

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL - RESPONSE TO INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR NEW PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

Boundary Commission for England's Initial proposal

- 1 The Boundary Commission for England's (BCE) initial proposal is to increase the number of electors in the Windsor constituency by transferring the Chalvey Ward to it from the Slough Constituency.
- 2 The Commission did consider whether other wards in Slough Borough Council could be included in the Windsor Constituency in order to ensure it met the electorate quota. However the Commission identified that including other Slough wards would result in the Slough constituency being detached or require the inclusion of multiple wards. The Commission considered whether to include a ward from Buckinghamshire CC in the Windsor constituency but were of the view that crossing the county boundary was not necessary.
- 3 The Commission has proposed that the Berkshire constituencies of Bracknell, and Maidenhead, both of which (like Slough) are within 5% of the electoral quota, remain unaltered.

Council Views on initial proposals

- 4 The Council notes the aims of the Review and the statutory rules for the Review as set out in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.
- 5 The Council acknowledges that under the terms of the Review there is a need to increase the number of electors in the Windsor constituency. The Council accepts that it is not logical to cross the County boundary given the Berkshire electorate figures.
- 6 The Commission's report does not indicate whether any consideration was given to transferring a ward from Bracknell Forest Borough Council or the Bray Ward from the Maidenhead Constituency to the Windsor Constituency. The majority of the Working Group believes there are viable alternatives to the Commission's initial proposal to move the Chalvey Ward from Slough into the Windsor Constituency which would maintain the community identity and integrity of the Slough seat.
- 7 **In summary the submission is:**
 - **that the Slough Constituency remain unchanged as it is already within the required tolerance for electorate figures**
 - **That either the Bullbrook, Crowthorne or Priestwood and Garth Ward be moved from the larger Bracknell Constituency to the Windsor Constituency as a viable alternative.**
 - **The proposal would achieve a better outcome on the statutory electorate quotas with less variance from the median between the three**

constituencies affected and maintain the community identity and integrity of the Slough seat.

Evidence to support submission

- 8 The existing Slough Constituency has an electorate of 76,668. This is within the primary rule of the Review that constituencies must have no fewer than 71,031 electors and no more that 78,507 electors.
- 9 The existing Bracknell constituency at 76,917 electors is a very similar size to Slough. Both areas have significant housing growth and are likely to increase in electorate numbers similarly over time.*
- 10 The Council considers that a viable alternative to moving the Slough Chalvey ward into the Windsor Constituency would be to move either the Bracknell Forest Borough Ward of Bullbrook, Crowthorne or Priestwood and Garth into the Windsor Constituency. Windsor Constituency already contains significant parts of Bracknell Forest Borough. There were changes to both the Maidenhead and Windsor Constituencies in 2005 and the Commission noted at that time that the proposed transfer of the Windsor and Maidenhead ward of Bray to Maidenhead Constituency necessitated some increase to the electorate of Windsor CC, which could only be achieved by adding wards from the existing Bracknell CC.
- 11 The Council acknowledges that moving Bray Ward from Maidenhead to Windsor would be an obvious alternative to the BCE current proposals in geographic terms but the consequent reduction in size of the Maidenhead Constituency would be problematic with further adjustment needed from neighbouring constituencies. Settlements within the Bray ward are also closer to, and have more affinities with, the town of Maidenhead than the town of Windsor and the Council has therefore not pursued this as a viable alternative.
- 12 Moving either Bullbrook, Crowthorne, or Priestwood and Garth Ward into Windsor would produce a lower disparity in terms of electorate numbers between Windsor and Bracknell – the key driver of the Review and would be viable alternatives to Chalvey. If the Commission were minded to keep the urban settlement of Bracknell town intact then it could look transferring the Crowthorne ward. Alternatively, as the Commission has already moved Warfield Harvest Ride into Windsor as part of the last review then the transfer of Bullbrook or Priestwood and Garth would be a logical continuation of that approach in order to reach the electorate numbers needed for the Windsor Constituency.

*www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Electorate Numbers

- 13 If either the Bullbrook, Crowthorne or Priestwood and Garth Ward were to be moved from Bracknell to the Windsor Constituency the electorate figures for the three constituencies affected would be as set out below:

Constituency	Existing electorate	Electorate – BCE initial	Electorate – alternative proposal -	Electorate alternative proposal -	Electorate alternative proposal –

		proposals	Crowthorne	Bullbrook	Priestwood and Garth
Slough	76,668	71,317	76,668	76,668	76,668
Windsor	68,834	74,185	72,766	72,994	74,288
Bracknell	76,917	76,917	72,985	72,807	71,463

- 14 These alternatives leave Slough and Bracknell closer to the median number of 74,769 and Windsor within the tolerance. The Commission's initial proposals leave Slough well below the median (-3452) and Bracknell well above it (+2148). The alternative proposals produce a better outcome that more closely aligns to the statutory electorate range with less marked variances from the median.

Geography

- 15 Four Bracknell Borough Wards to the north and east of central Bracknell (Ascot, Binfield with Warfield, Warfield Harvest Ride and Winkfield and Cranbourne) are already within the Windsor Constituency. Therefore to reach the required additional number of electors in the Windsor Constituency moving a further ward from Bracknell would be more logical than breaching the M4 to take the Chalvey ward from central Slough
- 16 Whilst Bullbrook has close ties with the town of Bracknell, its transfer would meet the necessary increase in the electorate of the Windsor Constituency and would be a logical extension to the Warfield Harvest Ride Ward which is already in Windsor Constituency. There is no physical boundary between the Wards. The transfer would also have the benefit of improving the Constituency boundary between Bracknell and Windsor by using main roads as boundaries which creates a more obvious boundary. (See Map 2 attached) (To follow)
- 17 Whilst Priestwood and Garth similarly has close ties with the town of Bracknell, its transfer would meet the necessary increase in the electorate of the Windsor Constituency and would be a logical extension to the Warfield Harvest Ride Ward which is already in the Windsor Constituency. There is no physical boundary between the wards. The A329 to the south and A3095 to the east would act as 'hard' physical boundary between the Windsor and Bracknell constituencies. (See Map 3 attached) (To Follow)
- 18 The inclusion of Crowthorne would have little or no effect on the urban settlement of Bracknell town and would simply extend the Windsor constituency at its south western tip. (See map 4 attached). Like Ascot, Binfield with Warfield, Warfield Harvest Ride and Winkfield and Cranbourne the Crowthorne Ward, being a semi rural ward to the south of Bracknell town, is out-lying from Bracknell town centre. It is therefore not illogical to group it with the other four Bracknell council wards within the Windsor Constituency. The Bramshill forest and heathland areas in the Ascot Ward run into Crowthorne and the wards share the green land/open space in the area. (See Map 4 attached) (To Follow)
- 19 The transfer of either Bullbrook, Crowthorne or Priestwood and Garth Ward would be an alternative to the transfer of Chalvey Ward and the Council wishes to draw the Commission's attention to the special factors relating to Chalvey.

Community Identity

- 20 The Council acknowledges that the Commission's initial proposals take into account existing constituencies, local government boundaries and geographical features to produce a set of constituencies that are within the statutory electorate range and are what the BCE consider to be the best balance between those factors. The BCE acknowledges that it has not taken into account how proposals may break local community ties.
- 21 Slough has some of the most deprived communities in the South East. The IMD deprivation measure lists Slough as having an overall rank of 79, compared to 287 for Bracknell Forest and 306 for Windsor and Maidenhead. (Where 1 is most deprived and 236 is least deprived.)
- 22 It is vital that democratic representation of Slough's communities is as effective as possible. The Commission's initial proposals would result in the residents in Chalvey almost certainly having to travel several miles to Windsor to access their MP's surgeries.
- 23 Chalvey is one of the more deprived Wards in Slough, and is culturally and religiously diverse. This is in contrast to Windsor and the two areas share very little both socially and culturally. Chalvey has no identification with Windsor nor any meaningful connections with Windsor.
- 24 The statistics below detail some of the key differences between Chalvey and the Eton Wick and Eton & Castle wards (the two wards that physically abut Chalvey), as well as the Bullbrook, Crowthorne and Priestwood and Garth wards from Bracknell Forest:
- **Religious diversity:** Chalvey (and Slough as a wider borough) is far more diverse than the other areas. 37% of its residents are Muslim, 7% Hindu, 6% Sikh. By contrast the other 3 non-Slough wards and the two non-Slough Boroughs are largely populated by Christians or Atheists. There are three-and-a-half times as many Muslims living in Chalvey as in the whole of Bracknell Forest, and 80% of the total living in Windsor & Maidenhead.
 - **Ethnic diversity:** Just 16% of Chalvey residents are categorised as White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British – 78% of Eton Wick and 87% of the other two wards are from such a background. 48% are Asian / Asian British compared to a maximum of 6% in Eton & Castle Ward.
 - **Country of birth:** 90% of Eton Wick and 80% of Eton & Castle residents were born in the UK, compared to just 45% in Chalvey.
 - **Language issues:** Only 58% of Chalvey residents have English as their main language, and 11% either cannot speak English at all or cannot speak it well. For all the other comparison areas outside of Slough a

minimum of 93% of residents have English as their main language and only vanishingly small numbers cannot speak it with proficiency.

- **Qualifications / skills:** Identical proportions of Chalvey and Eton Wick residents have no formal qualifications, but this is considerably higher than the other comparators. These comparator areas have far higher proportions of residents with Level 3 or 4 Qualifications (equivalent to good 6th Form education or higher) than does Chalvey.
- **Housing stock:** A higher proportion of Chalvey residents are renting their homes either privately (40%) or from social letting agents (19%); just 37% own or are purchasing their own homes. Residents of Crowthorne and Eton Wick are far more likely to own their homes (73%, 67%). Whilst direct home ownership is low in Eton & Castle (28%), an equal portion (28%) lives rent-free here - a type of arrangement that is virtually unknown in all other areas. Linked to this is the fact that 41% of Eton & Castle residents have a second home elsewhere – in all other areas considered, second home ownership is low at around 4-5%.
- **Population by age:** ONS mid-year population estimates were released at ward-level. Chalvey has a much larger total population than the other wards – at 12,736 this is 2.2 times the number in Crowthorne, 4.5 times that in Eton and Castle, and 5.5 times that in Eton Wick. 29% of Chalvey were aged 17 or below i.e. were children – a higher proportion than Crowthorne (21%) or Eton Wick (17%) but less than Eton & Castle (41%). Eton & Castle ward does of course contain the famous Eton College with numerous boarding pupils.

- 25 The M4 acts as a 'hard' physical boundary between the Windsor and Slough Constituencies. Whilst there are link roads between Windsor and Chalvey, taking Chalvey in from north of the M4 is both illogical and impractical. (See Map 1 attached)
- 26 Slough is a cohesive urban area with distinct boundaries. Chalvey is one of the oldest most integral parts of the Slough settlement. This is evidenced by the ancient ecclesiastical parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey forming the basis of the modern town of Slough.
- 27 Chalvey ward is in the central urban area of Slough, contains Slough High Street, Slough Borough Council Offices, the Slough MPs Office, the town's magistrates court and Slough Police station – all illustrative of it being part of the central urban core of the Slough Constituency. (See Map 1 attached)
- 28 Historically all of Slough Borough, (except Colnbrook and Poyle ward south of the M4), was in Buckinghamshire until the 1972 local government reorganisation, and consequently Slough's ties with the rest of Berkshire are recent. In parliamentary elections, the settlements of Eton and Eton Wick were briefly included in the old Slough & Eton constituency until 1983, but the river Thames was the physical boundary separating Slough from the town of Windsor. In terms of community identity, it would seem more logical to grow the Windsor constituency by adding a ward from its periphery with Bracknell than to reach north of the river and motorway to Chalvey.

Conclusion

- 29 The Council established a cross party working group consisting of Labour, Conservative and UKIP councillors to give consideration to the BCE's initial proposals. There have been three meetings of the working group to date. Both Labour and UKIP object to Chalvey being transferred into the Windsor Constituency. The Conservative Group have noted the BCE's initial proposals and do not consider the alternatives produce better outcomes.
- 30 In summary the Council's submission is:
- That the Slough Constituency remain unchanged as it is already within the required tolerance for electorate figures
 - That either the Bullbrook, Crowthorne or Priestwood and Garth Ward be moved from the larger Bracknell Constituency to the Windsor Constituency as a viable alternative.
- 31 The proposal would achieve a better outcome on the statutory electorate quotas with less variance from the median between the three constituencies affected and maintain the community identity and integrity of the Slough seat.

