20th March 2017

FAO The Review Officer (Windsor and Maidenhead)

Dear Sir / Madam

I am writing in a personal capacity to respond to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s (‘the Commission’) draft recommendations for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (‘the Borough’).

1. Overview

1.1 In March 2018 the Commission published its draft recommendations for the Borough. This proposal consisted of 19 wards of 42 councillors and aimed to deliver/reflect: electoral equality, community identity, and effective and convenient local government.

1.2 In September 2017, it was established that 43 councillors are an appropriate size of council membership to provide effective local government. It was found by the commission that a 42-member pattern ensures a more even spread of councillors across the borough than 43 members. This submission does not dispute that conclusion.

1.3 In its draft proposals, the Commission has sought to balance the conflicting objectives of electoral equality and community identity. In summary, this submission concludes that the commission has found the right balance in the Maidenhead-half of the Borough (referred to as ‘Maidenhead Town’ and ‘Maidenhead Rural’ in the draft recommendations), has found an acceptable mix in the South of the Borough (‘Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale’), but has not yet produced acceptable proposals for ‘Windsor town’.

1.4 It is noted that the draft recommendations do not fit strictly within the 10% variance target for electoral equality and that the commission has chosen to flex this to best match communities. As such this submission utilises this flexibility.

2. Maidenhead

2.1 The draft recommendations for Maidenhead (town and rural) deliver electoral equality and represent local communities.

2.2 Further, the proposed wards are appropriately named.

2.3 The draft recommendations should be accepted in full.

3. Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale

3.1 Due to the geography, the difficulty of balancing community identities and electoral equality is recognised as particularly acute in the South of the Borough.
3.2 Whilst a warding pattern that respects the parish boundaries would be preferred to best represent communities, it is recognised that this is not possible whilst maintaining acceptable levels of electoral equality.

3.3 The commission is correct not to arbitrarily link south Windsor to better gain electoral equality. [This equality will improve following the Borough Local Plan and development in the South of the Borough].

3.4 As such, the boundaries in the draft recommendation are reluctantly supported, despite being sub-optimal.

4. Windsor

4.1 In the view of this submission, the draft recommendations covering the area defined as ‘Windsor town’ do not best reflect local communities and contain arbitrary linkages between disparate settlements. Whilst the rationale for doing so is understood in terms of electoral equality, the commission proposals could be significantly improved.

4.2 Of particular concern is the proposal to include south-east Windsor in the Old Windsor ward and the linking of Eton Wick with Central Windsor.

4.1 West of Windsor

4.1.1 The three proposed wards in the West of Windsor ‘Clewer & Dedworth West’, ‘Clewer & Dedworth East’ and ‘Clewer East’ represent a reasonable pattern.

4.1.2 It is suggested that the proposed boundaries remain, but that they are renamed. The current proposed names are confusing and unhelpful:

- ‘Clewer and Dedworth West’ is renamed to ‘Victoria’
- ‘Clewer and Dedworth East’ is renamed to ‘Albert’
- ‘Clewer East’ is renamed to ‘St Andrew and St Agnes’

4.1.3 Using ‘Royal’ names is appropriate for Windsor given its status as the home of the Royal Family, the name of the Royal House, and Windsor being a double garrison town.

4.1.4 At the heart of the proposed ‘Clewer & Dedworth West’ ward is Victoria Park, so called as the streets in Broom Farm Estate are all named for Victoria Cross heroes. In the absence of a sensible community identifier for the ward, a park name that echoes the history and provenance of the area is appropriate. Queen Victoria’s counted Windsor as her home.

4.1.5 Likewise, ‘Clewer & Dedworth East’ does not have a ‘natural’ name that identifies the ward. If its partner ward to its immediate west is to be named ‘Victoria’, then an appropriate name for this ward is ‘Albert’. This recognises Victoria and Albert’s contribution to Windsor and is a suitable pairing.

4.1.6 The naming of this particular ward ‘Albert’ is especially appropriate due to the landmark public house ‘The Prince Albert’ being prominently located in the proposed ward.
4.1.7 If the Clewer and Dedworth wards are renamed, then the name ‘Clewer East’ is no longer appropriate, as it is named in geographical contrast to other wards covering the historic Clewer area. The name ‘St Andrew and St Agnes’ is suggested as maintaining that historic link to Clewer Parish by recognising St Andrews Church, and recognising the other end of the ward with St Agnes.

4.2 Windsor Town and Villages (exc. West of Windsor)

The Problems with the Draft Recommendations

4.2.1 We consider this area of the Borough to be currently being used as a ‘balancing figure’ and not reflecting natural boundaries or local communities. In particular, the proposal to include south-east Windsor in the Old Windsor ward is absurd and the linking of Eton Wick with Central Windsor is far from ideal. These are arbitrary linkages of disconnected communities.

Eton and Castle

4.2.2 If the current draft submission were accepted, then south-east Windsor and the Etons would be poorly represented. The boundaries fail the ‘reflects community identity’ test and ‘provide effective and convenient local government’ test. If accepted, Eton and Eton Wick may find that they are represented by ‘Windsor’ councillors, who, even if conscientious and active, would struggle to appropriately and effectively understand and respond to local interests.

4.2.3 To walk, say, from York House Council offices in Central Windsor to Eton Wick via Windsor Bridge (suggested by the commission as providing a good pedestrian transport link) would take 51 minutes: Whilst this may be acceptable in a rural ward such as Bray, this proposed ward is urban in character. To drive the same journey via Royal Windsor Way (also suggested by the commission as providing a good road transport link) would entail driving out of the current Castle Without ward, through the current Park and Clewer East wards down Osborne Road, turning right through the current Clewer North ward, leaving the Royal Borough, into the Slough Borough Council ward of Chalvey, re-entering the existing Eton & Castle ward of the Royal Borough, and into the Eton Wick ward. These are not good links. The parish of Eton should have its own representative(s), taking as limited of central Windsor/Castle as possible to gain sensible electoral equality.

Old Windsor

4.2.4 Even more so, south-east Windsor would find it has ‘Old Windsor’ councillors who cannot meaningfully represent them: Despite their names, Windsor and Old Windsor are thoroughly separate in identity, composition, and have different local issues and concerns. This area of Windsor is also significantly different from Old Windsor in socio-economic terms.

4.2.5 The proposed ‘Datchet, Horton & Wraysbury’ ward is a good fit, but may need to be reopened to allow a sensible pattern across the Etons, Central Windsor and Old Windsor.

The Solutions

4.2.6 The distinct communities to group are:
• Central Windsor (covering the existing Castle Without ward, the Castle-element of the current Eton & Castle ward, the south-east of Windsor currently in Park ward)
• Eton
• Eton Wick
• Old Windsor
• Datchet
• Horton
• Wraysbury

4.2.7 Horton and Wraysbury, and Eton and Eton Wick should be linked. That said, it is recognised that both units alone are insufficiently populous to gain two councillors and too populous to gain one councillor, whilst maintaining electoral equality.

4.2.8 Datchet combined with Horton and Wraysbury (as per the draft recommendations) makes sense. However, taking the whole of central Windsor with the Etons will mean Eton and Eton Wick will be dominated by Central Windsor concerns. It is suggested that the Castle alone is taken with the Etons (in a similar vein to as happens currently, including the Frogmore polling district currently allocated to Old Windsor in the draft recommendations), this will create a distinctive Etons ward, so they can be sensibly represented. This creates a three-member ‘Datchet, Horton & Wraysbury’ and a two-member ‘Etons and Castle’ (note the s).

4.2.9 The remainder of Central Windsor, including the south-east, can then create a two-member Central Windsor ward, retaining the ‘Castle Without’ name is suggested.

4.2.10 Old Windsor then has a requirement for something in the order of 1.35 councillors: a one-member ward named ‘Old Windsor’ is suggested. It is recognised that this is a significant variance, being poor in terms of electoral equality, but these proposals will mean that community identity is maintained, enabling effective and convenient local government. This is viewed to be preferable to arbitrary distinct communities being linked (c.f. Isle of Wight and Cornwall in current national boundary debate and the overwhelming public preference for community identity to be retained in electoral units, even when this means self-underrepresentation). It may be sensible to move the Old Windsor boundaries south and west, reclaiming some of the land allocated to ‘Ascot and Sunninghill’ in the draft recommendations to share this inequity.

We thank you for your consideration and time.

Yours faithfully

Clr Jack M. Rankin
Appendix 1: Windsor ward proposals

1. Etons & Castle (2)
2. Castle Without (2)
3. Old Windsor (1)