

Surrey

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Comment text:

Related subject: Woking

The Commission's view that a good level of coterminosity with Woking Borough Council wards in Woking is "impossible" overstates the case and minimises the opportunity for improvement. The Conservative Party submitted proposals to the Commission that vastly increased both coterminosity and voter equity.

I am unclear as to why the Commission has chosen to set those aside in favour of Surrey County Council proposals that do neither.

Under Conservative proposals, seven out of the ten Borough Council wards - up from just two currently - would have become coterminous within County Council divisions. The three that remained split are already so.

Reading the report, some of the Commission's stated views on Woking's local geography and ward boundaries are confusing. It was puzzling for example to read of the Commission's concerns in 141 about the geographically large area Conservatives proposed for South West Woking ("stretching from Brookwood to Sutton Green, and including electors from the Barnsbury area and as far north as Salisbury Road)". This is precisely the same boundary the Commission agreed in 2015 when creating the Heathlands Borough Council ward. This is inconsistent and should be reconsidered in its proper context.

In 139, the Commission states that it does not agree with the swap of the K1 polling district into Knaphill in return for Goldsworth West being reunited with the rest of Goldsworth Park. It says that it wishes Goldsworth Park "to be retained as a strong boundary". It reads like the Commission believes that Goldsworth Park is a green space ie public park but it is actually a very large housing development set out in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Conservative proposal creates precisely that "strong boundary" around Goldsworth Park by reuniting the whole of Goldsworth Park (ie Goldsworth East and West) within a single division - not a "Goldsworth East division" as stated in the Commission's response. I am unclear as to

the objection here and not sure the local geography has been understood properly in the context of Conservative proposals.

In 140 the Commission notes the move of Percheron Drive in Knaphill as a boost to coterminosity, which it is. But by choosing this option, the Commission has reunited Knaphill at the cost of doing the same to both Goldsworth Park and Heathlands wards. The move of Percheron Drive also contributes to a Knaphill division that is 6% oversized compared to 3.3% in Conservative proposals.

In 141, I have already touched on the inconsistency of this decision with those previously made by the Commission. The relevance of the support of Cllr Forster for items overwhelmingly not in his division of Woking South (the divisional member for Woking South West is Cllr Azad) is also unclear.

Reading the report ("The Conservatives proposed using St John's Lye as a boundary – we observed this area on our tour of Surrey, and felt that this small stream does not represent a strong or particularly clear boundary") the Commission seems under the impression that St John's Lye is a stream - it is not.

I cannot be sure what was observed, but the Conservative proposals have as their boundary the Basingstoke Canal, which is certainly not a "small stream" as it runs the length of Woking Borough and has been a fixture of the area's geography since the 1700s. Conservative proposals deliver a Woking South West division that contains the whole of Heathlands Borough Council ward and sit within 4% of voter equity; they fit better with Commission criteria than the proposed scheme.

Additionally in Woking South West, the division member has given very detailed reasons why the transfer of Winnington Way and roads off from Goldsworth East into St John's is inappropriate both historically and from the point of breaching the natural boundary of the St John's Road, one of the oldest highways in the area. I would ask that these be heeded; to reduce a division already undersized in order to increase another already undersized cannot be said in any real sense to improve voter equity.

In 143, the Commission notes the difficulty in placing the Princess Road area of Maybury into the South East division containing the rest of the Pyrford Borough Council ward. It states that doing so would make Woking North 21% undersized without any other changes.

The Conservative submission not only reunites Canalside in one division and places J1 into the Woking South East division, it does so with both wards within less than 2% of voter equity. I would ask that the Commission reconsiders these proposals.

The conclusion of the Commission in 144 is welcomed as a clear solution to the problem of the size of the current South West Woking ward.

In conclusion, it is felt that the Conservative proposals for Woking have been dismissed too quickly, with many of the reasons for dismissal either contradicting previous Commission boundary decisions or based upon some flawed assumptions about the local area.

Conservative proposals greatly improve coterminosity and voter distribution with three of the seven divisions within 2% of equity and another three within 4%. The Commission's proposals leave four divisions more than 5% adrift from equity - a far less satisfactory conclusion in that respect.

It is difficult to reconcile the Commission's stated aims of coterminosity/effective government, voter equity and community cohesion with its adoption of Surrey County Council proposals that are less compliant with them than other submissions. I would ask that, in Woking, these submissions be examined further.

Attached Documents:

None attached