

Sandwell

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Comment text:

Please find attached letter from Cllr Parmjit Sahota, Chair of the Halesowen Labour Party, in response to the Sandwell boundary review.

Attached Documents:

- boundary-commission-consultation-response.docx



HALESOWEN CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTY

The Review Officer (Sandwell)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
7th Floor, 3 Bunhill Row
London
EC1Y 8YZ

By email only to: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

8 May 2025

Dear Sirs

Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission Review of Sandwell

I am writing in response to your review of the number of councillors, wards and ward names for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

The Halesowen Labour Party operates across the Halesowen parliamentary constituency, including more than 11,000 electors and more than 6,000 households in Cradley Heath, Old Hill and Blackheath.

At the most recent elections, candidates from the Labour Party exclusively were elected to represent the area as councillors, Member of Parliament, Mayor of the West Midlands, and Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Labour councillors currently representing the area include the Leader of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, a further cabinet member, and a former Mayor of Sandwellⁱ.

The area is well known to the Halesowen Labour Party, and we spend a significant amount of time engaging with the community in the area. Our work is wide-ranging and includes supporting the Women Chainmakers' Festival each year.

We are truly embedded in the community in Cradley Heath, Old Hill and Blackheath, and we have campaigned comprehensively in the area.

We are opposed to the proposed changes to the boundaries of the existing Cradley Heath and Old Hill ward.

The proposed boundaries do not reflect community identity or recognised boundaries, and do not support effective and convenient local government.

The proposal to divide Cradley Heath and Old Hill would result in an artificial divide of a single

unified community and cause confusion among residents accessing local services.

Put simply, Cradley Heath and Old Hill form a single recognisable geographic area. Blackheath and Old Hill do not. Cradley Heath and Old Hill should stay together.

1. Community identity

- 1.1 The main business and shopping streets in Cradley Heath (High Street / Upper High Street) and Old Hill (Halesowen Road) form a single commercial area. Shoppers and workers walk between these areas – in effect, they form a single town centre.
- 1.2 By way of illustration, the people of Old Hill are typically served by Cradley Heath library (a ten-minute walk, less than ½ mile, from Old Hill post office) not Blackheath library (a thirty-minute walk, up a steep hill, from the same location).
- 1.3 Similar comparisons can be made between supermarkets (Tesco Extra in Cradley Heath and Sainsburys in Blackheath), places of worship (Cradley Heath Mosque and Blackheath Mosque) and public houses (branches of Wetherspoons!).
- 1.4 The proposed division of Cradley Heath and Old Hill is entirely artificial.
- 1.5 The proposed changes will see some key Cradley Heath and Old Hill landmarks sitting on the boundaries of their respective wards. For example, the Old Hill Railway Station will sit on a ward boundary. Far from recognising these community assets as central focal points in their communities, the proposal treats them as peripheral.
- 1.6 Other local landmarks will find themselves on the wrong side of the border entirely. Under the proposal the Old Hill cricket club, Old Hill tennis club and Old Hill sports bar will no longer be situated in the 'Old Hill' ward but will instead fall entirely within the new Cradley Heath ward.
- 1.7 Cradley Heath and Old Hill are not only united by geographic proximity, but by a shared industrial history.
- 1.8 Together, Cradley Heath and Old Hill formed the centre of Britain's chain-making industry during the nineteenth century. It is reported that almost one third of all Great Britain's chain works and chain shops were situated in Old Hill by the early twentieth century.
- 1.9 In 1910, the suffragette, Mary MacArthur, led the area's women chain makers to victory in their fight for a minimum wage and led a strike to force employers to implement the rise.
- 1.10 MacArthur continues to be a local hero in Cradley Heath and Old Hill; and the annual Women Chainmakers' Festival celebrates her legacy and the area's chain-making heritage.
- 1.11 This common history is highlighted in texts including [Cradley Heath Old Hill & District](#) by Ron Moss, [Cradley Heath & Old Hill from Above](#) by Christopher Homer, and old ordnance survey maps which refer to Cradley Heath and Old Hill together.
- 1.12 By contrast, Blackheath's history is as a dormitory town for surrounding industries.

- 1.13 The proposal provides for the area around Waterfall Lane to form part of the Cradley Heath ward – despite the reality that it will be entirely detached from the remainder of the ward, accessible on foot or by car only by crossing through other wards.
- 1.14 The Waterfall Lane area is historically part of Blackheath. It is divided from Cradley Heath and Old Hill by the Dudley Canal and the railway – these form clear and commonly recognised boundaries (much more so than the proposed boundary which splits the back roads of Beechcroft Road and Lawrence Lane).
- 1.15 The proposed boundaries show an obvious protrusion into Blackheath.
- 1.16 The area is significantly closer to Blackheath High Street than Cradley Heath High Street. No clear justification has been given for including the Waterfall Lane area in a new Cradley Heath ward – it is important that wards should form cohesive contiguous areas.

2. Effective and convenient local government

- 2.1 Cradley Heath and Old Hill are intrinsically linked in local government.
- 2.2 The proposal from the Conservative Association is preoccupied with postal addresses and polling districts, neither of which are determinative of community identity. Other factors must be taken into account as set out in the Boundary Commission's guidance.
- 2.3 The Conservative Association's proposal to divide Cradley Heath and Old Hill makes reference to properties bearing a 'Cradley Heath' postal address. This overlooks the reality that all properties in both Cradley Heath and Old Hill bear a Cradley Heath postal address. Cradley Heath is the post town for the area.
- 2.4 For example, the address for [Old Hill Post Office](#) itself is 236 Halesowen Road, Cradley Heath B64 6HZ.
- 2.5 The postal town for Old Hill is Cradley Heath – not Blackheath. If anything, this reinforces the area's cohesive community identity.
- 2.6 The selective assertions of links between areas of Cradley Heath, Old Hill, Rowley and Blackheath in the Conservative Association's proposal are not supported by clear evidence.
- 2.7 Important public services and community groups operate on a Cradley Heath and Old Hill basis.
- 2.8 For example, Cradley Heath and Old Hill are served by one secondary school – Ormiston Forge Academy; whereas children from Blackheath will typically attend St Michael's Church of England High School in Rowley Regis.
- 2.9 The [Old Hill and Cradley Heath Townswomen's Guild](#) meets on the first Thursday of every month, and the [Haden Hill and District Historical Society](#) also meets on a monthly basis.
- 2.10 The area has previously been served by a single children's centre on Valley Road – the

Cradley Heath and Old Hill Children's Centre.

- 2.11 The sense of community is reflected in grassroots Facebook groups including Cradley Heath and Old Hill General (29,000 members), Who Remembers Old Hill and Cradley Heath (8,000 members), and the Cradley Heath and Old Hill Community Group (5,000 members), amongst others.
- 2.12 A single group exists for Cradley Heath and Old Hill in Bloom.
- 2.13 We are not aware of similar institutions operating across Blackheath and Old Hill.
- 2.14 The entirety of Cradley Heath and Old Hill falls within the Halesowen constituency. This means that everybody in Cradley Heath and Old Hill is represented by the same Member of Parliament. This is a straightforward and easily understood arrangement.
- 2.15 The current Member of Parliament has high visibility in Cradley Heath and Old Hill. The proposal will cause added confusion for residents in Cradley Heath, Old Hill and Blackheath when contacting their representative in Parliament.

In addition to the above, we note that the proposal states that councillors in the proposed Blackheath and Old Hill ward will have the highest number of electors per councillor in Sandwell, and the greatest variance from the average number of voters.

We are happy to expand on any of the points raised in this submission at your request, if helpful.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Yours faithfully

Parmjit Sahota
Chair, Halesowen Labour Party

¹ Cllr Kerrie Carmichael, Blackheath (Leader); Cllr Vicki Smith, Cradley Heath and Old Hill (Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development); Cllr Julie Webb, Cradley Heath and Old Hill (Mayor of Sandwell 2016-17)