

Solihull

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Comment text:

Please see attached.

Attached Documents:

- solihull-local-government-boundary-commission-solihull-response.pdf

COUNCILLOR MAX McLOUGHLIN

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30th October 2024

Letter of response to Local Government Boundary Commission regarding Solihull

I am writing as Opposition Leader on Solihull Council. I am Leader of the Green Group and have previously written on previous stages of your process.

Recently, Solihull Council voted on the proposals from our Governance Committee which would not meet your three main consideration:

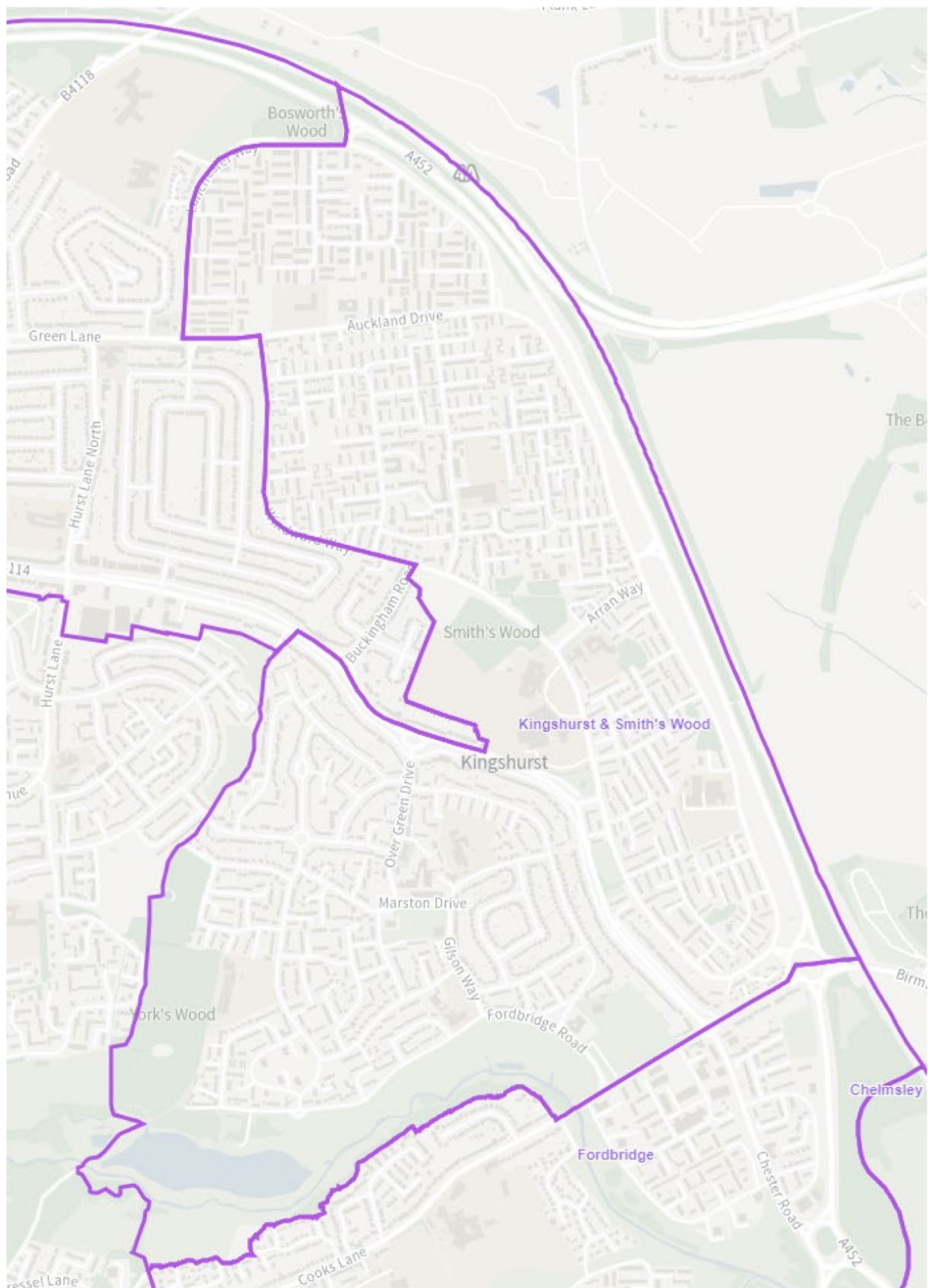
- Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each Councillor represents
- Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity
- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

The draft proposals for the Cars Area, currently in Smith's Wood, are the most significant area of contention. Castle Bromwich did not meet the first of your considerations in the Council's initial proposals, in that it would have been over the 10% variance by 2029. There is no easy way of balancing the size of wards to meet all of your criteria. However, your draft proposals arrived at the best compromise in achieving this.

At the Governance Committee meeting in July of this year, proposals were made that significantly departed from these criteria. They were presented without any map of the final boundary. These proposals were voted against by every member who was not part of the controlling group. A request for a minority recommendation was made, but denied. These proposals would make one of the wards within LSOAs in the lowest deciles in the Indices of Deprivation the worst represented by the criteria you provide.

The proposals were later brought before the Council, and again were voted against by every member of the Council who is not part of the controlling group. Only Conservative members voted for these proposals.

I attach the proposed ward map for Kingshurst & Smith's Wood overleaf:




Kingshurst and Smith's Wood.

What is immediately apparent from the shape of the ward, is the severance of the northern and southern parts of the ward. Forest Oak and Smith's Wood Academy create a severance of the ward now that the Buckingham Road area has been removed. The

section of Chester Road is removed from the other parts of the Castle Bromwich ward, impacting the effective representation of these homes also.

This ward, should it go ahead in your recommendations, would be almost 12% larger than the average, in terms of elector numbers, by 2029. I am aware that this is the metric that you have to work by. But as a Councillor who has supported group members in this area, I am aware of the number of people who are not registered to vote. They are still in need of advocacy, and support by local Councillors. This would compound existing inequalities by adding electoral inequality to residents of this ward.


The only criteria on which the Conservative Group justified their recommendations was that of community identity. Identity is a subjective matter that is hard to pin down. There are people in the north of Solihull who identify with Chelmsley Wood, Castle Bromwich, the parishes of Smith's Wood, Kingshurst and Marston Green. Many identify with the development number assigned during the 1960s, when many of the houses were built. The Cars Area identifies primarily as "the Cars Area". Many will say that they live in Castle Bromwich, others Solihull, North Solihull, Smith's Wood or, as with many areas of North Solihull, even Chelmsley Wood. Others will say that they live in Birmingham. In fact, the Cars Area on Apple Maps is addressed as Birmingham, the nursery on Auckland Drive is addressed as in Castle Bromwich, as is Smith's Wood:

Address Smiths Wood Castle Bromwich Birmingham England		Address Castle Bromwich Nursery Auckland Drive Smiths Wood Birmingham B36 0DD England
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Indeed, Bumble Bees Nursery on Auckland Drive, which is in Smith's Wood, and would remain in the Kingshurst & Smith's Wood ward, is labelled on Google Maps as being "Castle Bromwich":

Bumble Bees Nursery (Castle Bromwich)

3.7 ★★★★★ (3) ⓘ
Nursery school · 

 655 Auckland Dr, Birmingham B36 0SN

Identity is a contentious matter to make a determination on, and the arguments would have to be irrefutable to disregard the other criteria. This is not the case here.

The recommendations, as presented in the submission from the Conservatives on Solihull Council do not meet any of the criteria:

1. Kingshurst & Smith's Wood would be 12% larger in 2029.

2. The Cars Area does not have one easily defined identity, that links to either ward, other than it being “the Cars Area”. Many feel it more closely links to Castle Bromwich than Kingshurst & Smith’s Wood.
3. Kingshurst & Smith’s Wood would be severed in two, with a north and south largely separated by the appendix of Buckingham Road being added to Castle Bromwich.

For these reasons I ask that you disregard the recommendations as they pertain to the boundaries of Castle Bromwich and Kingshurst & Smith’s Wood from Solihull Council. They do not reflect the diversity of views, nor do they meet the criteria applied to the review.

Yours sincerely,



Max McLoughlin
Green Group Leader
Leader of the Opposition on Solihull Council