

## Owen, David

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**From:** Councillor O'Neill OBE, Teresa - Leader of the Council  
**Sent:** 12 November 2015 20:50  
**To:** Owen, David  
**Cc:** reviews; Councillor Massey, Donald  
**Subject:** Boundary Commission review of the London Borough of Bexley

Dear Mr Owen

I felt I needed to write to you in addition to the official submission from the Council to set out some additional information that we believe supports the proposal as well as a few words about the process we have followed that resulted from our initial conversations at the start of the process.

1. The proposal

The Conservative Group on the London Borough of Bexley wholeheartedly support the warding proposals being put forward by the Council.

We believe these proposals recognise and utilise a number of transport infrastructure and geographical features that are significant in delineating the communities within Bexley.

Our borough is dominated by the radial nature of the transport links, which nearly all run West to East. Namely the A2 trunk road and three train lines (the Sidcup loop line, the Bexleyheath line and the North Kent line). There are very few road crossings, subways and footbridges across these, so many communities have built up on either side of these links and, consequently, there a number of very strong boundaries within the borough delineated by these. The proposals put forward by the council use these obvious boundaries.

Bexley also has a number of open spaces, parks and rivers; as you would expect in an outer London borough. The sizes of many of these have led to defined communities on their sides, but in many case the communities do not normally have common links. This is relevant in respect of Fooks Cray Meadows, Danson Park, Lesnes Abbey Woods, Franks Park and the rivers Cray and Shuttle. Also the escarpment running parallel to the River Thames in the north of the borough is a very significant barrier at the western end. These features are also used in the warding proposals.

Another welcome feature is that all the major town and shopping centres are put within wards and not split unless they are of a significant size. All are represented by more than one Councillor to assist with the heavier caseload these areas mainly generate, and if they are of a sufficient size the boundaries do not cross the town centre arbitrarily. For instance Bexleyheath and Welling town centres are both served by two wards, whilst Thamesmead, Erith, Crayford and Sidcup all lie within one ward.

The proposals also address a number of issues that the present warding pattern creates such as;

- In Falconwood and Welling at present there are six roads south of A2, which are connected to the rest of the ward only by a subway and flyover. These crossings are infrequently used, mainly by commuters going to and from Falconwood Station.
- In Danson Park there are four roads on the south western edge that cannot be accessed from the rest of the ward without going outside of the ward.
- The northern part of Cray Meadows ward is separated from the southern part by Fooks Cray Meadows. There are only two roads that connect the two parts within the ward, one of which is single track with passing places. In addition a key rationale for creating Cray Meadows Ward at the Boundary Review was that it covered the catchment areas of three primary schools. One of these schools was closed shortly after the boundaries came into existence with a housing development and Neighbourhood Centre replacing it.
- Lesnes Abbey Ward is split into several very different and distinct areas. A part of Thamesmead just to the north of Abbey Wood Station and the North Kent line, housing on and around Abbey Road which has the North Kent line to the north and Lesnes Abbey Woods to the south, the community of West

Heath which is the south of Lesnes Abbey Woods the other side of Woolwich Road. The only road that links all three areas is Knee Hill, which is a narrow road where public transport cannot pass going in opposite direction in places.

Consequently we feel the warding pattern proposed by the Council should be adopted by yourselves.

## 2. The process

When we met at the start of the process you suggested that we should try to bring forward a cross party consensus on the proposals (or even a scenario of what was agreed and where there were differences of opinion between the groups).

We tried to ensure that would happen through creating a Boundary Commission Working Group who then met and agreed key milestones and dates to ensure that could be achieved. This process was agreed by all three groups and indeed achieved a unanimous agreement on the number of 45 at its meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015 which was then accepted by the Commission. The methodology in terms of bringing separate proposals to officers by each of the groups in a confidential manner was also approved unanimously.

The meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> July agreed what we all thought of as natural boundaries and geographical features (general principles) which we believed created the communities that the Boundary Commission were seeking to allow warding proposals. It was agreed that all three groups were to be given access to confidential officer time to allow their proposals to be constructed in such a way that they could be debated at the meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> October.

The second meeting (6<sup>th</sup> October) had to be cancelled as the Labour Group weren't ready to share information but they said they expected to be ready by the next meeting (scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> October) to share their information and allow the possible construction of a cross party consensual proposal which would then go to the General Purposes Committee for consideration as previously agreed.

However, when that date came, the Labour group again said they weren't ready to share although the proposals from the Conservative and UKIP groups were tabled. That meant that they saw the other proposals without sharing their own (which they are still to do).

The Conservative and UKIP proposals aren't dissimilar – albeit only the Conservative one is compliant – as they both draw on the natural boundaries agreed at the first meeting of the Working Group.

As all three Groups had signed up to the original timetable and were fully cognisant of the Boundary Commission timetable and the Labour group were unable to say when their proposal would be ready for review the decision was taken that the Conservative and UKIP proposals will be those going to the General Purposes Committee for consideration as the official Council proposal.

I hope that you will accept this communication as the formal support for the Council submission from the Conservative Group on Bexley Council as well as additional evidence in support of that proposal.

Teresa

Councillor Teresa O'Neill, OBE  
Leader, London Borough of Bexley

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