

Sandwell

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Comment text:

Related subject: West Bromwich Constituency

I am writing in support of the proposed new ward boundaries put forward by Sandwell Council for the wards that make up my constituency of West Bromwich.

I would firstly note that these boundaries were drawn up by a cross-party committee of the council and were passed unanimously by the council in their meeting on 17th September 2023. The fact that they have support of Labour, Conservative and independent members of the Council indicates that they are a positive development that not only meets the legal requirement of electoral equality but also the support the interests and identities of local communities and ensure effective and convenient local government.

I would like to make comment on the proposed new Newton and Valley Ward, the changes to Rowley Ward and Tividale Ward, and the name change for the proposed new Great Barr, Tamebridge and Yew Tree Ward.

The biggest apparent change on the map is the proposed new Newton and Valley Ward to replace the current existing Newton Ward. This is slightly misleading on the map, as it is the result of putting all of Sandwell Valley Country Park into one ward, rather than the current arrangement of splitting the park between the Newton and West Bromwich Central Wards.

The park encompasses the valley of the River Tame and is the site of the former Sandwell Priory. I believe that placing the entirety of the park into one ward will improve the effectiveness and convenience of local government for the residents of this area. The numbers in terms of electoral

equality make moving the park into the existing Newton Ward more sensible than moving it into the existing West Bromwich Central Ward.

This has led to a section of the proposed new ward to be separated from the current Newton Ward by the Country Park, in order to meet the electoral equality requirements. Whilst not perfect I agree with the council that this is the best compromise between the need for electoral equality and the interests and identities of local communities. The current Newton Ward is somewhat self-contained, with less in common with the Yew Tree Estate to the north than might be envisioned purely from the map in large part because of the socio-economic differences between those two communities, reflected in the different types and values of housing in those areas. As Newton was too small to meet the electoral equality requirements on its existing boundaries it was required to take in additional populations from somewhere, and as much of the boundary of Newton Ward is the edge of the Borough this would inevitably mean a compromise on the identities of local communities.

The character of the existing Newton Ward is also strongly linked to the Newton Road (A4041) which forms its northern border and gives the ward its name. The decision therefore to extend the boundary along the Newton Road (A4041) and to take in the roads which fall between that road, the A4031 (a continuation of the A4041 as it turns south) and the park is the best compromise as they are also linked to this major road. It also makes travel between the two sections simple.

In the south of the proposed new ward are several roads – Salters Lane, Lodge Hill Road and Sandwell Park Road – which are roads within the Sandwell Valley Country Park to provide access to the park and the Sandwell Valley Farm and Visitor Centre. There are also in this section of the ward the housing along Warstone Drive, Belvedere Close and six dwellings on Salter's Lane before it goes into the park. These roads, by virtue of bordering the park, are heavily linked to and entwined with the park. Therefore, incorporating them with the park in the new ward does make sense.

The change of name for the ward to Newton and Valley Ward also reflects the proposal to expand the current Newton Ward, to include Sandwell Valley Country Park and the communities that surround it. To reiterate therefore, whilst acknowledging that it is not perfect, I do agree with the Council and the cross-party committee that drew up the boundaries that it is the best available compromise to meet the legal requirement for electoral equality.

The proposal to move sections of Rowley Ward into Blackheath Ward along the existing border makes sense as the only way that Blackheath Ward could be brought up to the requirements of electoral equality. This meant that Rowley Ward in turn needed to take in a large section of the current Tividale Ward, which in turn took in a large section of the current Oldbury Ward. I believe that this arrangement both meets the electoral equality requirements and also actually improves the interests and identities of local communities compared to the current boundaries. The section of Tividale Ward which is moving over to Rowley Ward is separated from Tividale centre by the Rowley Hills park and nature reserve. There is at least as much connection in that area with Rowley Regis as a town as with Tividale and moving them to the proposed new Rowley Ward will not cause any disquiet in terms of the identity of the community.

On the other hand the area of the current Oldbury Ward being moved to the new proposed Tividale Ward does identify strongly with Tividale. It

includes Tividale Road, which is the main high street for Tividale, Tividale Park, Tividale Mosque and Tividale Primary School. It was always a peculiar historical lacuna that it did not form a part of the Tividale Ward and I am glad to see this rectified in the current proposals from the Council.

The current Great Barr and Yew Tree Ward is proposed to keep its existing boundaries but to adopt a new name, of Great Barr, Tame Bridge and Yew Tree. This was the unanimous suggestion of the Councillors who represent that ward, and I would like to add my support to it. The area consists of three distinct parts, Great Barr, the Tame Bridge Estate and the Yew Tree estate and the three sections should all be referenced in the name.

The remaining changes are, I believe, small adjustments to ensure that electoral equality is met.

I therefore reiterate my support for the proposed new ward map submitted by Sandwell Council with unanimous support in the chamber.

Attached Documents:

None attached