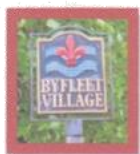


Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Residents' Association

c/o Byfleet Village Hall, 54 High Road, Byfleet, KT14 7QL



Date: 29 March 2014

The Review Officer (Woking)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE),
Layden House,
76-86 Turnmill Street,
London,
EC1M 5LG

Woking Borough Council - Consultation on Warding Arrangements

Dear sir/madam,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Byfleet, West Byfleet & Pyrford Residents' Association. We are an active community organisation that represents the interests of all those who live and work in these three villages. Our association has been in existence for over 80 years and currently has 2500+ members drawn from both residents and local businesses.

Each of our villages has a strong and distinct historical character, with a growing sense of community spirit most recently demonstrated by the formation of individual Neighbourhood Forums. The Residents' Association has actively encouraged this initiative and believes that it will further strengthen the voice of local people in this area of Woking Borough.

Currently, the villages enjoy the practical benefits of each having their own ward – an arrangement that closely reflects the 'natural extent' of each village. This ensures that our elected councillors each have a clear village focus and can better serve the interests of voters in these wards. Our new neighbourhood forum areas have largely adopted the same boundaries as they too believe that this also provides the best definition of community interests and identity.

We believe that wherever possible a close alignment of neighbourhood and ward areas will make for more efficient working between our three communities, councillors and local businesses. As such we would hope that any adjustments to ward boundaries are kept to a minimum so that we can preserve these relationships into the future.

We fully recognise the importance of having a reasonable balance of electors per councillor but we do not believe that this should be at the expense of community interests. Your own guidelines provide for electorate variations across wards and we believe that this will be an important factor when considering this eastern area of the borough.

We understand that the decision has already been taken to reduce the number of councillors in Woking Borough Council (WBC) from 36 to 30. This is a significant change and is likely to have a substantial effect on the governance of the borough. It would therefore seem important to minimise the resulting ward boundary changes and avoid any fragmentation of existing communities - if at all possible.

A number of our members provided feedback to the consultation exercise undertaken by WBC over the last few months. This has highlighted the strength of feeling that local residents have on this issue.

WBC have done a very efficient job in redrawing the ward boundaries to minimise the variance in voting numbers across the borough, however their proposal to the LGBCE seems more concerned with equalising the vote between wards rather than avoiding disruption to existing communities. We believe that if ward variances had been relaxed more in their thinking, in line with your own guidelines, then greater flexibility would have been possible when deciding on any changes to Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford wards.

The final WBC recommendations have a particularly harmful effect on West Byfleet, which is officially designated by WBC as the only "District Centre" in Woking. Effectively the West Byfleet centre and its surrounding community identity no longer forms the nucleus of a ward area. We believe that this will have a detrimental effect on the long term governance of West Byfleet and its relationship with our other two villages, Byfleet and Pyrford. Under the WBC proposals, West Byfleet centre would be represented by councillors from the completely different and separate community in Byfleet (they are physically separated by the Wey Navigation and the M25!). Many current West Byfleet residents would have no influence even though they are the regular users of the centre while Byfleet residents have their own centre over a mile away with its own shops, restaurants, schools, churches, library, village hall, park, sports fields and railway station.

So in summary, we recognise that ward reviews and adjustments are necessary from time to time, but that our three distinct communities covered by the existing ward pattern should be preserved to the greatest extent possible. Any changes should ensure that whole communities are kept together and not split as is the case with the proposals submitted by WBC.

We trust that our views will be taken into consideration and look forward to participating in the LGBCE public consultation exercise planned for the summer. Should you require clarification on any of the points made above then please do get in contact.

Yours Sincerely,



Godfrey Chapples
Chairman