

Representation by Kennington, Oval and Vauxhall Forum to the Boundary Commission for England about proposed new Parliamentary Constituencies for London

Who we are

1 KOVF is a neighbourhood forum, with some 700 members, recognised and funded by the London Borough of Lambeth as a non-political umbrella group bringing together local community organisations, businesses and residents, in the North Lambeth area between Lambeth Road, Kennington Park Road, Camberwell New Road, Harleyford Road and the river Thames [essentially the two Lambeth Wards of Oval and Prince's, with a small element of Bishop's Ward south of Lambeth Road]. At present this area lies exclusively within the Vauxhall Parliamentary constituency, with a local MP heavily engaged in issues arising in our area, with boundaries unchanged for over a decade.

2 In practice, Kennington, Oval and Vauxhall are overlapping descriptions, and there is no generally recognised set of **internal** boundaries between them. But the **external** boundaries of the combined grouping **are** reasonably settled, and there was no public dissent when the whole of the Forum's area and the Forum itself were recognised as being sufficiently coherent to be designated by Lambeth Council for the production of a Neighbourhood Plan for the area in July 2015. Prince's and Oval Wards were also put together in July 2014 as a natural grouping, as the Council's Co-operative Local Investment Plan (CLIP) area for North Lambeth, which organises the spending of locally earmarked S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies.

Impact of the proposals – The 3 Way Split of our KOV area

3 Given this well-recognised unity of our community, we were amazed to find it distributed between no less than three constituencies in the draft (4, 8 and 13), within the space of a 400m walk north to south along one of our principal main roads, Kennington Road. Only Oval Ward would remain within a predominantly Lambeth constituency, while Bishop's Ward would be a singleton Lambeth Ward within a predominantly Southwark constituency, and Prince's one of only two Lambeth wards brigaded with Southwark wards to the east. We must expect such minority status within a constituency, bolstered by no natural links, to be detrimental to adequate parliamentary representation or attention. Such a partition does not respect local links, nor principal public transport routes, which run predominantly north and south. Indeed, it was the lack of direct public transport links east west which led the Post Office, in July 2014, to abandon its proposals to close Kennington Post Office and merge its business with the Walworth Road office in Southwark to the east.

4 We therefore urge that our local links be respected and Prince's and Oval Wards in particular be grouped with other wards to form a predominantly Lambeth based constituency.

Wider impact of the methodology for Lambeth and South London

5 In circumstances like these, the Commission Consultation document (para 69) urges respondents "to bear in mind any knock-on effects that might result from their suggestions." Given the disconcerting prospect that our three adjacent constitutive wards or ward elements

might find themselves in three different constituencies, we have looked at the extent of this over-fragmentation of boroughs first in Lambeth itself, then more widely, particularly for the South London sub-region.

6 It is impractical for a group such as ours to rework the whole of London at a ward level in consequence of our proposal, but we note that the wider Lambeth borough is proposed to be partitioned between no less than 6 constituencies, when the electorate of 188,189 amounts to about 2.51 constituencies with a nominal size of 75,000, with a benchmark of 3 constituencies, rounding up. We regard the excess of $6 - 3 = 3$ constituencies as a measure of the over-fragmentation of Lambeth under the current proposals, correlated with the splitting of natural communities.

7 Turning to the wider London picture, the BC London proposals, eg at Annex A, concentrate on which wards go into which constituencies, rather than how many constituencies individual boroughs are split into. So we have inverted the process in the attached spreadsheet, identified how many constituencies of nominal size (75,000 electors) each borough would amount to, rounded up to the nearest whole number above, then computed the difference between this benchmark figure and the actual number of constituencies between which the borough is shared. This difference is a measure of the excess fragmentation of that borough, likely involving the division of natural communities. In a few asterisked cases we have rounded down where the 5% size tolerance would permit this.

8 When you graph this excess (see map attached), you see that Lambeth, with Merton, have the highest excesses, at 3 each (Lambeth 3 nominal, 6 actual, Merton 2 nominal, 5 actual). Indeed, there is a South London cluster of over-fragmented boroughs (Lambeth, Merton and Croydon), surrounded by boroughs with 0s and 1s. Essentially, we find that this cluster, for whatever reason, becomes the dumping ground for the problems thrown up by the methodology of tight numerical limits, varied ward sizes between London boroughs, and a policy of no breaking ward boundaries.

9 Over-fragmentation of natural communities to different MPs reduces the territorial link and tilts the franchise arrangements towards an “any 75,000 electors will do” approach, reminiscent of the European Parliament franchise, which is correlated with reduced democratic engagement, low representative recognition among constituents and lower esteem for the whole process.

10 We consider that the South London model should be run again, this time from the centre outwards, to spread what appears to be the inevitable fragmentation more evenly over the South London area.

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Kennington, Oval and Vauxhall Forum
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