing manner to create a 5 member ward. Both these adjustments would ensure all voters can vote every year which I believe is the desirable objective.

This keeps 39 Members total.

Thank you for considering.

David Harper
Councillor Ashtead Park Ward.
Ashtead Independent Councillor.