

Boundary review submission

Runnymede Borough Council acknowledges the work undertaken by the Boundary Commission (the Commission) in formulating the first set of draft proposals.

In relation to the Runnymede area the proposal is for a new constituency called Weybridge and Chertsey. This will incorporate existing wards within the Runnymede Borough Council local authority area. It is proposed that Egham Town and Egham Hythe wards will be added to the proposed Windsor Constituency which falls within the local authority area administered by Windsor and Maidenhead Royal Borough Council.

In addition to the Runnymede Borough Council wards for the proposed Weybridge and Chertsey Constituency it is proposed that the Cobham and Downside, Oatlands and Burwood Park, Weybridge Riverside and Weybridge St George's Hill wards from Elmbridge Borough Council local authority area will be included.

Runnymede Borough Council disagrees with the conclusion which has been reached.

Runnymede Borough Council was formed in 1974 under the Local Government Act 1972 by the merger of the Chertsey and Egham Urban Districts, both of which had been created in 1894. The existing Runnymede and Weybridge constituency was created in 1997 from parts of the former constituencies of Chertsey and Walton and North West Surrey.

During the course of its existence the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency has created a strong community identity with each area recognised by its electorate. Across Runnymede the electorate identify with a specific local authority which serves its diverse social and economic needs. Likewise, other organisations e.g. health sector, which serve the electorate are in the main structured to reflect the existing boundaries of the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency.

The current proposal would have a detrimental impact on the community identity which has been created since 1974 and was built upon when the existing constituency was created in 1997. Whilst the wards of Egham Town and Egham Hythe may physically border Windsor the electorate of those wards look towards Surrey as their county seat and associate themselves with Surrey and Runnymede rather than Berkshire. A range of services that the electorate benefit from are delivered by Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council.

Local identity and community also links closely the wards within Egham and those of Englefield Green. The Royal Holloway (RHUL) estate straddles Englefield Green East ward and Egham Town ward, as does its associated student housing, which is situated throughout all the local wards. The areas are socially, economically and infrastructurally connected, and issues affecting the university affect many residents in both areas therefore removing the link to a single constituency and parliamentary representative would add confusion and complexity as well as dividing this natural community.

The community is also served by Surrey Police and the local Runnymede force. The Police and Crime Commissioner that oversees the work of the local constabulary that look after the electorate is the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner. In every way the Egham wards identify with the Runnymede and Surrey communities, and not Windsor or Berkshire as proposed.

As the Commission acknowledges, in the criteria it uses to formulate proposals, community identity and ties are important factors which should be taken into account in drafting proposals. The justification put forward for the current proposal fails to articulate in any coherent fashion why existing community identify and ties should be severed. Whilst appreciating the problems faced, due to the electorate size in Berkshire, it would appear that a very simplistic approach has been taken to resolve that issue which will have a negative impact on a sizable number of the electorates who reside in the current Runnymede and Weybridge constituency.

It is the view of Runnymede Borough Council that an alternative proposal could be formulated which not only addresses the problems faced by Berkshire but at the same time ensures that the electorate of Runnymede and Weybridge constituency are not negatively impacted.

Runnymede Borough Council would invite the Commission to consider the creation of a constituency which is coterminous with the Runnymede Borough Council local authority area. It is the belief of Runnymede Borough Council that such an approach would be a correct application of the criteria that the Commission has indicated should influence its formulation of proposals. Such a proposal would ensure the continuation of the existing community identify and ties.

The Runnymede and Weybridge constituency, through its historic connections, is at the heart of parliamentary democracy and its residents are proud of their history and community identity. Given the establishment of Members of Parliament was a stage in the evolution of democracy, which took place following the sealing of the Magna Carta within the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency in 1215, it is important that any proposals dealing with such matters reflect the desires and wishes of the electorate who will be affected by them.

Name of the proposed constituency

In its proposals in respect of the naming of any new constituency the Commission states that as the water-meadow of Runnymede lies within the Egham wards, which it proposes to include in the Windsor constituency, the name 'Runnymede and Weybridge' is no longer appropriate; therefore, it proposes a new name of the Weybridge and Chertsey constituency with broadly similar boundaries.

Runnymede Borough Council would propose that any new name for a constituency which incorporates the totality or majority of the Runnymede Borough Council local authority area should retain the name Runnymede as part of its description.

The rationale behind this response is as follows.

As mentioned above the local authority area of Runnymede Borough Council came into existence in 1974. The selection of the name Runnymede was designed to create a new community spirit and succeeded, with residents across the borough proud of the history and heritage that the name reflects.

It is the view of Runnymede Borough Council that the proposed name seeks to emphasise merely one settlement within the Runnymede area and would not be felt to represent the majority of residents in the area. There are a number of settlements within the existing Runnymede and Weybridge constituency, of which Chertsey is merely one. Due to demographic and economic factors it would not be possible to point to one of those settlements as preeminent. Each settlement has certain features which make it unique. As outline above, the name Runnymede is recognised by the whole community as identifying

the area they live in. As the Commission will note from the material above the name Runnymede was adopted into the constituency name in 1997 because it reflected the fact that the whole of the Runnymede Borough Council local authority area fell within the constituency area.

The Commission state that in selecting names for constituencies regard should be had to reflecting local community identities. The proposal put forward by the Commission appears inconsistent with that principle.

Given that the current proposal for a new constituency, which Runnymede Borough Council objects to, would incorporate the vast majority of the Runnymede Borough Council local authority area, it is our strong belief this name should continue to form part of any new constituency, to maintain consistency and as the most representative of the area.

Consultation process

On a final point, Runnymede Council notes that the Boundary Commission guidance that submissions should present alternative solutions where they do not agree with the proposals put forward. Members of Runnymede Borough Council believe this would be possible had the consultation period allowed enough time to do so. However, bearing in mind consultees do not have access to the modelling and technology of the Boundary Commission, we do not feel an 8 weeks consultation provides sufficient time to read and review the proposals, model alternative solutions, prepare and publish a response. We would urge the Boundary Commission to ensure any future consultations run for a minimum of 12 weeks to allow for more meaningful engagement.