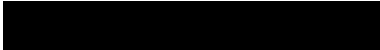





12th October 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Draft Recommendations - New electoral arrangements for Surrey County Council



. My husband and I have lived here for 40 years and I know the area and its residents extremely well.

Weston Green (WG) and Thames Ditton (TD) have historically been linked for centuries resulting in a strong historical identity. The two areas became the same division in 1895 when the Esher and District Urban District Council was set up and remains so to this day. The Manor of Weston Green was mentioned in the Domesday Book as being a part of Thames Ditton.

There exists a thriving Residents' Association - set up nearly 90 years ago and believed to be one of the oldest in the country. It has a website, and volunteers deliver a quarterly magazine to every household to help keep everyone abreast of local information and various community events. A Climate Change Festival had its inaugural year in 2022, followed by an extremely successful second festival this September. During these, various events were held at the TD Community Centre, local library, and the Vera Fletcher Hall (TD). Events such as these foster a strong sense of community and bring residents together.

This is a very close-knit community. Residents who are church-goers attend All Saints Church in Weston Green, St Nicholas in Thames Ditton or Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Weston Green. These churches provide facilities for several local groups (ballet; keep fit; baby and toddler groups etc.) and also a base for Guides, Brownies and Scouts drawing youngsters from both communities. The Thames Ditton Library serves both communities – likewise our local schools. The number of children who walk or cycle (evident by the hundreds of bike racks!) is to be celebrated and applauded.

Various community groups exist and volunteers come from, and serve, both communities - thus fostering further cohesion. The community is strong and cohesive, and the community spirit is palpable.

The number of clubs in the area is impressive – they serve both TD and WG, and include the Thames Ditton Tennis Club, Ember Sports Club, Thames Ditton Cricket Club, The Old Cranleighans Sporting Club, Colets Health and Fitness, Dittons Skiff and Punting Club, Foley Boxing Club, and the Old Pauline Football Club.

With this in mind, I was astounded to learn that Surrey County Council were proposing to split the two communities. This flies in the face of the Boundary Commission's own criteria which states that boundaries should:

- 1. Ensure that recommendations reflect community identity;*
- 2. Improve electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents; and*
- 3. Provide arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.*

The existing division actually gives more electoral equality than the proposals. The Dittons Division is currently 4% off the ideal Surrey average. The proposals would result in the division being 11% below average. This does not improve the electoral equality.

Furthermore, the proposals would mean that the proposed Division would have TWO County Councillors serving ONE community. This would not support effective and convenient local government and would be extremely confusing for residents.

The current division boundary is clear and easily identifiable. It is familiar to the residents and, most importantly, it works. Why change it? Surrey County Council did not initially propose any change to the existing arrangements.

Point 45 of your proposals states that the Liberal Democrats and West Molesey Residents' Association suggested changes to the SCC proposals. Respectfully, these people obviously have scant (if any) knowledge of the long-standing established link between the Thames Ditton and Weston Green communities and the important links that exist between Thames Ditton and Long Ditton.

I very much regret that the word 'gerrymandering' comes to mind.

I have a press cutting on file regarding proposals by SCC to alter the WG boundaries some years ago – its headline reads "U-Turn over plans to split Weston Green". I am hopeful that, given the information supplied in my submission (and similar comments from others in this community) I shall see a similar headline in the local news later this year.

In summary, the proposed change to the Dittons Division would serve no useful purpose, would cause a great deal of confusion, and would not fulfil the Boundary Commission's own criteria. I urge you therefore to reconsider the recommendations and remain with the status quo.

Yours faithfully,

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