

Independent Roding Ward  
District and Town Councillor Stephen Murray

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## REVIEW OFFICER (EPPING FOREST)

### PROPOSED NEW WARD OF BUCKHURST HILL EAST and WHITEBRIDGE

I write to make a submission as regards your draft proposals and in particular voice very strong concerns as regards your proposals for the former Loughton Roding Ward which I have had the privilege of continuously representing for 26 years since 1996.

In my opinion it is very important that district ward boundaries align with an area that has a strong community of interest and in my opinion, this is clearly not the case for the proposed new ward of Buckhurst Hill East and Whitebridge.

Your argument for this community of interest existing, as outlined in paragraph 39, page 9 of your report is in my opinion **extremely weak**.

It is **simply inaccurate** to say that there is continuous housing across the boundary (see points 1 and 3 below). Your assertion of a community of interest around the Loughton Way shops and the recreation ground has a degree of reality. However, the strength of that argument needs to be considered in the context of points 4, 9 and 10 below.

My opinion about this new ward of Buckhurst Hill East and Whitebridge having very little community of interest is based on very factual evidence, which I will outline below but it is also based on the lived experience of having represented the current Roding ward for 26 years, of having lived in the Roding ward community for most of the last 63 years and having worked at the local secondary school, Roding Valley High School, since its foundation in 1989.

The current Roding ward has a very high degree of community interest which is reflected in part by its strong independent representation over many years, at both parish and district level, culminating in the independent candidate winning with 83% of the vote in 2022 against the main two political parties Conservative and Labour.

My arguments for the newly proposed ward of Buckhurst Hill East and Whitebridge having very little community of interest are as follows.

1. There is a ***clear physical dividing*** line between the Buckhurst Hill (BH) and Loughton (L) parts of this new ward, namely the Green Walk. This was created in the 1940's following the Abercrombie principles as a clear boundary between the two towns of BH and L. This was as a **deliberate act** and has been maintained ever since.
2. This ***clear distinction*** between BH and L is reflected in the post codes of IG9 and IG10, the different telephone areas of 504 and 508.
3. This ***clear distinction*** on either side of the green walk is also reflected in the change in road names Valley Hill (L) becoming Loughton Way (BH). Felstead Road (L) becoming Thaxted Road (BH). Greensted Road (L) becoming Bradwell Road (BH). With a clear physical divide between each road pairing in the form of either the green walk or a playground between Felstead Road and Thaxted Road.
4. As regards ***shopping areas*** the bulk of residents in the BH part of the new ward look either to the Roding Valley station area, Lower Queens Road, and Queens Road for their shopping needs, whilst the Whitebridge part of Loughton look to the Valley Hill crossroads, Sainsbury's and the High Road Loughton for their requirements. It is accepted that a small area of housing either side of the Green Walk will both equally look to the Loughton Way shops.
5. As regards ***schooling*** again the two parts of the new ward, very largely look in different directions, BH East towards Buckhurst Hill Primary School and West Hatch Secondary School, whilst the Whitebridge part of the proposed new ward towards Whitebridge Primary School and Roding Valley High School for their secondary school provision.
6. ***Medical provision.*** Both areas of the new ward have their own doctor's surgeries and pharmacy provision and to my knowledge the bulk of residents use the provision based on either living in BH or L.
7. ***Faith facilities,*** BH has its own Anglican and Non-Conformist churches (St John's and BH Baptist Church) whilst Loughton has its own (St Michael's, Loughton Baptist, and Loughton Methodist Church's), with attendance once again very largely following the BH and L split. St Michael's Church in Roding Road works extremely hard in developing a community provision aimed at the entire current Roding ward and a daily café provision which has engendered a lot of support from the Loughton Whitebridge area.

8. ***Library provision***, once again very largely reflects the BH and L divide. Whitebridge residents very largely looking to Loughton Library with BH residents very largely using Buckhurst Hill Library.
9. ***Roding Valley Recreation Ground***, which is stated as evidence in your report (page 9, paragraph 39) as having a community of interest between the two parts of the new ward is true but only to a certain extent. Usage of this area also reflects the BH and L separation of community interest. BH families largely use the playground and hard-court area just off Roding Lane IG9, whilst L Whitebridge families very largely use the playground and hard-court area just off Roding Road IG10.
10. ***Cricket Club and Football Club provision on the Recreation Ground***, once again this reflects the IG9 and IG10 separate community provision. South Loughton Cricket Club has a square and a pavilion just off Roding Road IG10 and Buckhurst Hill Cricket Club has a square and a pavilion just off Roding Lane IG9. Loughton Football Club lease land from the County Council just adjacent to the recreation ground at the end of Avondale Drive IG10, whilst Buckhurst Hill Football Club has its ground and headquarters in Roding Lane IG9.
11. ***Roding Valley Recreation Ground Management***, although of less importance than the actual patterns of community usage the IG9 / IG10 split is also mirrored in how the recreation ground is actually managed. Loughton Town Council has a 125 year lease on its portion of the recreation ground, running up to the green walk, whilst Buckhurst Hill Parish Council chose not to take up this option from EFDC.

These points 1 to 11, in my opinion, very clearly evidence the lack of strong community ties between the BH and L parts of the newly proposed ward of Buckhurst Hill East and Whitebridge.

Many of the key building blocks of community and a sense of place, shops, schools, leisure and faith buildings simply do not traverse this existing green walk divide between two very established towns and therefore the newly proposed ward of Buckhurst Hill East and Whitebridge might exist on a map it simply does not exist in any meaningful sense in the real world which is shaped by the daily lives of individuals and their families.

In my opinion it is completely inappropriate to suggest the creation of a 3-member District ward crossing the BH and L boundary merely for some predetermined need for three member wards across the district.

**On any measure of community interest there should be a 2-member BH East ward and a separate 1-member Loughton Whitebridge ward** (unless the commission wishes to revisit its proposals for Loughton in its entirety, which is something I am not suggesting).

Best wishes – Stephen Murray