

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES – RESPONSE OF EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is the Council's response to consultation being conducted by the Boundary Commission for England about its initial proposals for new Parliamentary Constituencies in Essex.
- 1.2 These responses were approved at the meeting of the Council held on 1 November 2011.

2. Representations in Response to Consultation Questions

- 2.1 The Council is asked to comment on the Commission's proposals in four respects. These are set out below with, after each heading, a suggested response.
- 2.2 **Whether the Council agrees in full, in part or not at all with the Commission's initial proposals for the Eastern Region**

Response:

The Council has not reviewed the proposals for the Eastern Region, other than those which affect the Epping Forest District and has no comment to make.

- 2.3 **Which sub-region proposals the Council agrees with and why.**

Response:

The Epping Forest District is part of the Essex Sub-Region and the Council has restricted its consideration of the Commission's initial proposals to the constituencies affecting the Epping Forest District. The Council fully supports the proposals for new constituencies of Epping Forest, Brentwood & Ongar and Harlow.

The proposals for the Epping Forest District seem to the Council logical in that:

- (a) the new constituency for Epping Forest retains its current community identity;
- (b) the one change (ie the addition of Lambourne district ward) to the Epping Forest Constituency is appropriate in community governance terms in that the ward has links to the neighbouring Theydon Bois ward which sits at the heart of the Epping Forest Constituency.
- (c) that the community links between Lambourne and Theydon Bois District Wards are reflected in local services, local retailing facilities, transport links and in terms of distance which places Lambourne much closer to the Epping Forest constituency than to Brentwood.
- (d) that the new Epping Forest constituency provides North Weald Bassett Ward with continuity of parliamentary representation in that it remains in Brentwood and Ongar thereby avoiding the difficulties experienced in previous reviews where the ward has been transferred between different constituencies at different times;

(e) that the new Epping Forest, Harlow and Brentwood and Ongar constituencies meet the Commission's electorate criteria and create constituencies which are logical and justified by existing community links.

2.4 Which Sub Region does the Council disagree with and why?

Response:

The Council has not reviewed proposals for the Eastern Region, having concentrated on the 3 local constituencies. However, the Council cannot support the boundary at Matching Green between the Harlow and Brentwood & Ongar Constituencies, which the Council regards as anomalous in that it divides a single community, taking no account of recent changes to the Parish, District and County Electoral Division boundaries with which the constituency boundary was previously coterminous. This is discussed in greater detail under the next question.

2.5 What are the Council's alternatives for areas with which the Council disagrees and which meet the statutory rules?

The Council is unhappy about the anomaly which will be created at Matching Green if the Commission's initial proposals for the boundary between the Brentwood & Ongar and Harlow constituencies are not changed.

The Council contends that having different electoral boundaries at this location will cause considerable confusion among voters when Parliamentary elections are held concurrently with those for local government. Over recent years, concurrent elections have become the norm and there are very strong cost arguments for continuing this policy. There will, in the view of the Returning Officer, be problems in running such elections on different boundaries.

The effect of re-aligning the Parliamentary boundary at Matching Green would have the effect of transferring 160 voters (approx) from the Brentwood & Ongar constituency to Harlow. In terms of electorate figures, a comparison is given below:

Present Electorate (Commission's Initial Proposals)

Brentwood & Ongar	74,240
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Harlow	73,223
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Proposed Electorate (By re-aligning the Parliamentary Boundary at Matching Green)

Brentwood & Ongar	74,080 (96.65% of electoral quota)
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Harlow	73,383 (95.74% of electoral quota)
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These new electorate figures are within the tolerances of + or – 5% of the quota as prescribed in the statutory rules.

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A map showing the relevant boundaries is attached.