

PROPOSAL TO RETAIN MERTON PARK WARD IN WIMBLEDON & COOMBE BC

SUBMISSION FROM MERTON PARK WARD RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION (MPWRA)

SUMMARY

1. MPWRA recognises that the Boundary Commission faces a difficult task in achieving electoral equality while respecting local ties, and does not wish to make further changes to the proposed boundaries between Wimbledon and Coombe BC and Mitcham & Morden BC at this final stage of the consultation process, unless it can be convinced a fairer outcome is achieved by doing so.
2. Our proposal is to retain Merton Park Ward in the Wimbledon and Coombe BC as it is now, and to transfer Wandle Ward to the Mitcham & Morden BC. No further adjustments are required; by exchanging one 2-member ward for another, both constituencies remain well within the upper limit of the permitted range. The calculation is as follows, based on forecast 2025 electorates:

Wimbledon and Coombe – Wandle + Merton Park

$$\text{ie. } 75,714 - 5,805 + 6,228 = 76,137$$

Mitcham & Morden – Merton Park + Wandle

$$\text{ie. } 75,565 - 6,228 + 5,805 = 75,142$$

3. Responding to objections from Cannon Hill residents to their ward's proposed transfer to Mitcham & Morden BC, the Boundary Commission states that it is "*convinced by the evidence that Cannon Hill has ties to the wider Wimbledon area*". If this is the case, MPWRA's contention is that Merton Park has even stronger claims to be an integral part of the Wimbledon area, since it is nearer to Wimbledon town centre than Cannon Hill. You will have received numerous submissions from the residents of Merton Park demonstrating their ties, both practical and emotional, to Wimbledon.
4. However, MPWRA's purpose is not to assert the primacy of Merton Park's claims over those of Cannon Hill, since the proposal we put forward allows both to remain part of Wimbledon and Coombe BC. Rather it is to propose Wandle Ward as a suitable substitute for Merton Park in Mitcham & Morden BC. Wandle is a new and expanding ward, still forming ties with its neighbours, but increasingly these are towards the south and east, towards Colliers Wood and away from Wimbledon.
5. It is now for the Boundary Commission to decide which of these options minimises harm and disruption to the two communities of Merton Park and Wandle, given that boundaries must be changed to achieve electoral equality. MPWRA believes that the following detailed points demonstrate the case for Merton Park to remain in Wimbledon and Coombe BC.

EVIDENCE

Merton Park Ward's Community Links to Wimbledon

1. Merton Park Ward has been part of the Wimbledon Constituency ever since it was first established in 1885. Throughout the extensive Consultation process, there has been no indication at any stage that our Ward was being considered for transfer to another constituency.
2. The Ward is well served with public transport links to Wimbledon which makes it popular with commuters; rail, tram and three bus services all transport residents into central Wimbledon as their destination, or for onward journeys into central London.
3. Reactions received by MPWRA, our councillors, and in local social media make it very clear there is a majority opinion among our residents that they live in Wimbledon. Wimbledon is where our residents go for major shops, three theatres and two cinemas and local cultural and sporting activities. They have friends in other parts of Wimbledon. Rutlish School has a shared 6th form with Ricards Lodge which is in the Wimbledon constituency. Some of our children go to other schools in Wimbledon, such as the Ursuline, Wimbledon College, Wimbledon High School for Girls and Kings College Wimbledon.
4. These reactions have been expressed from both the north and south of the Ward. Analysis of a map of the Ward might suggest that residents in the south (polling district RC) have more in common with Morden than Wimbledon. For the quotidian needs of transport and some shopping this may be so, but in terms of civic identity their attachment is to Wimbledon as the major retail and business centre and cultural hub in Merton.

Some of us have lived elsewhere in Wimbledon before moving to Merton Park and in no way thought we were moving out of Wimbledon.

5. The majority of Merton Park Ward is composed of land acquired by John Innes in the 1800's to build his Merton Park Garden Suburb. The Garden Suburb extends significantly north of the Kingston Road into Wimbledon Town and Dundonald Ward. John Innes built his Garden suburb to straddle Kingston Road. Social, cultural, architectural and historical links have been maintained by the activities of the John Innes Society with members on both sides of Kingston Road. Residents of Merton Park Garden Suburb north and south have always seen themselves and been seen as residents of Wimbledon.

EVIDENCE (continued)

Community Links in Wandle Ward

1. Wandle Ward was created as part of the very recent LGBC review from three former Wimbledon wards, Wimbledon Park, Trinity and Abbey, and is located on the east boundary of Merton LB. The Wimbledon Park Residents' Association warned that it "*would lack a single community identity*" and at this early stage in its evolution it remains three disparate neighbourhoods:
 - 1.1 The AFC Wimbledon stadium plus 500 new homes under development on the north side of Plough Lane and retail superstores fronting an industrial site on the south side east of the Wandle River, bounded to the south by the Thameslink railway line (former Wimbledon Park Ward). The nearest local centre for transport, shopping, leisure and entertainment (a small theatre) is Earlsfield to the north. Earlsfield station is on the main line into Waterloo, and bus routes along Garratt Lane connect to Tooting and Wandsworth.
 - 1.2 The "Poets" are established roads in the centre of the Ward and consist of older Victorian and Edwardian terraced housing between the railway line and North Road (formerly in Trinity Ward). Garfield Primary School and Recreation Ground border the River Wandle to the east. Haydons Road provides local convenience shopping, but Colliers Wood is the nearest major centre for transport (Tube and bus services), shopping (Tandem and Priory Retail Park), leisure and entertainment.
 - 1.3 The area between North Road and Merton High Street (formerly part of Abbey Ward) is more mixed, with social housing and newer flatted developments along the banks of the Wandle as well as older terraced housing. All Saints primary school is in the centre. Merton High Street is the conduit for several bus routes, and to Colliers Wood station (Northern Line). Colliers Wood is the immediate centre for transport, shopping, leisure and entertainment (Merton Abbey Mills) and recreation (Wandle Park). There is a new library, and Colliers Wood is designated in the London Plan as an Intensification Area. Those who live here regard themselves as residents of Colliers Wood.
2. In summary, the new Wandle Ward has yet to establish a single community identity, but for the majority living in the south of the Ward it is more pre-disposed towards Colliers Wood for most of its needs (transport, shopping, leisure and entertainment) than other major centres. Its links to Wimbledon are tenuous. Colliers Wood is in the Mitcham & Morden BC, which makes it the most obvious fit for Wandle Ward.

EVIDENCE (continued)

Community Links in Wandle Ward (cont.)

3. In deciding to locate the Wandle Ward in Wimbledon and Coombe BC, the Boundary Commission appears to have been influenced by the evidence of Cllr Martin Whelton, who cited the significance of the new AFC Wimbledon stadium in Plough Lane to the community in Merton. "AFC" is indeed a source of civic pride to the borough, but this is not exclusive to Wimbledon. The club derives its supporters as much from Mitcham & Morden BC as from Wimbledon BC, and from further afield in the neighbouring boroughs of Wandsworth, Sutton and Kingston. The current MP for Mitcham & Morden BC is a committed supporter.
4. We understand the Boundary Commission tries not to break established cultural links so moving Wandle Ward, with its lesser links, would seem by far the least damaging move.

For the reasons stated Merton Park Ward's links to Wimbledon are undeniably strong and we have provided a solution which works mathematically without dividing existing wards. **We ask you now please to reconsider.**

Hubert Child
Chair
MPWRA

29/11/2022

David Merriman
Vice Chair
MPWRA

29/11/2022