

ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2018
PROPOSED HERSHAM COMMUNITY COUNCIL

SUBMISSION BY THE HERSHAM COMMUNITY COUNCIL STEERING GROUP

We enclose a summary of our views on the value of a community council to Hersham

OUR VISION OF WHAT THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL WILL DO FOR HERSHAM

The Hersham Community Council Steering Group is a body which was established to ascertain whether the residents wish to have an organization which will have authority to direct financial resources where they best benefit this community

The COMMUNITY COUNCIL once established would:

- set up a website for Hersham to act as a forum for sharing village and HCC initiatives and enable the residents to propose other initiatives. It would be a platform for publicising all local activities, clubs and businesses and could act as a conduit to other established associations – enabling the community to act with one voice – and to help strengthen the relationship between the community and its elected councillors
- investigate the possibility of publishing a free newspaper in conjunction with the website – to enable the inclusion of those residents without access to the internet
- help increase community participation by supporting a local business forum, arts and culture exhibitions and initiatives
- support the Day Centre, Village Hall and Youth Club
- use its funding resources to improve the quality of local clubs and associations by help in paying for new / replacing old equipment where needed where self-funding is not possible.
- be able to provide seed-funding for new initiatives being set up in Hersham, especially for the young and disabled
- by encouraging active use of the community facilities, help to assist in the viability and success of local businesses as well as improving those community facilities themselves
- have the power to respond and engage with to planning applications to preserve the character of Hersham while being supportive of developments which are sympathetically created. Care would be taken to ensure that the involvement of the HCC would not hold up the planning process.
- Supporting such initiatives as the Food Bank and School uniform recycling initiatives.

PROPOSED BOUNDARY for the Community Council area of responsibility:

- The proposed boundary uses the River Mole, the railway line, Seven Hills Road and A3 as the limits. It therefore includes Longmore Estate, Whiteley Village, Burwood Park and Painshill Park.
- The proposed boundary makes sense because it is also the one used by: the current Parliamentary Elections for Esher and Walton (eastern boundary); the previous Elmbridge Borough Council Hersham North and South wards; much of the Church of England Parish boundary and the Surrey County Council Hersham Division (except part of Netherby Park)

- We acknowledge that there will always be different opinions as to where the boundary should be, especially from those who live close to the perimeter.
- We hope that all those within the boundary would want to be associated with Hersham, and as such be included within the HCC boundary. However, we acknowledge that there will always be different opinions especially close to the boundaries and are happy to negotiate alterations and adjustments, particularly in the southern part, where the A3 has sectioned off a part of the old parish.
- Whiteley Village is strongly in favour of being part of Hersham and we would anticipate that it be included.

ECONOMICS

Our understanding of the financing of the community council:

- The steering committee anticipates that a precept be levied similar to that of Claygate
- Increases in the levy once it has been determined at the outset are not anticipated (as has been the case in Claygate)
- At band D, we understand the precept will be approximately £2 per household per month.
- All the money will be spent within Hersham only.
- The total levy received will be significant and impactful to the quality of community life in Hersham and will enable the provision of services in addition to those provided by Elmbridge Borough Council and/or Surrey County Council

RELATIONSHIP WITH ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

A positive relationship with Elmbridge Borough Council will be fundamental to the success of the community council.

- Elmbridge Borough Council would be strongly supported, and a strong rapport is envisaged
- The need for Elmbridge Borough Council to be neutral at this stage is understood to ensure that the proposals come from a grass roots level and are not felt to be imposed by other layers of administration.
- It is not envisaged that Hersham Community Council would take any roles from Elmbridge Borough Council unless requested by it and fully funded.
- There is no expectation that the Hersham Community Council will be in competition with Elmbridge Borough Council in any way but will be there to help foster community growth and self sufficiency
- Hersham Village itself is a special place, centred around a green with churches, a doctor's surgery, schools, shops and a library all in close proximity. There are few places like this in Elmbridge and this is something which should be treasured
- Hersham is a large community and the residents are proud to live here and really care about their village
- The Village Hall is central to all of this and is the heartbeat of Hersham and community life. Both the Village Hall and Day Centre are positive for local businesses as they increase visitors and footfall – both young and old - to the commercial centre of Hersham
- The exceptionally strong turnout at the My Elmbridge meeting in Hersham on October 1st clearly showed that many residents do not feel that they currently have a voice.

- It is clear that many Hersham residents currently feel they are under-represented at Borough level. This is not a reflection of lack of care from its councillors, but an inevitable result of the current ward boundaries.
- Hersham Community Council will help all residents have a voice and to channel that voice in an efficient way to the Borough Council and in that way help to bridge the gap between the higher levels of administration and the local level
- Hersham Community Council would be able to support funding for youth events and community gatherings, fostering a stronger community spirit, and thus the well-being of the community and its residents
- Hersham Community Council can provide a useful forum for local businesses; a locally produced newspaper (online plus some print) would assist them

RELATIONSHIP WITH ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCILLORS

It is the belief of the steering group that a non-partisan community council, staffed primarily by volunteers, will be able to represent all the residents of Hersham, whether or not they have political interests.

- Approximately 1000 signatories were obtained for the petition, and even though not all of these were accepted under the electoral register criteria, the petition was easily able to reach the legally required 7.5%. This is a similar number to that achieved by successful candidates in borough elections, and this was without any financial backing, being funded from donations by the members of steering group only
- The Hersham Community Council would want to have and would strive towards a good working relationship with Elmbridge Borough councillors, providing feedback on Hersham issues
- The aim is to represent everyone, including those who are unable to vote for whatever reason but who live within the boundary, listening especially to those who feel unsettled by political stand points and who want only to concentrate on the environment where they live
- The community council will aim to give a high profile to the centre of the village, its clubs and its businesses
- The belief is that Hersham residents will prefer to take decisions with long term payback
- Many residents – evidenced by the high turn-out for the My Elmbridge meeting - do not currently feel that they have a voice in many decisions being made in their name, but in collaboration with local borough councillors, this situation can be improved

EXAMPLE: DAY CENTRE AND VILLAGE HALL

The Steering Group has not been set up to be a campaigning body but it does have concerns about the closure of the village hall and the rumours of redevelopment. A future HCC would provide a great forum for discussing issues such as the Village Hall and developing local policies with the support and engagement of Hersham residents.

This approach could have taken much of the heat out of the MyElmbridge meeting on 1st October, allowing other topics to be discussed.

As an example of this, it is felt that the existence of HCC would have helped to mitigate these points raised at the MyElmbridge meeting:

- As mentioned above, the My Elmbridge meeting clearly showed that many Hersham residents do not feel that they are being heard or consulted about the closure of the Village Hall
- It was felt that a feasibility study could have been initiated soon after the closure of the Village Hall – over 16 months have elapsed and this has still not been started
- The decision-making process surrounding this issue has been opaque and slow
- A refurbishment costing for both the Day Centre and the Village Hall should always have been included
- As highlighted earlier both the Village Hall and Day Centre are positive for local businesses as they increase visitors and footfall of all ages to the commercial centre of Hersham
- Another concern is that any redevelopment could mean that Hersham would be without a Village Hall AND Day Centre facilities for elderly for many years which residents felt was unacceptable.