



North Cray Residents Association

www.northcrayresidents.org.uk

Mr David Owen
Review Officer
LGBCE
14th Floor Millbank Tower
Millbank
London, SW1P 4QP

9 November 2015

Dear Mr Owen

ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY

This is in response to your invitation to us to submit our views on future ward boundaries for the borough, in particular for the ward in which we are currently located, i.e. Cray Meadows.

ABOUT US

Our Association was founded 71 years ago and our Constitution sets out our Aims and Objectives. These include two that are key to this exercise:-

1. To promote and further the preservation of the local environment as a residential area, the protection of the Green Belt and the improvement of local amenities in North Cray; and
2. To co-operate with any other Association, Federation or Council having similar objectives, with a view to ensuring unity of action on matters affecting members generally to their mutual benefit.

Our Association represents some 400 households (800+ people), making our membership level approx. 75%, and rising, of the residents of North Cray. Please see attached map at **A**.

Our website www.northcrayresidents.org.uk explains more about what we do and the nature of our members' concerns and interests.

OUR AIM

Our considered view is that our part of the current Cray Meadows Ward should become part of a new reshaped ward, one that through its western boundary would encompass the whole of Foothills Cray Meadows and the remaining area east of the River Cray down to Foothills Cray Bridge; then run eastward along the Maidstone Road on its northern side; then run northwards taking in our Green Belt and Heritage Land; then run westwards to include Coldblow and Bexley Village east of the River Shuttle; and then turn southwards again towards the River Cray, taking in Bexley Woods.

Please see attached marked-up maps at **B** (existing wards) and **C** (proposed new ward).

The principal changes to the present Cray Meadows Ward would be:

1. In the west and the south where we would lose:
 - (a) the residential areas west of the open land forming the Foots Cray Meadows and those west of the bridge over the River Cray in Foots Cray, and
 - (b) the commercial area on the southern side the Maidstone Road; and
2. To the north where we would gain what is currently St Mary's Ward.

Important Note: We appreciate that the River Cray itself could be considered an obvious geographical boundary for part of this proposed new ward. However, all other factors outweigh this consideration as we have explained immediately below and in 'Identifiable Boundaries', page 3.

We have given considerable thought to these proposed changes and our proposals are based on our firm view that we have no affinity, historical links or shared aims and interests with the residential areas west of Foots Cray Meadows and Foots Cray Bridge – nor, indeed, with any part of Sidcup.

The proposed new ward we are suggesting would embrace the ancient and adjoining parishes of St James (North Cray) and St Mary's (Bexley Village) which leads us to suggest an inclusive name for the new ward: **St James & St Mary's**.

The reasons for our proposal include:-

- ~ shared history;
- ~ affinity between residents;
- ~ common leisure activities;
- ~ conservation goals;
- ~ shared transport links;
- ~ mutually supportive community groups;
- ~ shared interests.

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

Community History, Identity and Facilities

The villages of North Cray and Bexley not only have a shared history but, today, there remains a closer affinity of identity between the residents of North Cray and Bexley than with Sidcup (albeit our postal address is Sidcup). Sidcup's town centre is further away and, unlike our area (which is a mix of rural, semi-rural and residential), is quite different in character. Unlike Sidcup, Bexley Village is just a short drive, cycle or walk away from North Cray. It is where we go for the doctor, the dentist, restaurants and takeaways, pubs, the chemist, bank and post office, mini-supermarkets, and a variety of other shops and services. In addition the Village provides different church denominations, a minicab service, the weekly Farmers' Market, the Community Library and, significantly, the nearest railway station; and where (unlike Sidcup and Foots Cray beyond the bridge) there is adequate commuter and visitor parking.

Because of the rurality of this area, horse riding is a very popular leisure activity and North Cray has several riding schools and livery stables to meet this need. Part of their catchment area is Bexley. There is also a major riding establishment in Bexley itself (Mount Mascall Stables, off Vicarage Road). Its land runs into North Cray, with additional livery stables in Cocksure Lane. The riding areas are Foots Cray Meadows and, via Parsonage Lane, Chalk Wood and Joydens Wood.

Another draw for Bexley people is the number of North Cray's footpaths through Green Belt land, its farm shops (Kelseys off the North Cray Road and Honeydale Farm on the Maidstone Road), its nurseries (Bexley Garden Centre and Penhill Nursery, both in the North Cray Road). Last, but not least, we have Foots Cray Meadows, a vast open space used extensively by dog-walkers and others, with its nature reserve, events, riverside walk and the historical and iconic Five Arches Bridge. The Cray Riverway (a signposted walk) is also something which links North Cray with Bexley.

Like us, the people of Bexley are concerned with conservation, as is evidenced by the fact that both North Cray and Bexley Village have Conservation Areas (High Beeches and The Village).

Transport Links

North Cray has only one bus service, the 492. This service (which begins near Sidcup Station and ends at the Bluewater Shopping Centre, via Bexleyheath) runs the whole length of the North Cray Road (the A223) from its beginning at Ruxley Roundabout until it reaches Bexley Village. Our nearest railway station, Bexley, is in Bexley Village and, as mentioned above, Bexley Village is close enough to North Cray for people to walk or cycle between the two as an alternative to using public transport.

Community Groups

We work in a mutually supportive way with the Coldblow Residents Association (although this currently operates in the adjacent ward of St Mary's) as we share Bexley's Green Belt and Heritage Land and have very similar aims and objectives, namely the need to protect this and to prevent over-development and inappropriate development something that would alter the character of our two areas, both of which are predominantly residential. We also work closely with a local environmental protection society, Friends of Foots Cray Meadows (www.footscraymeadows.org), whose chairman is also a member of our Committee. See also 'Shared Interests' below.

Identifiable Boundaries

The new-shaped ward we are proposing has both strong and recognisable natural features in addition to well-known barriers such as present ward boundaries. Natural features are the River Cray to the west of North Cray and the long stretch of Green Belt and woodland in the east running north-south. A further existing clearly defined and established boundary is that created by the A2, the northern boundary of the present St Mary's ward.

However, as we have already mentioned, on the western boundary of our proposed new ward, we see it as undesirable to adopt the River Cray, in its entirety, as the ward boundary as this would divide Foots Cray Meadows between two separate wards. This could create practical difficulties in the future as the Meadows are in a single ownership (Bexley Council). They are also in the care of our sister organisation, Friends of Foots Cray Meadows. Furthermore, local support, protection and maintenance of the Meadows is known to be centred east of the Cray and we are strongly of the view that their future protection and the avoidance of conflict is best served if all of the Meadows were to be in the same ward, i.e. the one we are proposing.

Parishes

As mentioned above, the proposed new ward would incorporate two ancient parishes: St James (in North Cray) and St Mary's (in Bexley). The ward we are proposing is largely based upon these two adjoining parishes.

Shared Interests

Both North Cray and Bexley have residential areas which are suburban in character, although the character of North Cray is mostly one of open spaces and semi-rural in nature. However, both communities are ones where the residents are predominantly owner occupiers, i.e. people with a stake in ensuring that their community remains largely residential, unspoilt by inappropriate and intensive development, where their open spaces and Green Belt land are protected and where their 'built-heritage' is similarly protected and preserved. Many of our members are also members of Friends of Footh Cray Meadows, an activity-driven local society dedicated to the protection of the biodiversity features of the Meadows.

Local Consultation

Through the medium of our website, and our new *GroupMail* service to all those who have so far signed up to it (over 60%), we have outlined our proposal for the new ward to our members. Their response has been overwhelmingly positive.

The Electoral Position

We understand that the electoral figure for the proposed new ward comes to around 8,500, providing an electoral balance and coming close to the average of two councillors of 8,408.

We do hope you will take our views into full consideration.

Yours sincerely,

David H Cook

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Chairman, North Cray Residents Association

Copies To:

James Brokenshire, MP for Old Bexley & Sidcup

Cllr. Donald Massey (Cray Meadows Ward)

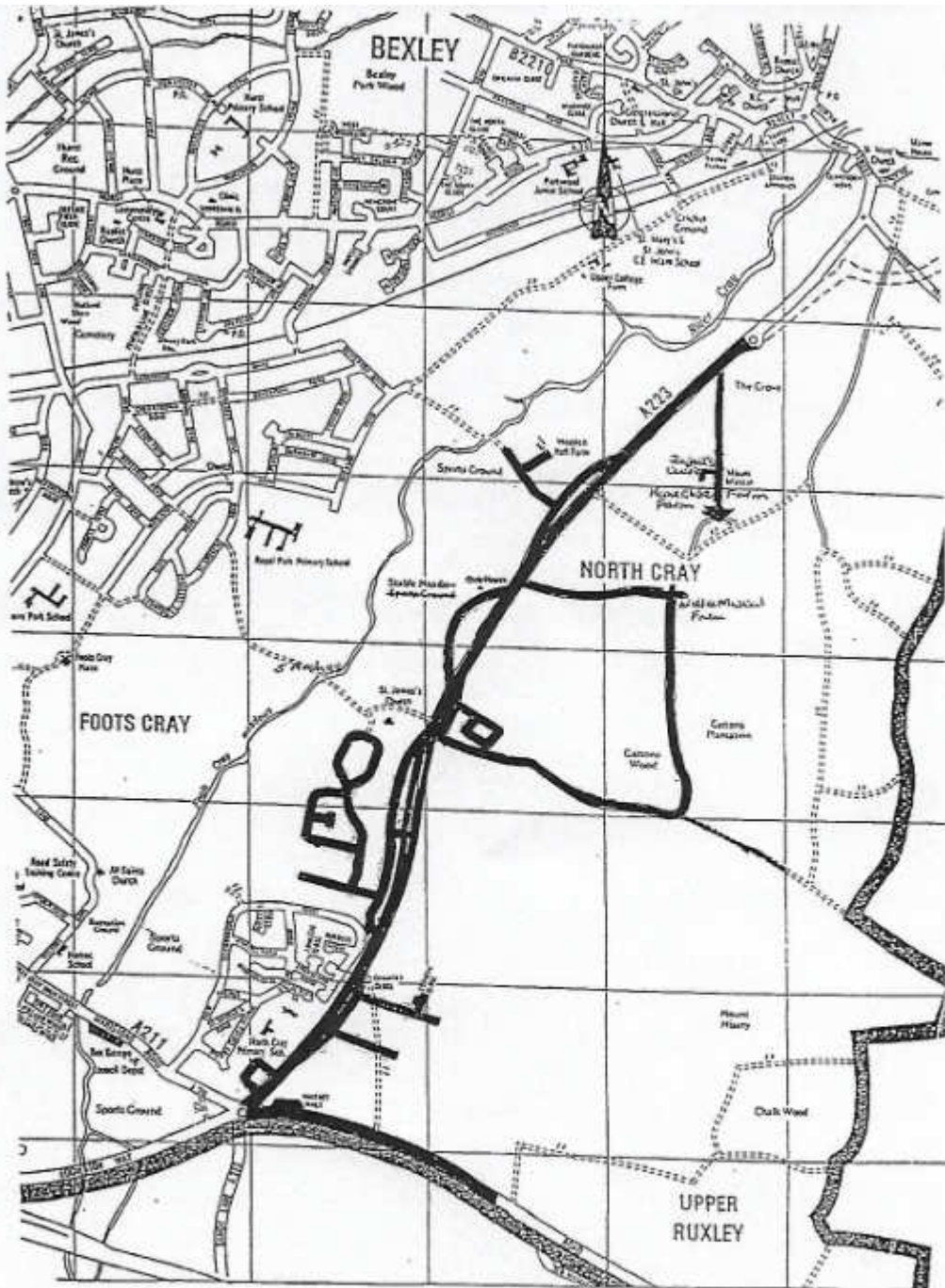
Friends of Footh Cray Meadows

Coldblow Residents Association

Bexley Civic Society

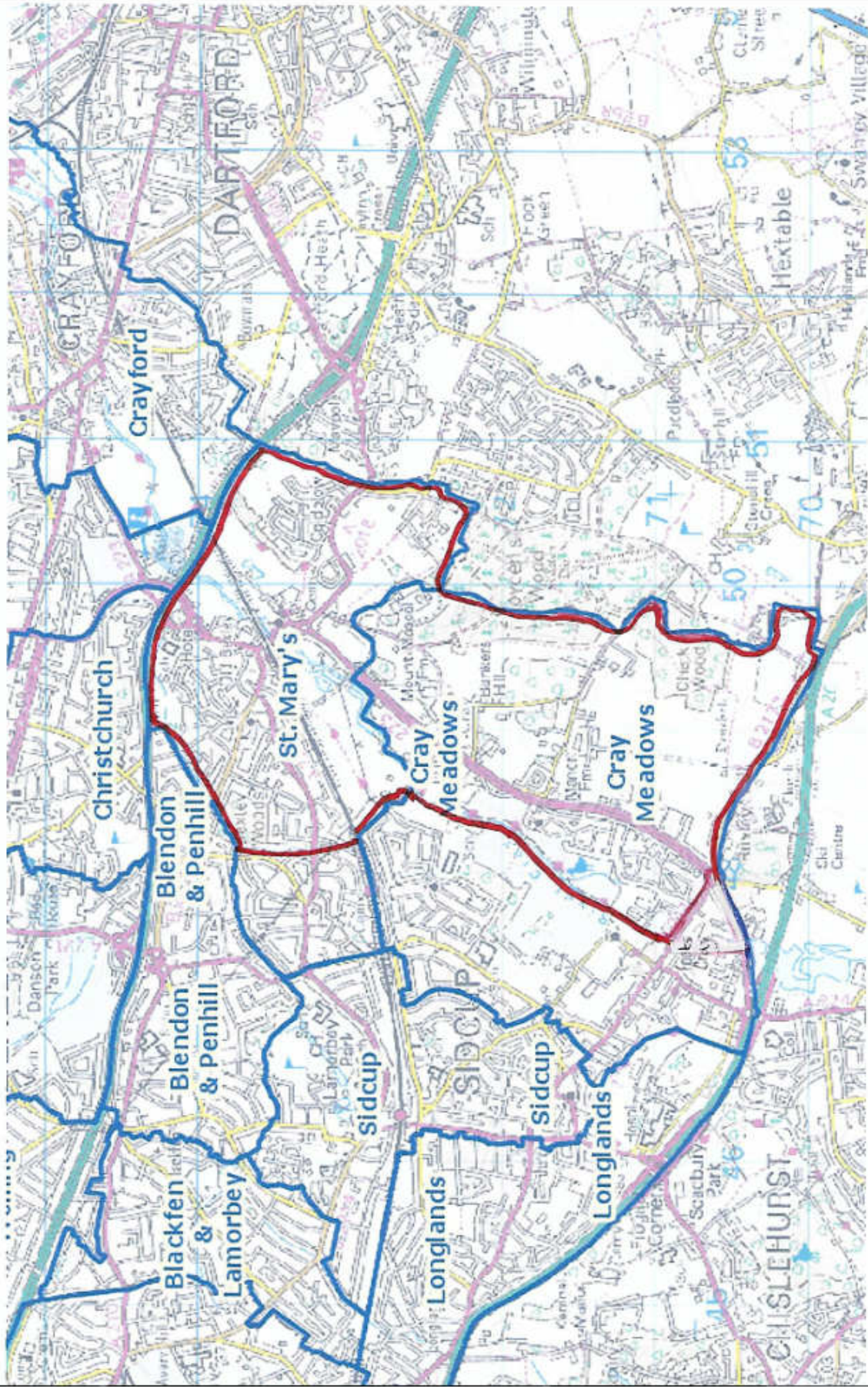
Development Control, Bexley

A

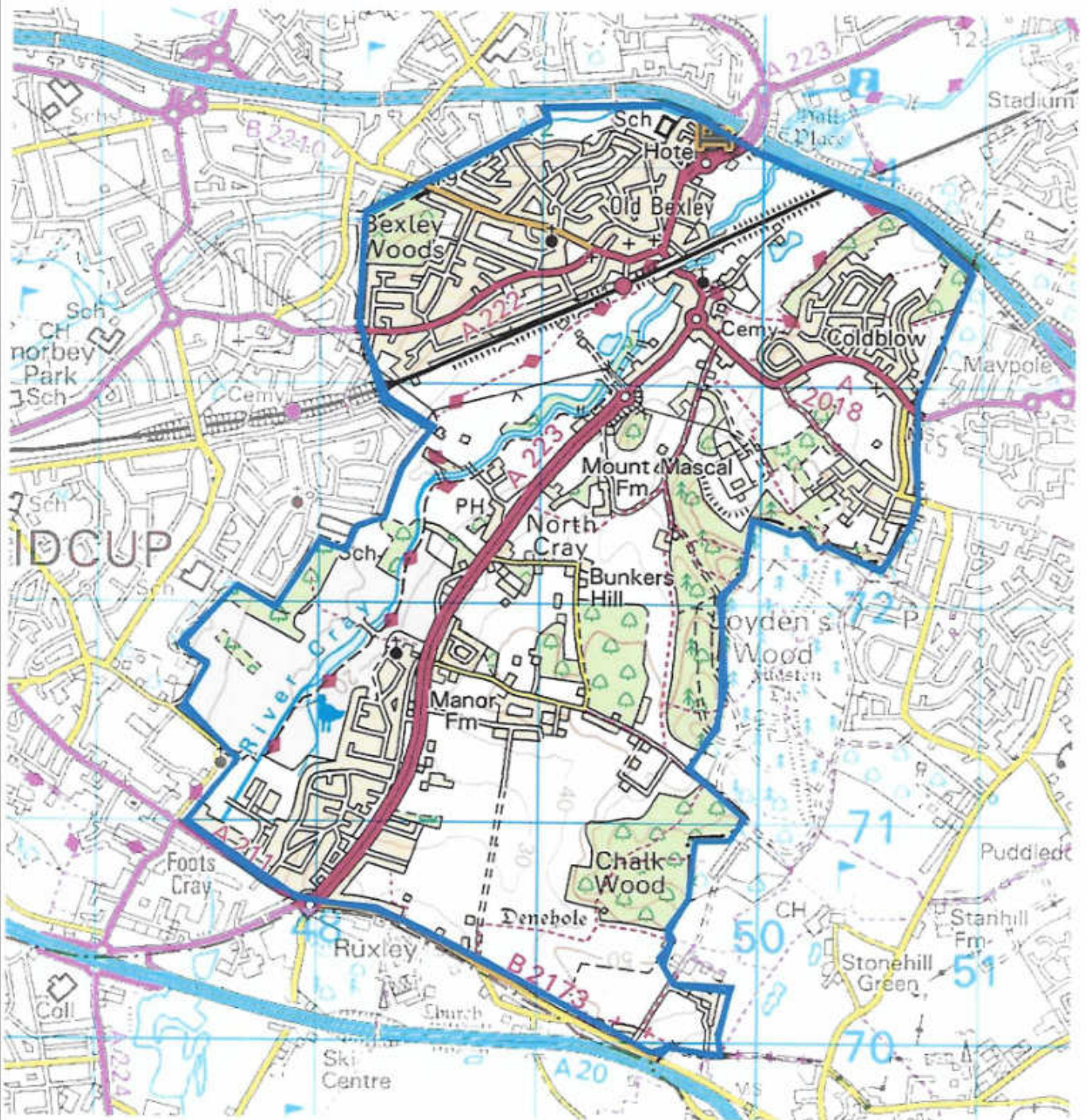


— Area covered by the North Cray Residents Association

PROPOSED RAISED BOUNDARY FOR CRAY MEADOWS & ST MARY'S



- Existing ward boundary
- Proposed ward boundary



Proposed ward including whole of Footscray Meadows