

Sandwell

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Organisation Name: Smethwick Constituency Labour Party (Political groups)

Comment text:

Related subject: St Pauls Ward, Langley Ward, Blackheath, Rowley and Cradley Heath and Old Hill Wards

This submission is being made on behalf of the Smethwick Constituency Labour Party.

Proposals for Soho and Victoria, Smethwick, Bearwood (Abbey), Bristnall and Old Warley Wards.

Smethwick Constituency Labour Party supports the proposals from the Commission for the new boundaries for Soho and Victoria Ward, Smethwick Ward, Bristnall Ward and Old Warley Ward.

In addition, the Party is supportive of the proposed changes to the boundaries of Abbey Ward and to the proposal to rename the ward as Bearwood Ward. The old Warley Abbey was derelict from the 1920s and demolished in 1954, so has not been a major landmark for over seventy years. The area is known locally as Bearwood and the new boundaries taking in the remainder of Bearwood Road will make this identification even stronger. We note also that a previous Council ward to cover the area was also known as Bearwood.

Proposal for Langley Ward.

We are supportive of the proposal for Langley Ward with one minor exception. Boundary Avenue, on the border between the existing Langley Ward and Blackheath Ward, has a much greater community connection to Blackheath than to Langley. We believe it was included in the Langley Ward at the last boundary review for reasons of electoral equality, however moving it from Langley to Blackheath would not prejudice electoral equality for either ward, but would more closely match the interests and identities of the local community, which looks to Blackheath and its amenities. We note that the Council proposed this to be moved in its original submission to the Commission and has again done so in its most recent submission. We support this proposal.

Proposal for St. Pauls Ward.

We support the majority of the boundaries for St Pauls Ward, but would like to submit a suggested change to the proposed border with Oldbury

Ward in the area around Crystal Drive and West End Avenue. We would like to submit that this border be changed back to reflect the current border, specifically to run between the M5 and the A457 to the rear of Crystal Drive, then between Tram Way and Beresford Road and along the boundary of George Betts Primary School premises between the A457 the railway line.

West End Avenue and George Betts School are connected to and serve the St Pauls and West Smethwick area, and are separated from the rest of the proposed Oldbury Ward by several industrial estates, the canal and the M5 motorway. The residents and the school look to the amenities of St Pauls not Oldbury for this very reason. In addition, there are plans to turn the Chance Brothers site into a residential and heritage development by the Chance Heritage Trust, which has recently purchased the site. Chance Brothers was a glass manufactory which made the glass for the Crystal Palace (hence the names Crystal Drive and Palace Drive), the Houses of Parliament and the U.S. White House, as well as specialising in Lighthouse lenses, contributing to over 4,000 lighthouses worldwide. The factory site is divided in half on the current proposals, which would divide that development, as well as placing the nationally recognised heritage asset not only in two different wards, but in two different towns – which are the sub-Borough structure used by the Council – which would create confusion in responsibility and funding lines. The proposal would also place West End Avenue and George Betts School in different Parliamentary constituencies to the rest of the proposed ward, which would again cause confusion and be detrimental to the identity of the community.

Considering the Boundary Commissions stated objectives, we believe that returning this boundary to the current one as detailed above would not put either the St Pauls or Oldbury Wards out of scope for the purposes of electoral equality, but would improve both the efficiency of local government and be more reflective of the identities and interests of the local communities.

Proposal for Blackheath Ward.

We have significant concerns with the proposed Blackheath and Old Hill Ward. The new ward includes significant areas around the Brickhouse Farm area on the border with Dudley which have no connection, historic, community or transport, with Blackheath town centre, which is on the exact opposite Borough border with Birmingham, nor does it have any connection to Old Hill. This area strongly identifies with Rowley, and that should be reflected in the local government ward boundaries.

In addition, the proposal moves the Waterfall Lane area – which is an integral part of Blackheath, and has been separated from the Cradley Heath and Old Hill area since the 19th Century by the railway line and canal – into the proposed new Cradley Heath ward. This area has no community ties to Cradley Heath, because of the natural boundaries between the communities, and is less than half a mile from Blackheath Town Centre.

In addition, the proposal moves part of Old Hill into the Blackheath Ward, whilst leaving significant sections around Petford Street in the Cradley Heath Ward. Cradley Heath and Old Hill have formed a coherent community since they merged during urban sprawl in the 19th Century, as can be seen by the number of Facebook groups referencing the two areas as a combined community. They jointly celebrate the Chainmakers Festival, a commemoration of the women chainmakers strike, which is a source of great local pride in Cradley Heath and Old Hill but not Blackheath.

In addition, the proposal splits the Blackheath Ward into three Parliamentary constituencies, making joint working between the layers of government more difficult and problematic as well as being confusing for local residents.

We have seen the response from the local council and would like to indicate our support for the proposed boundaries they have come back to the commission with. We feel that they meet the criteria for electoral equality but are a far better balance of the interests and identities of the local communities in the three affected wards, as well as allowing for more efficient local government.

We note that the Sandwell Conservative Group has – via their leader Cllr William Gill – supported this proposal against that submitted by a Conservative Councillor and Conservative Group in Halesowen, in the neighbouring Borough of Dudley, who do not live in nor represent the local area of Cradley Heath and Old Hill. We also note that the proposal is supported by the Green Party Councillor John Tipper who represents Cradley Heath and Old Hill as well as the Labour Group and Independent Councillor Richard Jeffcoat, all of whom have been involved in the Council's submission.

Attached Documents:

- smethwick-clp-submission-to-the-boundary-review.docx

Smethwick CLP submission to the boundary review.

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