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To: reviews <reviews@lgbce.org.uk>
Subject: Redridge Draft Proposals

LibDem Group Response to the LGBCE Draft Proposal for Redbridge

For much of the Borough the Commission has done a good job in making proposals that balance community ties with the requirements of electoral equality. Our response therefore focuses solely on our areas of concern with the Draft Proposal.

The most significant change in approach from the previous two local reviews is that the Commission has, for the first time, proposed wards that cross the Central Line in the Woodford and South Woodford areas. The Central Line was identified as a 'hard boundary' by the previous review (and indeed the one prior). We do recognise, however, that there is some potential advantage in doing this. Residents do tend to look towards the underground stations as the 'focal point' for their communities. The historical growth of both South Woodford and Woodford was stimulated by the railway line, and shops and services are today concentrated around tube stations, serving people on both sides of the line. Further, as is the case across much of London, if you ask someone where in London they live, they will tend to give the nearest underground station as the name for their community. Indeed when Redbridge Council established Area Committees shortly after 2000, it employed consultants to interview local residents about where they thought they lived, and the research finding was that the sense of community identity was strongest in, respectively, Woodford, South Woodford and Wanstead.

1. Churchfields Ward

The Commission's proposed Churchfields Ward contains the northern part of South Woodford, separated from the Underground station by the A406. In terms of community the proposed ward is not ideal, as it clearly consists of two halves with no vehicular connections other than around the ward boundary (and, at the south western corner, only by travelling briefly outside the Borough). Nevertheless, we can see that the boundaries the Commission is proposing are strong.

We notice that the proposed ward is particularly large, not much below +10% on the 2021 forecast electorate, with a still larger current variance. Because of the strong boundaries, we recognise that there is not much scope to address this without losing the merit of the proposal. Nevertheless there is one change that we would suggest: transferring Chalford Walk (together with a few adjacent houses in the short part of Broadmead Road East of Chigwell Road) into Bridge Ward, which as proposed is under-sized. Because Chalford Walk is a self-contained cul-de-sac only accessible from the north (such that it is almost cut off from the rest of Churchfields ward as proposed), transferring it to Bridge does not detract from the clarity of the boundaries. This small proposal improves the overall electoral equality with Churchfields at 11644 on the 2021 forecast (+8%) and Bridge at 10378 (-4%), according to modelling done for us by Redbridge Council officers.

2. South Woodford and Wanstead

We can see the logic for the proposed two-member Wanstead Park ward, which contains most of the area south of the A12.

However we have a significant concern with the proposed division between "South Woodford and Snaresbrook" and "Wanstead Village", which offers neither a good boundary nor a good representation of community ties.

The proposed boundary between these two wards is particularly weak. Hermon Hill and Chigwell Roads carry mostly local traffic, outside of rush hour, since the M11 cannot be accessed from Charlie Brown roundabout and the A406 is better accessed via the A12 eastbound or A104 westbound. Both roads are single carriageway and along them are various local shops and services including shops, various restaurants, and the parish church. Neither Chigwell Road nor Hermon Hill is currently even used as a polling district boundary, and Hermon Hill has previously been recommended to the Commission as a focal point for a ward. Further, we see that the Commission comments (in the Draft Recommendations document) that it cannot even use the centre of these roads as the boundary because of the resulting electoral inequality.

In terms of community, as we noted above, these focus upon the local underground stations. Taking the area covered by these two wards together, the reality is that people living in the northern part, closest to South Woodford station, see themselves as living in South Woodford, and do their shopping and access other services in South Woodford's George Lane and High Road. In the southern part people look towards Wanstead High Street.

The difficulty we have with the Commission's draft proposal in this area is that it breaks local community ties, when the only real justification for departing from the Commission's long standing advocacy of the Central Line as a ward boundary would be to better reflect the fact that communities tend to focus around the tube stations. The proposed "Wanstead Village" ward does not include all of Wanstead High Street, yet at its northern end extends as far as Charlie Brown roundabout, which no-one locally would see as having anything to do with Wanstead. A large part of the residential area at the north of this proposed ward (all of the roads running south off Chigwell Road, together with the estate north and west of Nightingale School) is an integral part of South Woodford, looking towards George Lane for shopping, transport and services.

Consequently the proposed "South Woodford and Snaresbrook" ward actually in effect covers 'South Woodford West' and 'Snaresbrook West', since the proposed boundary runs very close to Snaresbrook Station, with roads such as Wellesley Road that are outside of the ward clearly looking towards Snaresbrook as the nearest local station.

We therefore propose an alternative sub-division of this area into two three-member wards, one for South Woodford and one for Wanstead, divided along an east-west boundary line close to the catchment 'watershed' between South Woodford and Wanstead/Snaresbrook stations. This much better reflects the actual dividing line between South Woodford and Wanstead, close to the E18/E11 postcode boundary and, for the eastern part, the existing boundaries between wards. In the case of our Wanstead Village ward, the whole of Wanstead High Street, together with all adjacent roads, is brought together into a single ward.

I attach a map produced by Council officers which shows our proposal in respect of this area of the Borough (the full revised Borough map is available from either me or Redbridge Council, but the size of the file at 9MB does exceed your submission limit).

Since these two wards in the Draft Proposal are both under-sized on the 2021 forecast, subdividing this area in a different way cannot change the average absolute inequality across the Borough as a whole. According to Council officers our "South Woodford" ward would have 9781 electors in 2021 (-9%) with our "Wanstead Village" at 10181 (-6%).

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Ian Bond

Leader, Redbridge Liberal Democrats



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Churchfields

South Woodford

Wanstead Village