

## Why should I support SCC's proposals for 2009?

Surrey County Council ("SCC") is consulting on the arrangements for secondary schools admissions for September 2009. The consultation process closes on 31 January.

We set out here the background to the recent issues surrounding admissions to the Howard of Effingham School ("the Howard") and explain the reasons why we believe SCC's proposals with respect to the Howard should be supported.

### **The Howard's Traditional Catchment Area**

For many years SCC dealt with admissions to the Howard of Effingham School by reviewing applications after they were received and drawing up an Admissions Priority Area (APA). As recently as 2006, SCC explained the rationale underlying the drawing up of the geographic area of the APA as follows:

"Whilst a lot of Education Authorities have "distance" as their main criterion we do not have an equal spread of secondary schools and the use of distance would mean that some children, living furthest away from a secondary school, may not qualify for entry to ANY school".

This is the case in Horsley. It has now been accepted by both SCC and the Office of the Schools Adjudicator that while Horsley children live approximately 2 to 3 miles from the Howard, they have no other reasonably accessible school at which they are likely to have any chance of obtaining a place. Accordingly the western boundary of the Howard's APA was, year in, year out habitually drawn to include the children of Horsley. The attached map illustrates the recent geography of the APA for 2005 and 2006.

Conversely the eastern and northern boundaries of the APA flexed in line with application numbers, in recognition of the fact that children in Cobham and Fetcham West, whilst living nearby, have other reasonably accessible nearby schools.

### **The 2007 Admissions Round**

For 2007 admissions, SCC anticipated certain legal changes required by the upcoming implementation of the new 2008 Schools Admission Code. In particular the new Code outlawed the drawing up of an APA after applications were received. So SCC ceased the use of the APA and moved instead to a simple, county-wide admissions policy which prioritised applications based on a child's proximity to the school.

As a result of the new policy, over 90% of Horsley non-siblings were offered **NONE** of their preferences with **NONE** being offered a place at the Howard, even though it was their nearest school. Instead they were allocated one of three different schools 8 to 9 miles away.

### **Remedying the Problem**

Since these problems arose in March 2007, parents in Horsley have been working with SCC to find a way to remedy this unexpected and unintentional outcome:

- For September 2007 admissions, SCC agreed with the Howard that - for one year only - an additional class would be added to the intake to enable Horsley children to be accommodated.
- The September 2008 admissions policy had already been published and, whilst substantially the same as that for 2007, still retained the same distance tiebreaker flaw. Horsley parents therefore appealed to the Schools Adjudicator, requesting that the 2008 policy be changed on the grounds that its impact on Horsley children constituted a breach of mandatory terms of the Schools Admissions Code.
- The Adjudicator agreed and upheld the appeal, reasoning "it is important that arrangements ensure

that, as far as possible, every child can be confident of admission to at least one reasonably accessible school". To remedy the breach of the Code and ensure fairness, he ruled that SCC's admissions criteria should take account of whether a child has another nearby alternative school.

- For 2009, SCC's proposal adopts the Adjudicator's recommendation that the nearest alternative school tie-breaker be included in its admissions policy for the Howard. We fully support this proposal. SCC's proposal reflects the understanding that Surrey's county-wide criteria, based on distance from home to school, cannot lawfully be applied to the Howard.

### **SCC's Proposed Admissions Criteria for 2009**

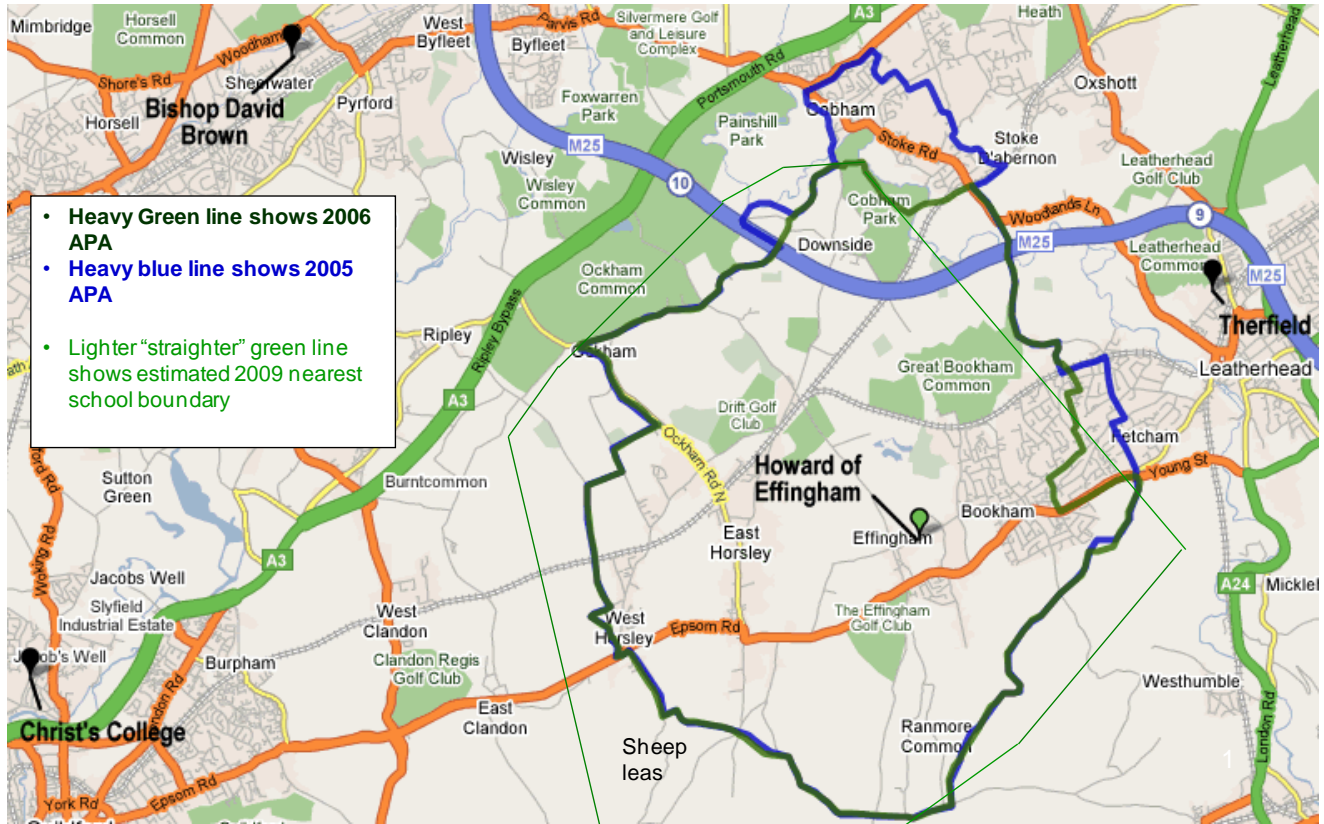
SCC's proposal for 2009 most closely recreates the Howard's historical APA and most effectively maintains the traditional links between the Howard and surrounding communities.

The parents of Horsley have researched many examples of admission policies applied by other LEAs. Throughout our research we have sought to ensure that any change does not place other children in an equally disadvantaged position. We believe that the proposed Howard of Effingham admissions criteria for 2009 of "Nearest school", combined with a tiebreaker of "Nearest Alternative School", is based on best-practice and represents the most equitable solution because

- It aligns with the principles of the old APA. The result will be a reinstatement of the traditional core catchment area for the Howard; this being Effingham, Bookham and Horsley.
- The boundary will flex according to applications at the Fetcham edge of the catchment, as in the past. So, in lower birth rate years the catchment area would be likely to include parts of Fetcham West.
- It expresses the admission criteria clearly, in a way which is legally and simply implementable
- The Nearest Alternative School tie-breaker has been reviewed, accepted as suitable and recommended by the Schools Adjudicator
- Surrey County Council have undertaken an independent internal review and concluded that the 2009 proposal is the most appropriate solution for addressing the specific circumstances created by the geography of the supply and demand of educational resources in the area served by the Howard.

The attached map illustrates the effect of SCC's proposed 2009 policy. Whilst the 2009 "boundary" extends beyond that of the old APA, the outer areas are so thinly populated that the catchment area will not be materially different from the past. So SCC's proposal for 2009 does not remove Howard places from those in some communities in favour of new areas. The proposals simply maintain, as far as possible, the status quo existing prior to the 2007 admissions round.

It is for these reasons that we urge you to support the proposed criteria as it provides the best way, under the current law, of maintaining the links between the Howard and the communities it has traditionally served.



- Heavy Green line shows 2006 APA
- Heavy blue line shows 2005 APA
- Lighter "straighter" green line shows estimated 2009 nearest school boundary