

# Streets Apart: Growing up on the margins in Elmbridge

## 1. Introduction

For most children and young people Elmbridge is a great place to grow up. There are numerous leisure and recreational facilities, low levels of youth crime and good schools with high numbers of young people succeeding in education, training and employment. In addition, Elmbridge has a buoyant local economy, on average its residents experience better health outcomes and better employment prospects than in most places in the country, and it is largely made up of sought after neighbourhoods where people are keen to bring up their children. These are just some of the features which explain why Elmbridge has repeatedly been identified as one of the best places to live in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

Our shared interest is to ensure that the opportunities afforded to the majority of children and young people in Elmbridge can be accessed and enjoyed by all.

Commissioned by Surrey County Council and Walton Charity, with the support of Elmbridge Borough Council, 'Streets Apart' is the start of ongoing work to find innovative approaches to support vulnerable young people and their families in Elmbridge. The Streets Apart report looks specifically at the impact of social exclusion and wider inequalities on young people in Elmbridge and considers what we can do differently to improve the situation of the most disadvantaged.

Through partnership we want to create an overarching strategy which joins together organisations from the public, private, voluntary and faiths sector, to align resources to provide timely, quality support for vulnerable children and families in Elmbridge. In this way we will develop effective services, which make the best use of finite resources and deliver the best outcomes for people in Elmbridge. This work is part of the broader public service transformation which is going on across Surrey's services and reflects the desire by a range of partners to shape services around people and breakdown unhelpful barriers between those who seek to provide services to Surrey residents.

As a starting point for a new way of working this report was commissioned to collate key data relating to vulnerable young people from previous publications and current partnership information. Data is considered at a borough/ward/neighbourhood level and placed within a Surrey and national context. The research also draws upon interviews with a variety of local stakeholders including young people, parents and professionals working with them, as well as seeking the views of senior officers across the partnership.

<sup>1</sup> Halifax Quality of Life Survey 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010

## 2. About Elmbridge

Elmbridge lies in the north-east of the county of Surrey. It is bordered by the London Boroughs of Richmond and Kingston, and Surrey boroughs of Spelthorne, Runnymede, Guildford, Woking and Mole Valley.

According to the 2011 census, there are 130,900 people living in Elmbridge, making it the third most populated of Surrey's 11 districts and boroughs. It is notable that 20.6% of the Elmbridge population are under the age of 15 which is the highest proportion of any borough in Surrey and is higher than the national average of 17.6%. There are a total of 52,900 households in Elmbridge with its principal towns being Esher, Walton on Thames and Weybridge.

The main ethnic groups in Elmbridge are:

- white British/English/Scottish/Welsh - 79.9%
- other white - 8.7%
- Asian/Asian British/Indian - 1.9% (the largest non-white ethnic group)
- white, gypsy or Irish traveller - 0.12% (this number is likely to be higher because of under-identification of this ethnic group).

The average gross income in Elmbridge is £514.70 per week which is made up of full and part time workers. The national gross average income is £421.60 per week. The average house price in Elmbridge is £647,992 whereas the national average house price is £246,764. (Department for Communities and Local Government, April – June 2013.)

According to the 2011 census social housing makes up approximately 10% of the housing stock in Elmbridge (15% being private rented and 73% owner occupied). There are approximately 4,500 social rent properties to meet general housing needs (excluding supported housing and sheltered housing for older people) of which the majority are owned and managed by Paragon Community Housing Group.

There are several large estates including Lower Green in Esher, Fieldcommon and Vicarage Fields in North Walton and St Johns in Walton Ambleside. There is a significant level of unmet need for social housing in Elmbridge with over 2,300 households on the housing register at any one time, with less than 250 vacancies each year to meet these needs. The knock on effects of a shortage of social housing can include households living in overcrowded accommodation and young people living at home for longer. Recent welfare reforms, including the restriction on housing benefit, may lead to an increase in the cost of housing.

According to the Office for National Statistics, levels of unemployment in Elmbridge are 3.4% whereas the national average for unemployment is 5.8% of the economically active population (those aged 16-64).

In June 2014, there were 385 open cases to Surrey County Council's children's social care teams. A total of 68 children were subject to a child protection plan, of which 13 were aged 13-18. In addition, statistics from June 2014 show that the Family Support Programme, which provides intensive support for families in need, has worked with 32 Elmbridge families in the last year.

### 3. What we found

There were several themes which emerged whilst undertaking the research, some of which were specific to Elmbridge and some which appear from national research to be general issues for young people as a whole.

Poverty is the most significant issue underpinning poor outcomes for young people in Elmbridge as elsewhere.

This said, negative experiences of exposure to domestic abuse, adult substance misuse, acute family stress, and experience of parental mental ill-health are by no means confined to the most economically deprived sections of the Elmbridge community. Perhaps what emerges most powerfully from accounts of young people and those who work with them, as a particular feature of the Elmbridge environment, is the experience of growing up poor or in other ways excluded in an area where ‘the norm’ is a form of social inclusion underpinned by economic prosperity. The accounts of young people and the data collected for this report indicate that there are a significant number of young people who feel excluded from the benefits enjoyed by the majority in Elmbridge.

#### 3.1 Economic inequality

**“When I go into the town, you can see who has money and who doesn’t and it made me feel bad about myself because I can’t go into the expensive shops.”**  
(16 year old female)

Elmbridge is an affluent borough with average house prices well above the national and county average. According to the 2011 census, 73% of the houses in Elmbridge are privately mortgaged or owned compared to 63% nationally. Nearly 10% of households are socially rented in Elmbridge compared to 17.7% nationally.

Wealthy people living in the most sought after neighbourhoods make up 31% of Elmbridge households, which is 10 times higher than the UK average. However, this affluence is dispersed with pockets of deprivation, which often include areas of social housing, high unemployment and families living in poverty<sup>2</sup>. Young people growing up in these more disadvantaged neighbourhoods described this proximity to obvious wealth as having the greatest impact upon them.

Elmbridge has a particular challenge around affordable accommodation. Elmbridge’s average ratio of house price to income was 22:1 in 2013 (and still rising) compared to 14:1 in Surrey and 11:1 nationally. In 2010, this ratio of house price to income was 17:1 which suggests that the opportunity to own a home for most people growing up in Elmbridge is diminishing.

This is emphasised by the fact that while earnings are 18% above the national average, houses prices are 260% above the national average. This means that it will be difficult for any young person in Elmbridge to buy their own home in the borough, but for those who are growing up in the most disadvantaged communities this becomes an entirely unrealistic

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<sup>2</sup>The proportion of children living in families in receipt of out of work (means-tested) benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent of median income.

prospect. With private rents also extremely high and very little social housing, this combination is potentially corrosive to aspiration and likely to create a poverty of expectation for those excluded from wealth in the borough.

### **Elmbridge stories:**

**Jenny** is a parent, living in rented accommodation in a private road in an affluent area of Elmbridge. Jenny and her family do not feel that they have good relationships with their neighbours and they feel that they are frequently blamed for any noise disturbances in the local area. Both Jenny and her husband work long hours to make ends-meet but still have mounting debts and are reliant on tax credits to subsidise their income. Rent arrears mean the family are at risk of being made homeless and they have, at times, needed to use the foodbank. The cost of living and their financial position exacerbates their feelings of social isolation and they experience tensions at home when the teenage children want the same clothes, games and leisure activities as their school friends enjoy. They are at risk of becoming homeless and the Citizens Advice Bureau and the housing department are working with the family to avoid this.

## **3.2 Families in poverty**

**“I’d really like to be able to give my children more, buy them better things and to do more activities with them.”** (40 year old female)

According to the Department for Work and Pensions, there are 2,610 children and young people aged 0-19 living in poverty in Elmbridge. The wards with a higher proportion of children and families than the regional average are:

- Walton North (355 families)
- Walton Ambleside (215 families)
- Molesey South (255 families)
- Hersham North (230 families).

These wards contain neighbourhoods (referred to as ‘super output areas’) where child poverty is as high as 30%. The national average for child poverty is 20.1% and Surrey’s child poverty average is 10%. There is strong evidence to suggest that those living in poverty are more likely to experience poorer educational attainment and poorer health and social outcomes than their more affluent peers (Rowntree Foundation 2009).

The relatively poor school attainment for those receiving free school meals in Surrey is a strong local indicator of these negative outcomes, as is the evidence within Elmbridge of differential life expectancy: a difference of 12 years between areas within the most affluent wards and those within wards with the highest levels of deprivation in Elmbridge. Those in poverty are more likely to experience obesity, teen pregnancies and alcohol and substance misuse.

Debt is also a common feature with many families making ends-meet through high interest loans. Young people and parents in Elmbridge described the family problems caused by debt and the particular impact associated with insecure or low paid employment. This

reflects national research conducted directly with children and young people about their experience of living in poverty.

It is often the inconsistency of parental income which has a direct correlation with stress in children and young people. (Rowntree Foundation 2009)

Increasingly, families in Elmbridge are making use of the four foodbanks in the borough. The Walton and Hershaw foodbank alone fed 991 people (470 families) between May 2013 and March 2014.

Health and Wellbeing Surrey estimates that there are 8,500 children with a disability in Surrey. It is estimated that 55% are in poverty or are on the margins of poverty. The average income of families with disabled children is 23.5% below the UK average income and only 16% of mothers of children with disabilities work, compared with 61% of other mothers.

For young people disability can be a significant barrier to their employability with over 50% of young people who are not in education, training or employment in Elmbridge having additional learning needs or disability. Young people with caring responsibilities for unwell or disabled parents or siblings are twice as likely not to be engaged in education, employment or training.

### 3.3 Abusive and unhealthy relationships

**“Being in a relationship with someone controlling makes you think that you’re never really going to be able to get out of that relationship.”** (34 year old female)

At both national and local levels, young people report high levels of abusive and unhealthy relationships (NSPCC 2014). This ranges from bullying in school and peer groups (and increasingly on the internet) to sexual exploitation and abusive intimate partner relationships. In the north-east of Surrey, a local domestic abuse charity supported 134 young people aged 16-24 in the first nine months of 2013/14.

In Elmbridge the Youth Support Service is working with significant numbers of young people who are in unhealthy intimate relationships, where emotional, physical and sexual abuse is a feature. The experience of working with the more vulnerable young people in Elmbridge is that such relationships are too often seen as normal within this peer group and as acceptable to both parties. This phenomenon is not isolated to Elmbridge but it does appear from practice experience to be an increasing feature of relationships between young people.

The prevalence of domestic abuse in adult relationships in Elmbridge, as elsewhere, is likely to have an impact upon the norms and learning of young people growing up in families where such abuse occurs. According to Surrey Police, there were 1,549 reports of domestic abuse in 2013 in Elmbridge and research suggests that only 1 in 35 incidence are actually reported (Refuge 2006). This suggests that exposure to domestic abuse is a relative common occurrence for many children growing up in Elmbridge. Research has

repeatedly demonstrated the damaging impact that domestic abuse has on children's development. It is the primary cause of children being placed on child protection plans.

For many children and young people, growing up in a digital world has impacted on the way they communicate, leading some to withdraw from society and their peers. This culture is not always positive for children and young people with 38% of young people being affected by cyber bullying. Girls are twice as likely as boys to be the victims of persistent cyber bullying. The concern around increasing withdrawal and isolation for some young people is discussed below.

### **Elmbridge stories:**

**Chris** has seen his mother assaulted by his father and his step-father. He is 14 years old and has spent much of his childhood afraid. He chooses to stay out of the house as much as he can. Chris has been picked up by the Police on several occasions as they are concerned that he is with older young people and becoming involved in anti-social behaviour. Chris has been excluded from school as he was found in possession of cannabis. Chris is working with a youth worker from the Eikon charity and his mother is being supported around the domestic abuse.

## **3.4 Emotional wellbeing and self harm**

**“I found it hard to find a way to deal with my aggression, so I took my aggression out on myself.”** (19 years old male)

Young people in Elmbridge and those who work with them identify a range of challenges that impact upon emotional health and wellbeing. Some of these result from the interdependent issues already highlighted such as relationship breakdown, (or dysfunctional relationships) with families, partners and in peer groups.

There are also a range of societal pressures and norms around body image, status and achievement (particularly academic) which increase emotional stresses in adolescence – a time of great change and vulnerability. One quarter of all enduring mental illness in adults is identifiable by the age of 16 and half of this is considered to be preventable (Public Health England).

Mental ill-health in children and young people in Elmbridge often exists alongside life on a low income. The Surrey average for children and young people diagnosed with a mental health disorder is 7.15%. There are two areas in Elmbridge that exceed the Surrey average; Walton North (10.1%) and Molesey North (9.8%), both containing areas of relative deprivation.

Research demonstrates that children in families with lower income levels have three times greater risk of mental health problems. Dr David Kingsley, Consultant Psychiatrist at Cheadle Royal Hospital found that self harm is prevalent amongst the 11-19 age group, with recent research indicating that one in three girls and one in five boys between these ages had self harmed in the UK. The number of young people admitted to hospital as a result of self harm has risen by one third in the last five years.

### **Elmbridge stories:**

**Damien** is 17. He had always struggled at school because of speech and language difficulties and his behaviour deteriorated as he fell further behind his classmates. He dropped out of school when he was 15 and thereafter he did not want to leave the house much. As a result, his health declined. Damien came to the attention of services when he was hospitalised after taking an overdose of his mother's painkillers with a bottle of whisky. Damien is now being treated for depression and is being helped to reintegrate with other young people by a youth worker with whom he is now building a trusting relationship.

## **3.5 Social isolation**

**“Living on the council estate makes you feel segregated from the rest of the community.”** (16 year old male)

Those working with families with multiple needs frequently commented on the social isolation experienced by families in Elmbridge. Risk factors which contribute to social isolation include poverty, mental health, poor and expensive public transport, domestic abuse and having a child with a disability. People experiencing multiple risk factors tend to be concentrated in the most deprived neighbourhoods but are by no means confined to these neighbourhoods.

Elmbridge has socially isolated neighbourhoods which are significantly more deprived than the rest of the borough and characterised by higher levels of social housing and limited public transport. Examples are Lower Green (Esher) and Fieldcommon Lane (Hersham) which are separated from each other by a water works and a disused quarry and separated from most of the other residents in the borough who would have no reason to pass through and may be unaware of their existence.

Elmbridge also has isolated individuals in all areas of the borough living, often un-noticed, with neighbours. The increasing isolation of significant numbers of young people is a concern to practitioners working in Elmbridge. Many young people appear to have disengaged with schooling early and have disappeared 'off the radar', often withdrawing to their bedrooms and sometimes becoming seriously unwell. Again, economic disadvantage increases the risks of isolation as one of the typical responses of poor children is to withdraw as a result of shame and discomfort caused by their poverty, particularly in affluent areas (Ridge, 2009).

Research from the University of York into mental health concluded that poorer mothers were more likely to lack friends and be depressed if they lived in high status neighbourhoods. It is the particular experience of isolation through an inability to take part in a social life which is predicated upon economic ability that appears to be a defining feature of disadvantaged young people and families in Elmbridge.

### **Elmbridge stories:**

**Emily** is 16. She has been in a relationship for over 18 months with a boyfriend who is two years older and has experienced emotional and physical abuse. Her relationship with her Mum is strained and several incidents at home have led to arrests for criminal damage. This volatility places Emily at risk of homelessness. To escape her problems Emily uses class A drugs; she enjoys the feeling of losing control. Emily's strained relationships with her family, abusive relationship; poor self esteem and drug use contribute to her isolation from the community. Emily is working with the Youth Support

## **3.6 Young people in need of appropriate accommodation**

**"I'm not wanted at home."** (17 year old male)

The latest data from the Youth Support Service's homelessness prevention service in Surrey shows that 407 young people aged 16-17 have been referred since November 2012. Thirty nine of these referrals are from young people in Elmbridge – the fourth highest of the 11 Surrey boroughs.

Although figures for October to December 2013 show an improvement in the referral rate from homeless Elmbridge young people, there are still between four and 10 new 16 and 17 year olds in the borough looking for emergency accommodation every three months. There are efforts to review and develop sustainable housing solutions for young people in Elmbridge but if these homeless young people need to be placed into emergency accommodation it will invariably be outside of the borough.

It is likely there are more young people who are homeless and 'sofa-surfing' but have not presented to the homeless prevention service for assistance. There are also families placed in temporary accommodation inside and outside the borough who can expect a significant period in accommodation, which will often not adequately meet their needs.

As already noted the prospect of any young person successfully moving into independent accommodation is made extremely difficult through high rents and insufficient capacity of social housing. For those who are unable to stay with parents (for many of the reasons already identified such as parental mental ill health, substance misuse or domestic violence), the prospect of establishing themselves independently in Elmbridge is extremely limited.



## 4. Effective practice and 'what works'

There are no shortage of good practice examples of individuals and organisations working directly with vulnerable young people and their families in Elmbridge. There are particular examples of partnership working that appear to provide holistic and joined up ways of working with vulnerable families.

Examples where new approaches are being successfully developed:

- Elmbridge's children's centres provide holistic support for families with children under five in Elmbridge and are making strong links with teenage parents in tandem with the Youth Support Service team in Elmbridge.
- Family support initiatives are also being developed and led by the Diocese of Guildford enabling local people to volunteer to support vulnerable families in the borough. This builds upon work led by local churches and Walton Charity to develop the foodbank network.
- The young people's homelessness prevention service has successfully taken on responsibilities for the borough and the county's children's services to improve responses to young people who would otherwise be homeless.
- Rydens School is supporting vulnerable pupils through commissioning the Eikon charity to work with young people who are experiencing difficulties in school caused by a range of personal and emotional issues.

The features of effective intervention with young people and families in need of support have been well documented in an established body of research which give us confidence as to which approaches should be pursued (Allen 2011, Munro 2012, Field 2010).

Research supports interventions:

- that are whole-family focused, recognising the interdependent nature of the needs of individuals within the family system
- where services are provided by the team around a young person and their family, and are well co-ordinated (typically by a lead professional)
- where services are young person friendly and well-integrated so that there is no wrong door for someone in need, and where timely help is available when requested
- which support a young person's or family needs to be sufficiently intensive to enable enduring positive change to occur
- that draw upon a range of community resources in order to better integrate individuals and families within their community networks.

### **New ways of working:**

The Family Support Programme (known nationally as the 'troubled families' initiative) brings together professionals to ensure timely intervention for vulnerable and disadvantaged families in Elmbridge and across Surrey. Hosted by Elmbridge Borough Council the north Surrey team have provided bespoke, often intensive, support to 32 families in Elmbridge in the last year and as a result have reduced offending and anti-social behaviour, improved school attendance and access to employment.

The underpinning principles which should be promoted are that relationships are key to supporting change and should be built upon trust, respect and continuity. Critically

professionals have an enabling role which views the young person or family as having self-determination. The answers to the problems they experience will ultimately lie in the increased capacity of the individual, family or community not in an expert fix.

### **New ways of working:**

Walton Charity has established 'Charity House' for 12 local charities and social enterprises, currently across two locations. Office co-location provides opportunities for cross pollination of ideas and sharing of resources resulting in more efficient and effective service delivery. Walton Charity aims to establish a 'community' under one roof and enable charities and social enterprises to develop and respond to local needs.

There are numerous examples of services and individual projects that have succeeded in achieving positive outcomes for young people and their families. The aim is to build upon this best practice and ensure that effective support is available for all young people who need it before problems become acute. This work is being undertaken within a context of constrained public finances so it is critical that the most effective approaches continue to develop and that the capacity within the residents and voluntary sector in Elmbridge is enhanced to support public services. Through successfully harnessing these resources vulnerable young people will enjoy the benefits of growing up in Elmbridge alongside their more advantaged neighbours.

### **New ways of working:**

Youth crime is falling in Elmbridge and fewer young people are entering the criminal justice system than ever before thanks in part to the development of the youth restorative intervention (YRI). The YRI gives victims much greater involvement in the justice system and enables them to say what needs to be done to repair the harm caused by an offence. The effect of involvement with their victim and needing to put things right is reducing re-offending by young people.

The YRI was developed in collaboration between the County Council's Youth Support Service and Surrey Police supported by a range of voluntary sector organisation and businesses which in Elmbridge include Brooklands Museum, Painshill Park and Walton Charity.

## **5. How we will respond**

Based on the findings of this research, we will respond in three main ways: we will support practical initiatives that can make a difference to people's lives today; we will partner with others to help prevent problems and achieve long term change; and, where we can, we will influence wider change where it is beneficial to vulnerable young people and families.

As a partnership we will work together to:

- align strategic priorities for young people across Surrey County Council, Elmbridge Borough Council and voluntary, community and faiths sector and seek opportunities to jointly commissioning services
- align budgets around agreed priorities with a single pot for grant funding and private giving overseen by a forum which will agree funding priorities

- access the untapped resources (skills, time and money) in Elmbridge to support vulnerable families and young people and seek to build upon the capacity and resilience of our more vulnerable families and disadvantaged communities
- engage businesses to better understand and help to address challenges in the local community including increasing access to employment for local young people
- ensure early help services are available for young people and families to prevent issues from becoming acute
- work in partnership to review and develop sustainable housing solutions for young people
- work together to tackle child poverty, domestic abuse and health inequalities
- work to align the priorities emerging from the Streets Apart initiative with related public service transformation work which is ongoing across Surrey.

## 6. Recommended next steps

To achieve the aims outlined above, it is recommended that we take the following next steps:

- i) Develop the Youth Task Group to take on responsibilities around strategy, priorities and allocation of resources and provide political oversight through the Elmbridge local area committee (lead: Surrey County Council).
- ii) Develop an Elmbridge Community Chest that has a mechanism for allocation for specific areas of need, which will include young people (lead: Walton Charity).
- iii) Through continued partnership, work to develop supported accommodation for vulnerable young people and enhance broader housing provision for Elmbridge young people (lead: Elmbridge Borough Council).
- iv) Influence borough and county strategy and commissioning to support the reduction in child poverty, domestic abuse and improve health equality (lead: Surrey County Council).
- v) Ensure commissioning of young people's services supports the development of initiatives to provide bridges between local vulnerable people and local businesses and that current re-commissioning of Surrey County Council services is undertaken collaboratively with local partners (lead: Surrey County Council).
- vi) Promote the inclusion of socially isolated individuals and families, building upon the opportunities that exist through the planned extension of the Family Support Programme, and through an enhanced role for volunteers and the voluntary, community and faiths sector in Elmbridge to work collaboratively with public services (lead: Elmbridge Borough Council).
- vii) Continue to work to enhance those neighbourhoods which are most isolated and disadvantaged, ensuring in this that access to affordable transport and accessibility of services and facilities is considered (lead: Elmbridge Borough Council).
- viii) Undertake further research into wider issues of poverty, inequality and social exclusion in Elmbridge (lead: Walton Charity).

ix) Ensure support is available to vulnerable young people as part of Surrey's early help strategy which aims to provide the right services for young people and their families at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent issues from becoming acute. This support needs to be mapped and easily accessible for those who need it (lead: Surrey County Council).

x) Responses to young people's emotional wellbeing and healthy relationships need to be strengthened and work with schools, colleges and health providers will be critical to this (lead: Surrey County Council).

### How will we know we have made a difference?

The young people who were the subject of this report have said they feel marginalised within the community, that some services are not responsive to their needs, and that the help they need often comes too late, if it comes at all. The Youth Task Group and Elmbridge Impact youth forum provide opportunities to address this marginalisation and to test out young people's views (with particular focus upon the most marginalised) of the services they receive to see if progress is being made.

Key outcomes we are seeking to improve based on the findings of the report are:

- **reduced homelessness** and particularly the use of out-of-borough placements
- **more young people participating** in education, training and employment (notably at the critical transition point in Year 12)
- **fewer young people requiring acute social care and mental health services** in the borough (this will require enhanced 'early help' services for young people and their families).

The key factor identified as underpinning many of the negative outcomes experienced by young people in Elmbridge is economic deprivation and the numbers of children in poverty in the borough should be a key indicator of the success of this work.

In order to take forward the 'Streets Apart' work the Youth Task Group (comprised of young people, elected members and officers from both Surrey County Council and Elmbridge Borough Council) will need to review its terms of reference to provide the drive to progress the key strands of work identified. The governance for the Youth Task Group is provided by the local area committee (Surrey County Council and Elmbridge Borough Council elected members). It is proposed that a report from the Youth Task Group on the Streets Apart work streams is brought at least annually to the Elmbridge local area committee.

## **Acknowledgements**

This report draws upon independent research by Rob Compton (CASS Business School) building upon the earlier work, 'Hidden Surrey' (Helen Bowcock) and 'Surrey Uncovered' (Sian Sangarde Brown – Community Foundation for Surrey).

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