

Rt Hon Greg Hands MP Submission to the Boundary Commission for England in respect of its 2023 Review into Parliamentary Boundaries in London.

1. I have been 23 years in elected local politics in Chelsea, Fulham and Hammersmith. From 1998 to 2006 as an elected Local Councillor in Fulham, 2005-2010 as MP for Hammersmith & Fulham and since 2010 as MP for Chelsea & Fulham. I have lived in Fulham since 1990.
2. My submission covers the proposed constituencies of *Westminster & Chelsea East* and *Fulham & Chelsea West* presented by the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) in its initial proposals for North Central and North West London. Extremely radical changes, as proposed by the Commission, especially for Chelsea, would only be justifiable if alternative models cannot be created, but in this case they can be.
3. Firstly, I will set out the problems created by the proposed model, and secondly, I will outline my alternative and the reasons why this would serve the area better, whilst still meeting the required constituency size with regards to number of voters.
4. As we know, Rule 5 in Schedule 2 provides a number of requirements for the BCE to take into account when proposing new constituency boundaries. These include a) geographical considerations (size, shape and accessibility of a constituency), b) existing local government boundaries, c) boundaries of current constituencies, d) local ties that would be broken by changes to a constituency and e) possible inconveniences resulting from the boundary changes.
5. Bearing in mind the above points, it is difficult to follow the BCE's reasoning for splitting Chelsea into two new constructs, *Chelsea East* and *Chelsea West*, which would find themselves in different parliamentary constituencies. I am strongly opposed to these proposals, as these divide Chelsea into two, unreasonably.
6. Geographically, Chelsea is a small but well-known neighbourhood between the River Thames and the Fulham Road. The iconic (New) King's Road acts as the central thread with old and new historical significance, connecting Chelsea with Fulham. Originally, a private royal road, used by King Charles II to travel to Kew, the King's Road gained international fame once again during the Swinging Sixties. The cult and fame remain to date. Fulham Road is its other major artery, which in many places forms the northern boundary of Chelsea, compared with Kensington.

Local Ties Within Chelsea

7. Chelsea is a small, well-knit community within the smallest London borough of Kensington & Chelsea. To split such a small, historically and culturally important area of inner London would be arbitrary, and in my view, totally unnecessary. Chelsea must remain as one Chelsea: *East Chelsea* and *West Chelsea* simply do not exist in London. It is therefore no surprise that previous constituency and local government boundaries have always respected the unity of Chelsea. It is not only strong local community ties that bind the area together, it is also its history.
8. The Royal Hospital, founded in 1681 by King Charles II, is located on the site of the former 'Chelsey College' which had been founded by James I. Chelsea's centre was originally located around Chelsea Manor, first recorded well before the Domesday Book and acquired by Henry VIII in 1536. Over the years, Chelsea Manor had prominent residents, including Elizabeth I and Anne of Cleves. Chelsea Manor Street remains on this site until today with the recognisable Chelsea Old Town Hall directly adjacent.
9. After nearly 1,000 years of a united Chelsea, the BCE proposes to split such integral historic sites. This shows little understanding of historic ties, characteristics and developments of the area. The Royal Hospital Chelsea is very much part of the entirety of Chelsea - for example the Chelsea Pensioners having eight regular, reserved places on match-day at Chelsea Football Club - and this undoubtedly argues for the retention of Royal Hospital ward with the rest of Chelsea in its entirety.
10. Further, it can be argued, that Sloane Square is the quintessential entry to Chelsea with easy access to the Royal Hospital, Chelsea Physic Garden, National Army Museum, Duke of York Square with the Saatchi Gallery as well as the King's Road, Chelsea Arts Club, Chelsea Old Town Hall, Chelsea Library and the World's End Estate. All these institutions are being frequented by residents from Chelsea as a whole.
11. The King's Road forms the cultural spine of the Chelsea community and is well-known internationally. The preservation of this unique character hub requires close co-operation between community groups, the local authority and the Member of Parliament. Cutting the King's Road apart would be hugely detrimental to the continuity of both historic and cultural community ties.
12. Similar dividing plans have been proposed by the BCE for the Fulham Road with the great hospitals along the Fulham Road (Marsden, Royal Brompton and Chelsea & Westminster) being separated into a different constituency, in this case *Chelsea West*. St Luke's Church, itself Grade I listed, and one of

the largest non-cathedral churches in England, would find its parish split between two constituencies.

13. The BCE proposal also splits several 'Character Areas' and Conservation Areas in Chelsea, causing significant harm to community identities and the coherence of parliamentary constituencies.
14. The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has recently undertaken a Character Study, the purpose of which is "*to divide the borough into 'Character Areas' which share common characteristics,*" both in relation to community identity and the built environment.
15. The Cheyne Character Area, identified in RBKC's study and defined as "*predominantly compris[ing] early to mid-Victorian uniform terraces*", spans from Sloane Court East in the east to Milman's Street in the west. Flood Street and Oakley Street do not divide this community as proposed by the BCE. The BCE proposal splits these roads in half. Both Flood Street and Oakley Street would have parts in different constituencies: three quarters of Oakley Street would be in *Fulham and Chelsea West*, with the other quarter in *Westminster and Chelsea East*. The same applies to Flood Street, but the other way round.
16. In addition, the BCE proposal splits several Conservation Areas into different parliamentary constituencies. The Royal Hospital Conservation Area and Thames Conservation Area would have parliamentary boundary lines splitting their designated areas. The Chelsea Conservation Area together with the Elystan Street Neighbourhood Centre around Chelsea Green would be equally affected by finding themselves in different parliamentary constituencies, despite being very much united through the central hub, Chelsea Green, and having benefitted from local government funding as recently as Spring 2021.
17. Markham Street, a very narrow residential street, is proposed to be the new constituency boundary, splitting a well-knit and compact local community. Whilst RBKC ward boundaries might split roads, for parliamentary representation this is unworkable and would be detrimental to residents.
18. Furthermore, the BCE proposal to join the wards of Royal Hospital and Brompton & Hans Town with the City of Westminster is justified by the Commission as the "*Belgravia, Brompton, East Chelsea and Knightsbridge areas share a similar character*". I fundamentally disagree with this illusory argument. Eastern Chelsea features largely red-brick buildings of the Cadogan Estate and focuses onto Sloane Street and the King's Road. Belgravia has white stucco fronted buildings, very characteristic of the Grosvenor Estate. Focus points for residents are amongst the streets and towards Victoria, especially Motcomb Street and Elizabeth Street.

19. As the incumbent Member of Parliament for *Chelsea & Fulham*, I am very concerned about the parliamentary representation Chelsea would be able to receive when split apart and added as a suffix to either Westminster or Fulham. Chelsea requires and deserves to be represented as one.
20. The proposed boundary between *East Chelsea* and *West Chelsea* has no substance, and residents would be confused as to where the border is located.
21. The change in constituency name would not reflect alignment to the local authority, which often aids identifying the relating parliamentary constituency and vice versa. Chelsea would be reduced to a suffix which can easily lead to community fragmentation.

Connections between Chelsea and Fulham

22. The current constituency *Chelsea & Fulham* follows the River Thames in its entirety from Chelsea Bridge to Putney Bridge. Several bus routes (Nos 11,14, 22, 211 and 414) travel along the entire area of Chelsea & Fulham and connect the two localities seamlessly. The beauty of the current Chelsea & Fulham constituency is that it contains the entirety of both Kings Road and Fulham Road (except a few yards at the Brompton end).
23. There is huge common interest between Chelsea (in its entirety) and Fulham. Many features in Chelsea are labelled 'Fulham', and many features in Fulham are labelled 'Chelsea', most notably of course, Chelsea Football Club, located just inside Fulham, SW6. Chelsea Harbour is just inside Fulham, too.
24. There are very few equivalents between Chelsea and Westminster. This is with the exception of the Chelsea & Westminster Hospital - ironically located close to the border with Fulham, and which would be located in the BCE's proposed *Fulham & Chelsea West* constituency, not in *Westminster & Chelsea East*!
25. Public transport stations at Imperial Wharf and Fulham Broadway serve residents from both Fulham and Chelsea equally.

Interaction with borough boundaries

26. Local government borough boundaries have respected the integrity of Chelsea since the creation of the Metropolitan Borough of Chelsea in 1900 and also during its amalgamation with the Metropolitan Borough of

Kensington in 1965, to create what is now the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), following the London Government Act of 1963.

27. The BCE proposal does not reflect these long-established local government boundaries, which have always affirmed the integrity of Chelsea. Additionally, the BCE proposal suggests dividing RBKC into three parliamentary constituencies. This is wholly unjustifiable for the smallest London borough, with only 7,500 voters over the threshold to justify a parliamentary constituency of its own.
28. A constituency should be aligned to the local authority, where possible. By creating a *Westminster & Chelsea East* constituency, the Royal Hospital ward would be unnaturally aligned with Westminster council. Westminster has different priorities and primarily planning concerns compared to RBKC as a local authority. Parliamentary representation would be difficult for such incongruent areas with different local plans. Chelsea's parliamentary representation should be through one Member of Parliament, especially given its small size and distinctive community.

Current constituency and number of MPs

29. The original borough constituency of Chelsea was created following the Reform Act 1867 and Chelsea has remained either as a self-standing constituency or as an integral area within a larger constituency through around half a dozen boundary re-organisations.
30. The main parts of Chelsea have never been split apart in any previous boundary review, apart from very small parts of split wards. It is worth noting that the present constituencies are based on old council ward boundaries, which prevailed before 2018. This explains the current ward of Brompton & Hans Town being split between the *Chelsea & Fulham* constituency on the one hand, and the *Kensington* constituency on the other.
31. Chelsea used to form a parliamentary constituency of its own in the past (until 1997), but it is now too small in electors, and therefore needs to be joined with a neighbouring area to meet the minimum voter threshold.
32. Between 1997 and 2010, Chelsea was paired with Kensington, which worked well, not least as both share a common local authority.
33. Since 2010, Chelsea has been paired with Fulham. As the only MP to have ever represented this constituency, I can vouch for the connectivity between Chelsea (as a whole) and Fulham. The joint parliamentary representation of Chelsea & Fulham has community support and has worked well since its creation.

34. I recognise the need for all three of these boroughs (Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster) to have more than one Member of Parliament, due to the number of electors in each. However, to split the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the smallest of all London boroughs, between three parliamentary representatives is unnecessary and avoidable. This would add unnecessary complications for engagement between the Royal Borough and the parliamentary representatives, and cause confusion on the ground, particularly in Chelsea and in South Kensington.
35. The BCE proposals do not take into account the existing and previous constituency boundaries which have respected the integrity of Chelsea for the entirety of parliamentary history.

Solutions

36. The following counter-proposal comes from a local perspective and solves the problems listed above without splitting Chelsea, as I firmly believe that an alternative model can be created.
37. My proposal is focused locally, but connects to the Conservative Party proposal for the wider London area. I accept, that even minor local changes have an impact on the wider London area. These knock-on effects have been addressed in the Conservative Party proposal.
38. I believe my proposal would be an improvement on the initial proposal from the BCE as it would reflect local ties far better, largely follow existing constituency boundary lines with only minor adjustments whilst representing around 76,500 voters which is within the required number of electors.
39. There would be no unnatural linkage of eastern Chelsea with the City of Westminster as proposed by the BCE and the current constituency name *Chelsea & Fulham* could be retained.
40. Firstly, I do not propose any changes to the new boundary in north Fulham. I note the inclusion of the wards of Fulham Reach and West Kensington. Both wards are historically part of Fulham, rather than Hammersmith, and have previously been part of the Fulham constituency which existed until 1997. They have ties with the rest of Fulham to the south.
41. However, I propose to move Courtfield ward back into the Kensington seat where it has been since 2010, and replace it with Royal Hospital ward. Courtfield ward is the largest residential district of South Kensington and has historically been part of Kensington. This way, the vast majority of the

Chelsea community would remain united and combined into one parliamentary constituency, together with the entirety of Fulham (Rule 5 (1) c). The current constituency name *Chelsea & Fulham* could (and should) continue to be used (Rule 5 (1) e). The constituency would continue to cover the full length of both the (New) King's Road and Fulham Road (bar about 30 yards), which are natural linkages between the two named communities as outlined above.

42. The adjusted *Chelsea & Fulham* seat would therefore contain the RBKC wards of Chelsea Riverside, Redcliffe, Royal Hospital and Stanley. This means that all but 2,567 electors (from the split Brompton & Hans Town ward) in the existing Chelsea & Fulham constituency would be retained in the *Chelsea & Fulham* constituency. The LBHF wards in this adjusted constituency would be Sands End, Parsons Green & Sandford, Fulham Town, Walham Green, Lillie, Munster, Palace & Hurlingham, Fulham Reach and West Kensington.
43. In order to stay within the required number of electors, the entire ward of Brompton & Hans Town would move into the Kensington constituency. This is regrettable, but inevitable, in my view, as especially the southern part of the Brompton & Hans Town area is a long-standing part of Chelsea. On balance, I firmly believe that the creation of an *East* and a *West Chelsea* for parliamentary representation would be much worse. The connection to Westminster is non-existent for Brompton & Hans Town, not only due to missing local authority linkage. Eastern Chelsea is very different to Belgravia. Residents orientate their social life towards Sloane Square and the length of the King's Road, as well as towards South Kensington, but not towards Victoria (Rule 5 (1) a).
44. I accept that part of Brompton & Hans Town ward is historically residential Chelsea, but the ward (only combined in 2018 from two separate wards, Hans Town in Chelsea and Brompton in Kensington) also contains the most iconic parts of South Kensington. I recognise that this linkage could be used rather than the Chelsea one for parliamentary purposes.
45. The inclusion of Redcliffe ward in this adjusted Chelsea & Fulham constituency is a point of continuity with the existing constituency, even though many view it as historically part of Kensington. Overall, this is a much less radical change to the present arrangements than the BCE's initial proposal.

Conclusions

46. As outlined above, my proposal is far more compliant with Rule 5 (1) d as it retains local ties between all Chelsea areas. I firmly believe that my proposed alternative solution would be far better for the local area and its residents

and represents the smallest change possible without splitting Chelsea and making other radical changes to the local area.

47. My alternative proposal would retain parliamentary representation of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea by only two MPs, which is the minimum number necessary to fit the quota, and is therefore a better solution than the BCE's proposal which would divide the borough between three MPs and not comply with Rule 5 (1) b.
48. Chelsea is one community – from Stamford Bridge and the NHS hospitals and the Worlds End at the western end, through St Luke's, Chelsea Old Town Hall and Chelsea Old Church in the centre, through to the Royal Hospital, the Chelsea Physic Garden and Sloane Square in the east: this is all one community.
49. *West Chelsea* and *East Chelsea* do exist in New York City, but they do not exist in London.
50. The unnatural divide between a *Chelsea West* and a *Chelsea East* would be seen in countless Chelsea features. For example, the Chelsea Pensioners (at the Royal Hospital) would be in *Westminster & Chelsea East*; but the Chelsea Pensioner pub would be in *Fulham & Chelsea West*.
51. Chelsea as a whole shares much in common with Fulham, but little with Westminster. Even the Chelsea & Westminster Hospital is close to the border between Chelsea and Fulham, and nowhere near Westminster! In any case, it would be in the BCE's "Fulham and Chelsea West", not in the new "Westminster and Chelsea East" seat.
52. It is not only undesirable to split Chelsea, but also unnecessary, as my alternative proposal creates constituencies within the size range, and preserves local ties and reduces inconvenience.
53. I commend my alternative proposal for a continuity *Chelsea & Fulham* constituency to the Review.