

Submission to the Boundary Commission for England second period of consultation: **South East of England**

1) HAMPSHIRE

Eastleigh / Hedge End & Hamble

The official Conservative response stated that the party was in favour of bringing into Eastleigh Test Valley wards and a Southampton ward currently in the Romsey constituency because of the “good communication links”.

However the Liberal Democrats would argue that, far from improving communication and community links, these proposals will make it harder for the MP to develop strong links with the three different local authorities’ council staff and councillors, threatening to reduce the effectiveness of the representation from the constituency’s MP.

The proposals bring together communities that have very little in common (e.g. Swaything, Ampfield, Fair Oak) and divides some of them down the middle (West End), because ward boundaries can be arbitrary.

Putting Swaything into Eastleigh is likely to result in lower turnout in this deprived area, because the community relates more strongly to Southampton. This happened when Woolston was added to Eastleigh in the 1980s.

Splitting the parishes within the current Eastleigh constituency by cutting an arbitrary line right across a well established community of villages and parishes will provide a serious barrier to sensible and coherent representation of this community, pitting one half of a borough against another, and have the potential to de-stabilise the area. The results of the constituency opinion poll commissioned by Rt. Hon. Chris Huhne MP and submitted to the Boundary Commission resoundingly support this conclusion.

The official Conservative submission also states: ““We support the composition of the proposed Hedge End and Hamble constituency which links together a number of communities with good communication links centred on Southampton Water and the River Hamble. We would rename the constituency The Hamble to reflect the river that is a uniting factor between the Fareham and Eastleigh parts of the constituency.”

However the Boundary Commission has stated in its guide to this review that *special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency*, will be considered in this review. It is clearly stated that the *statutory electorate range will primarily relate to physical geography such as mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, estuaries and islands*. The argument put forward by the Conservative Party that the river will be a ‘uniting factor’ for this proposed new constituency is clearly in contravention of the Boundary Commission’s guiding

principles in this review. Far from the River Hamble being a ‘uniting factor’, it is clear that the river acts as a natural barrier between Fareham and the Eastleigh part of the constituency. The River Hamble should remain as a natural boundary between constituencies, instead of being a barrier to two halves of one entirely new constituency, as with BCE’s Hedge End & Hamble seat.

The Commission has received one submission from one Conservative activist in Eastleigh, Paul Redding (001267). He stood as a Conservative candidate in Hedge End, as recently as March 2012. The comment is in favour of the boundary proposals, but offers no reasons for them, and no details beyond a simple ‘Agree’. Mr Redding fails to express why he or the Eastleigh Conservatives feel that splitting up the parishes within the current Eastleigh constituency is a sensible idea, or would be in the best interests of Eastleigh’s residents.

Finally, it has been heartening to see many submissions from the public disagreeing with the BCE’s plans to place the ward of Bitterne in the Hedge End & Hamble constituency, for example Gary Swanston (00525). The respondents make it clear that Bitterne is very much part of Southampton, with little or no connection with Hedge End or Hamble or the issues in these areas. This confirms the argument put forward by the Liberal Democrats that there is no community of interest between Bitterne and Titchfield Common. As argued by the Liberal Democrat submission, moving Bitterne to this new seat is likely to suppress turnout in this area of deprivation due to lack of community interest, as happened when Woolston was added to Eastleigh in the 1980s.

2) PORTSMOUTH

The official Conservative Party submission for Portsmouth is very brief and makes no attempt to propose a minimum change plan by merely splitting one ward, which is a pity as the Liberal Democrats have illustrated that this can be achieved with minimum disruption. The Conservative submission also enthusiastically endorses the inclusion of two orphan wards in the proposed East and West constituencies, which we believe do not meet the stated criteria of minimal disruption to current coterminousness of constituencies and local authorities.

The Labour proposal for Portsmouth, sadly, is nakedly partisan as it is the only ward configuration possible that keeps Labour second in one of East / West seats. We believe it should be discounted on these grounds.

3) OXFORDSHIRE

NB The Liberal Democrat map submitted in the first consultation was incorrect (not matching the proposal) in respect of Kirtlington ward which was not placed in Henley as it should have been. We also proposed calling the Henley seat “Henley and Kidlington” although this is described in some places as “Kidlington and Henley”

Conservative official submission

Overall the Conservative proposals

- do not respect rivers as natural boundaries in Oxford’s city centre;

- are internally contradictory as they proclaim the virtue of major rivers as boundaries in support of leaving Radley in the existing Oxford West & Abingdon but do not apply this virtue in Oxford City Centre;
- are inconsistent as they, rightly, criticise the Boundary Commission proposal for creating an orphan ward (Radley) and thus not being compliant with rule 1d, but then they create two new orphan wards (Otmoor and Hook Norton) and an orphan twin (Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook, compared to the Lib Dem proposal which have no orphan wards, twins or triplets
- are incoherent as, in their summary for the South East overall, rightly argue for maximising local authority fits (rule 1b) but their Oxfordshire proposals do not respect existing local authority boundaries (for example splitting Cherwell DC four ways, and ending the long-standing co-terminosity of Witney with West Oxfordshire DC), compared with either the Boundary Commission or especially the Liberal Democrat proposals

Going into specific issues we have with the Conservative submission:

- 1) *Transfers two wards (Carfax and North) from the current Oxford West & Abingdon into the current Oxford East*

This

- creates two Oxford constituencies without a clear boundary. The boundary would be the centre of minor roads, and the back garden fences of residential roads. This can be seen very clearly in this map of Oxford North Ward boundaries <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Direct/38881North.pdf>. This is particularly damaging in a University City Centre because many thousand voters who are students move residence each year and will find it difficult to relate to a particular constituency, both of which are very different. When the boundary between East and West Oxford seats first changed from the rivers to road markings, footpaths and back gardens, the turnout of student voters in the city centre fell significantly
- removes the heart of West Oxford and North Oxford from the seat of Abingdon and Oxford North / West; by doing so fails to respect respecting community links and fails to use natural boundaries (the river), even though they proclaim this virtue elsewhere in their Oxfordshire submission
- divides the City Council “North Oxford” Area Forum (previously Area Committee) between two seats for the first time
- cuts off the three remaining North Oxford wards from the other part of the City (Jericho and Osney) in the rest of the constituency, because the boundary of Oxford East would under their proposals cut right across the city, cutting off any road links in the city between the two parts. This is obvious from a map of the City, for example this map from the City Council <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Direct/SOAPfilesHolywellandCarfaxWards.pdf>
- divides the University of Oxford and the City Centre more than the Liberal Democrat proposal, as there are 4 major colleges in the remaining Oxford West wards

- 2) *Transfers two Cherwell District Council wards, one from Banbury and one from Henley into the existing Oxford West & Abingdon constituency*

This

- leaves an orphan Cherwell District Council ward (Otmoor) in Henley;
- makes Oxford West & Abingdon very long and banana-shaped;
- is artificial compared to the Boundary Commission and Liberal Democrat proposals in this area as it leaves Launton ward in the Banbury seat, requiring the move of Hook Norton ward of Cherwell DC into Witney (see 4 below)
- is a breach of rule 1d as it creates the two orphan wards mentioned above and in breach of rule 1b as it splits Cherwell DC 4 ways (compared to the Lib Dem proposal which splits it two ways and creates no orphan wards)
- and is internally inconsistent since here they argue that the A34 dual carriageway trunk road with no footbridges, which passes through one of the wards added and some of the rest of the constituency, usefully “unites” the seat, while elsewhere they argue that a similar road, with footbridges - the Oxford ring road - usefully divides two seats (see point 3 below)

- 3) *Transfers two urban wards (Blackbird Leys) from the existing Oxford East to rural Henley*

This is incoherent as

- It would involve placing an urban estate on the far edge of a rural seat
- the suggestion that ring road forms a new natural boundary is not consistent with the fact that the ring road is crossed in three other places in the City and is internally inconsistent with the view in (2) above that main roads unite communities they pass through
- disrupts existing strong and long-standing community links
- breaches rule 1b by creating an orphan twin ward from Oxford City in a third seat
- is more disruptive to local authority boundaries (Rule 1b) by splitting Oxford City between three seats instead of two (as the Boundary Commission and the Lib Dems propose) and involves the Henley seat spread over three local authorities (which the Conservatives criticise in the Boundary Commission proposals in respect of Radley) compared to the Liberal Democrat proposals which have only two local authorities in Henley constituency

- 4) *Transfers one Cherwell District Council ward (Hook Norton) from Banbury to Witney – which is currently coterminous with West Oxfordshire District Council*

This

- creates an orphan Cherwell District Council ward in Witney (breach of rule 1d)
- splits Cherwell DC four ways (breach of rule 1b)
- destroys the co-terminosity of Witney with West Oxfordshire District Council (breach of rule 1d)
- is a clear breach of rule 1b the virtue of respecting they stress elsewhere in their submission

We agree with the Conservative Party's arguments (and those of many local residents) about how the Boundary Commission proposal for Radley is a breach of Rule 1a in not respecting rivers, with no or few crossings, as natural boundaries.

Rule 1b on respecting local authority boundaries can be measured objectively. By this measure the Conservative counter-proposal is clearly worse than the Boundary Commission proposals, while the Liberal Democrat Counter-proposal is clearly better.

Proposal	Cumulative Seats times Local authorities
Boundary Commission/Labour	11
Conservative	12
Liberal Democrat	10

Labour official submission

- The Labour Party, in supporting the Boundary Commission proposal, argue against Liberal Democrat proposals to transfer Hinksey Park, which lies to the west of the river, from Oxford East into our proposed Abingdon and Oxford West. They argue that Hinksey Park shares community ties with areas to the east of the river
- However, there is only one bridge across Thames at the very south end of the long, thin ward; making access to Oxford East difficult. Hinksey Park has many more links with the city centre, in Oxford West & Abingdon, than with communities in Oxford East
- The City Council has always and voluntarily grouped Hinksey Park ward with 3 other wards, lying west of the river (Holywell, in a South, West and Central Area Committee (now Area Forum). This would remain split under the Labour and the Boundary Commission proposal but reunited under the Liberal Democrat one
- In contrast the County Council Divisions which Labour's submission cites are artificial and accepted as such in Oxford City. The rule in the City was that there would be 8 two-member divisions each made up of three city wards, regardless of local links. There are 8 wards lying west of the rivers and thus two of these had to be grouped artificially with a ward east of the river, which is why Holywell and Hinksey Park wards have to share a County Division with an East Oxford ward (Iffley Fields).
- The Labour Party submission supports splitting Oxford City Centre and the University of Oxford down the middle. Aside from the Rule 1d which seeks to prevent splitting strong community ties, this is problematic for participation and turn-out as there are about 12,000 students in the City Centre, most of whom move residence each year. By using the recognised boundary of the rivers between east and west Oxford these voters would more easily understand which constituency they were in. It is harder for them to understand that they move constituencies from Oxford West to Oxford East when crossing the small Parks Road and Catte Street or crossing the High Street north-south, which is the boundary supported by the Labour Party

Other submissions

Various submissions have been received from the Conservatives and local residents in the four Henley wards we propose moving to our Oxford East. They argue that it is somehow the equivalent of moving the wards into Oxford City Council itself, which is wrong and a complete misunderstanding of what the Boundary Review is about.

It is true that there are strong local links between the four wards which is why the Liberal Democrats propose keeping them together in the Oxford East seat.

Far from being an orphan ward, these four wards would make up a significant part of the Oxford East seat in population and area and would not be a mere add on.

These wards have far stronger links with the City in terms of transport, work, leisure and services than with the Henley population centre which is much further away in the far south east of the existing Henley seat.

They state the Lib Dem counter-proposal would aid development of the greenbelt, which as you know is completely wrong as that is not affected by parliamentary constituency changes.

The local Conservatives in this area say that it is unacceptable to group rural seats with urban wards in constituencies but propose doing precisely this in the south Cherwell area by adding Kirtlington and Ambroseden and Chesterton to Oxford West, and claiming that Kidlington, Begnbroke, Gosford and Yarnton villages must be linked to Oxford City rather than with the rest of south Cherwell in the Henley seats as we propose.

2) The Boundary Commission has also received submissions from residents of Launton, Ambroseden and Chesterton in Banbury, objecting to plans by the Boundary Commission; the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party to break ties that those wards currently have with Bicester. However the Boundary Commission is right to recognise that the Banbury seat is too big, that two wards must move; and that these are the only ones that abut another seat in the sub-region in a way that allows the transfer in a way that does not breach rule 1a (splitting off parts of Banbury constituency) and breach rule 1b (creating orphan wards, and splitting Cherwell four ways) as the Conservatives propose.

The Liberal Democrats recognise that the southern Cherwell wards have a distinct identity and community of interest and that is why we group all seven of them together in one seat of Henley and Kidlington, rather than splitting them up as the Boundary Commission propose.

5) EAST SUSSEX

Lewes and Brighton East / Uckfield

Local residents within the existing Lewes consistency have sent over 700 responses outlining their deep concern at losing their own unique identity and history. The vast

majority, over 80% of those who wrote in, disagreed with the proposals to split apart their existing, established communities and put into an artificial constituency with urban Brighton.

The overlying themes were:

- The strong local history of Lewes as the county town and surrounding communities – and the need to protect it through a dedicated parliamentary seat
- The lost unique identity of Lewes if it were to be overwhelmed by a urban majority in the Boundary Commission's proposed seat
- The lost of Lewes's existing community links with Ringmer, Seaford & Newhaven
- The damages to democratic representation that Lewes and its surrounding villages would lose if their voice was drowned out by being incorporated into a Brighton seat.
- People in Newhaven and Seaford have complained that they would have transport problems to even see their MP

Many residents in Lewes and the surrounding villages noted the negative effect these changes would have on their democratic representation. They clearly stated that it would be extremely difficult for an MP of Lewes and East Brighton to fully support the two extremely different communities. Due to the unique differences between rural and urban life, its very likely that one of the two communities will feel forgotten.

Many pointed that the sub-regions should be changed to allow Brighton and Hove to move West towards Shoreham, which already feel part of Brighton & hove and is an most urban community. It is pleasing to see so much support in the community for proposals put forward in the Liberal Democrat submission.

Residents in Ringmer, Newhaven and Seaford also noted the damage these changes would have on their democratic representation. Many pointed out that while there is regular public transport links to get to Lewes, there is no direct public transport from Newhaven or Seaford to Uckfield. This would make it extremely difficult and costly for residents – particularly disabled people and those who don't drive – to see their MP.

Throughout the 700+ responses the overriding theme was the damage that these proposed changes would do to the close relationship and community links between all the towns and villages of the current Lewes constituency.

Lewes is the historic county town of East Sussex and because of this it has built up strong community relations. The surrounding towns and villages all look to Lewes. Many local residents pointed out that these changes look to be a matter of administrative ease rather than protecting the local community. This is due to the fact that the current plans would divide the local District Council between two seats and remove Ringmer from the Lewes constituency despite the village being only three miles from Lewes.

A significant large number of residents wrote in supporting the Liberal Democrat alternative measure to add Uckfield with Lewes Constituency and allow Polegate to move into Wealden. Many responses pointed out that Uckfield shares many similar qualities with the town of Lewes and Lewes already has established transport links to Uckfield. Many submissions also stated that Polegate often looks more to Eastbourne and Wealden district council than it does to Lewes or Seaford.

We would like to endorse these submissions and urge the Assistant Commissioners to consider very carefully all options on the table that keep Lewes as the centre of a constituency, separate from Brighton.

We would also like to reiterate the importance of keeping historic Sussex together, instead of forming a sub-region of East Sussex and Kent. We strongly believe this would be a retrograde and unnecessary move that would set a dangerous precedent. We welcome the support of many submissions to the Liberal Democrat proposals to link East and West Sussex instead, which already share many services – including emergency services. Many people have made impassioned arguments for keeping Sussex linked, protecting its history, and we hope the Assistant Commissioners will consider these arguments very carefully and use this opportunity to make clear to the Boundary Commission that this would be a mistake and should be reversed.

6) KENT

Gillingham & Rainham

The Commission has received 1,898 representations, many in the form of petitions and duplicate proformas, relating to the single ward of Hempstead & Wigmore. Respondents said they wished to see this kept in Gillingham & Rainham – see URN 30018. The arguments in support of the BCE proposal are set out by Paul Clark, past Labour Member of Parliament for the existing Gillingham and Rainham constituency and current Secretary of the Constituency Labour Party – see URN 025333. However while the BCE proposal does cause a local anomaly, any attempt to avoid this appears to create more and – in total – more serious anomalies elsewhere.