

Local Government Boundary Commission
Windsor House
First Floor
50 Victoria Street
SW1H 0TL

10th April 2022

Dear Sir,

Consultation on Draft Proposals for Brighton and Hove

I write in my capacity as the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. By way of background, I was selected as candidate in [REDACTED]
speaking to residents, knocking on doors, attending community events and embedding myself within the local community. I therefore offer my experiences to help inform the commission's work and the proposals for Withdean ward which are of particular interest to me.

I must state categorically, that I support, in the strongest terms the proposals for this ward, with its abolition and replacement with the proposed Fiveways, Preston, and Westdene & Hove Park wards. My reasons for doing so are detailed below:

1. The Commission's proposals better reflect the communities within the current Withdean Ward

Withdean ward is both geographically large and straddles key north-south arterial routes hemming in and forming distinct communities. **The current ward is poor at representing a single identifiable community which are numerous.** To put it bluntly, Westdene feels completely different to the Fiveways community around Balfour Road – community groups and issues affecting these residents rarely crossed over.

The housing styles are very different from north to south of the current road leading to very different neighbourhoods and community feel. The area at the south of the current ward around Balfour Road is mainly terraced houses, and is semi-urban compared to the more northerly aspects of the ward which is distinctly suburban, and as the Urban Characterisation study put it can even be "semi-rural".

I should also note that the "lived experience" of the residents is reflected in communities hewn along such lines as recognised by the commission. The most notable of this is of course, education with Westdene pupils attending separate secondary schools to the rest of the ward. It is right that the Varndean campus should sit within one ward since the schools co-operate on many issues not least the transition from primary to secondary and on to further education. There was considerable public anger at proposals put forward by the then Labour Administration in 2016 to split this community when reviewing school catchment areas. Moreover, as a Governor of Balfour Primary until 2019, parents felt clearly aligned to the Fiveways area – which was the predominant catchment – despite being within Withdean ward.

Other services such as dentists, shopping parades and GPs are likewise utilized by their local catchments as identified hitherto.

2. The Proposed names of the wards themselves reflect the communities represented

In truth I found few residents identified with the name Withdean except from the very few in the immediate hinterland of the Stadium. Recognising Westdene in the name of a ward has my full support; the area is distinct, identifiable and enjoys community support. In recent years the Friends of Westdene Green led the community push to recognise the former bowling green as such as a community space for this neighbourhood.

Preston with its roots in the old village of the same name and indeed parish was also geographically distinct from its northern neighbour with the wooded fringe of the stadium serving as a clear demarcation point, and makes sense to draw the boundary in this way. Recognising the needs of this area of the ward were different to Westdene's, along with Councillors Norman, we pledged to establish a regular surgery within Preston Village to better represent this area.

Moving to the east of the ward, the neighbourhood once again feels unique with the Fiveways area. Many residents often joined the Fiveways LAT, despite it covering Preston Park ward.

3. The current Withdean ward separates communities from their natural hinterland

Residents in Preston Village and at the northern edge of Preston Park instinctively identified with this community, as did residents in the Balfour Road area identify as Fiveways residents. **The current ward boundaries of Withdean have effectively inserted artificial political boundaries and separated these communities.**

4. Westdene and Hove Park face several issues in common

Overall, the ward unites two communities of interest that have separated been from each other in the past by the arbitrary Dyke Road Boundary. During my term residents from either side frequently confused the boundary. The transport corridors and patterns of living do not reflect these political boundaries.

The ward includes a number of shared and common Community Groups shared by Westdene & Hove Park. This includes the Tongdean Conservation Area, exemplified by common nomenclature in the area with several streets in Hove Park & Westdene named 'Tongdean'. The wards also share the Parish Boundary of the Church of the Good Shephard.

I should also add that until the catchments were changed over a decade ago the secondary school catchment area for Westdene was indeed Hove based schools. (The change was based on the financial viability of Patcham School and was opposed by parents rather than a change due to geography).

5. The proposals would allow for better representation of these communities and their interests

Having dedicated Councillors representing these distinct areas would ultimately be beneficial for the residents who live there. At times as a councillor for such a diverse area it was a challenge to meet the conflicting interests and needs of residents. This was typified by the wish of residents in Preston Village and Balfour areas to join a parking scheme despite opposition from elsewhere in the ward.

To **conclude** therefore, I feel that the commission's proposals would benefit the residents who made up the current Withdean ward, are more accountable and will improve the quality of decision making.

They better reflect community life, as recognised from local groups to community magazines, and services.

I must also state that for me representing and championing the residents of such a ward has been a privilege of a lifetime. I will always be forever grateful that nearly 3000 residents chose me to represent them. Whilst, it will be sad to erase this ward from the map, I also recognise the commission's proposals for correcting long held and a series of anomalies in the current boundaries.

It should also be noted these proposals fit the criteria of the Commission and are within acceptable variances.

I look forward to reading your final proposals in due course.

With faithful regards,

