

Appendix 2: Merton Council’s proposed response to the 2018 Boundary Review of Parliamentary constituencies consultation

Set out below is the proposed response of the London Borough of Merton to the proposals for new constituency boundaries under the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. We would strongly urge the Boundary Commission to reassess their initial proposals which we believe will have a negative impact on the residents of Merton in terms of representation and partnership working and on the local communities that make up the borough. Of the five criteria set for the review, one of which is not relevant to Merton, it is in our view that the current proposal fails to meet all four of the other criteria. Our detailed reasons are set out below according to the criteria.

Each new constituency must have an electorate no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507

It is noted that the BC were required to use electorate figures as at 1 December 2015 when making their calculations, however the number of parliamentary electors for the proposed constituency of Merton and Wimbledon Central currently stands at 81,272 as at 1 September 2016 (the most recent update to the register of electors). This is 2,705 electors over the Boundary Commission’s maximum electorate quota of 78,507 for any new constituency.

Comparison of the constituency electorate figures for the two existing constituencies between the figure on 1 December 2015 and 1 September 2016 means that the Boundary Commission proposals are based on an electorate figure that excludes a large number of voters that registered to vote ahead of the EU referendum in June.

	Mitcham and Morden	Wimbledon
1 December 2015	65,682	62,979
1 September 2016	69,129	67,122

With a growing population and a projected minimum number of housing completions of 2,640 net residential units in the planning pipeline to be built between 2016-2021, we believe that it is a reasonable assumption that by 2020 the size of the Merton and Wimbledon Central constituency will be considerably higher than the upper limit set for the Boundary Commission’s review. Merton’s planned regeneration activities already exceed the housing targets well into the mid 2020s.

We would also note that with projected population growth based on the supply of new residential accommodation in the development pipeline it is highly likely that both of Merton’s existing constituencies will pass the minimum threshold by 2020.

Local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015 and Boundaries of existing constituencies

The Boundary Commission states that while it proposes to identify constituencies by reference to local authority external boundaries, it has often been necessary to cross these in order to form constituencies that comply with the statutory electoral range. The Boundary Commission has said it is seeking to avoid splitting wards. The Boundary Commission states that they have not treated any existing constituency as more immune to change than any other, but have considered the effects of retaining any existing constituencies in the application of all the statutory factors across the 68 constituencies.

Merton is one of only four other boroughs in London that have been divided across five or more constituencies, the average being three. Of the others split across five or more - Lambeth, Croydon and Enfield - all are significantly larger in area and population than Merton. As noted, Merton is currently divided across two constituencies. Of the three other boroughs to be divided across five or more constituencies, Croydon and Enfield are currently divided across three, while Lambeth includes two coterminous constituencies and one across a boundary with Southwark. This makes Merton the worst affected borough in the whole of London by these changes. Surely it is the role of the Boundary Commission to avoid such disproportionate impacts and ensure that proposals are fairly and evenly balanced.

In South West London, Merton is also disproportionately affected; for comparison Kingston, Richmond and Sutton will be divided across two constituencies, while Wandsworth will be divided across three.

Merton is undergoing a period of significant change. Major regeneration initiatives are planned to the west of the borough, in particular linked to Crossrail 2. Wimbledon will become the main transport hub for the southwest of London. Allied to this is a programme of significant growth in retail, leisure, office and residential developments. To the east of the borough there are major regeneration initiatives underway in Mitcham and Morden, and a programme of redeveloping the majority of the social housing stock.

The table below sets out the planned major developments in Merton; highlighting the housing numbers and projected population increase, assuming an average across the board of 3 people per home.

Proposed Constituency	Former Constituency	Major Development	Housing Capacity	Potential Population increase
Wimbledon Common & Putney	Wimbledon	Plough Lane	600	1800
		Vantage	100	300
		Volante	100	300
			800	2400
Merton & Wimbledon Central	Wimbledon	High Path	1200	3600
		Raynes Park	400	
	Mitcham & Morden	Colliers Wood	350	1200
		Morden Centre	1100	3300
			120	660
			180	540
			3350	10,050
Streatham & Mitcham	Mitcham & Morden	Eastfields	800	2400
		Pollards Hill	100	300
			900	2700
Sutton & Cheam	Mitcham & Morden	Haig Village	120	360
			120	360
Projected Totals c2020			5170	15,510

Within Merton's planned growth (and part of the London Plan SHLAA) the proposed Merton and Wimbledon Central constituency could have an addition 10,000 people living there by the mid 2020s.

The level of growth enabled by Crossrail 2 may not be delivered until 2025-2035 and does not form part of Merton's Local Plan or the London Plan yet. However the additional development capacity is thought to be around 5000 new homes (15,000 people) which would be located mainly in the new Wimbledon Common & Putney and Wimbledon Central constituencies.

It is clear that the proposed boundaries and constituency sizes are not based on a robust assessment of the future populations post 2020. A similar assessment would be beneficial for neighbouring boroughs who would share a proposed constituency with Merton.

Under the current arrangements the residents of Merton are well served by having two MPs focusing on the issues that will have a major impact on the borough. The new proposals dilute and potentially weaken representation for Merton residents by having five MPs who cannot focus fully on these issues. It will be extremely difficult for the Council, along with its statutory and voluntary sector partners to engage with five MPs on the major social and economic issues facing the borough.

The large number of cross-borough constituencies will also have a significant impact on administering elections, with Merton wards being split across a total of four

boroughs and five constituencies:

- The Returning Officer and lead borough for a constituency will be from the borough with the highest electorate in that constituency; under the proposals, Merton will be the lead borough for only one constituency rather than the two that it is currently.
- Merton's Returning Officer will still have responsibility for the administration of the poll for all Merton wards across five constituencies, (including all the associated risks) but will be subject to powers of direction in four constituencies from other Returning Officers, and will have no responsibility for those counts.
- During the election period Merton will have to exchange data regarding poll cards and postal votes with three other boroughs, thereby increasing the complexity of polling arrangements.
- At the close of poll Merton polling staff in cross boundary constituencies will be required to travel to count centres in Lambeth, Sutton and Wandsworth respectively. Late postal votes handed in at Merton polling stations in these cross boundary constituencies will have to be brought back to Merton Civic Centre to be processed, and then transported to count centres in the neighbouring boroughs, which will certainly delay the count process in those areas. It should also be noted that a consequence of the timing of the next Parliamentary election on 7 May 2020 is that this will coincide with the GLA elections, thereby exacerbating the complexity of arrangements.
- Apart from administrative issues, there is also a risk that consistency of voter experience in cross borough constituencies could be compromised, with voters in different parts of the borough being treated slightly differently depending on what constituency they are in – e.g. delivery date of their postal vote or poll card, and staffing allocation ratios in the polling stations.

Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies

As part of their proposals, the Boundary Commission has said that as far as possible, it has sought to create constituencies from wards that are adjacent to each other and that do not contain 'detached parts', i.e. where the only physical connection between one part of the constituency and the remainder would require travel through a different constituency. We believe that the proposed new constituencies will cut across and split a number of the boroughs natural neighbourhoods and communities.

Streatham and Mitcham - Mitcham is the main town centre and seen as the key retail destination of Merton for residents in the east of the borough. The proposed constituency of Streatham and Mitcham will include Figge's Marsh, Longthornton, and Pollards Hill wards, splitting them from Mitcham Town Centre which is on the border of Cricket Green and Figge's Marsh wards. Mitcham Eastfields station will be in the Streatham and Mitcham constituency. Under revisions to the 2011 proposals it was agreed by the Boundary Commission that Mitcham wards should be kept together.

Sutton and Cheam - Regeneration work on Morden town centre, including the creation of several hundred homes will be on the border of St Helier and Merton Park wards – meaning a split across two different constituencies (Merton and Wimbledon Central/Sutton and Cheam).

Wimbledon Common and Putney - Wimbledon Park ward, where the new Wimbledon Stadium is being developed will be part of a constituency which along with Village will include six wards from Wandsworth. Residents in Wandsworth and Wandsworth Council were in opposition to the planning and building of the new stadium.

We are also aware of the response by the London Borough of Wandsworth putting forward the recommendation that the proposed Wimbledon Common and Putney constituency, should it be agreed, be renamed to 'Putney and Wimbledon Common'. We strongly oppose this on the grounds of the international reputation that Wimbledon has, the presence of the All England Club and Wimbledon being the retail and transport hub for the South West London area.

Merton and Wimbledon Central - Wimbledon Village, Wimbledon Park and the common will be split from Wimbledon town centre, the main transport and retail hub for that area. Wimbledon town centre also contains half of Merton's jobs.

Tooting – under the proposals Graveney ward is to become an orphan ward as part of a constituency with wards from Wandsworth. Under revisions to the 2011 proposals the Boundary Commission saw this area and the Wandsworth ward of Furzedown that borders it as having strong ties to Streatham and Tooting, however the recommendation was for the area comprising these two wards to form part of a Merton-based constituency in order to enable the striking of 'a better balance between the statutory factors across South London'.

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