



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Boundary Commission
35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ

2 August 2021

Dear Sirs,

Gloucester Parliamentary Constituency proposals

Your 2023 review of parliamentary constituencies proposes that the residents of two wards in Gloucester City, Barnwood and Elmbridge, would vote for an MP for Tewkesbury rather than an MP for Gloucester, in order to reduce the number of voters in Gloucester to below the maximum allowed per constituency (77,062).

No MP likes 'losing' constituents whom he or she has represented for 11 years, helping many of them with personal issues, but that is not a relevant reason for the Commission to take into account. Equally my Party has accepted the mathematical logic of your treating Wiltshire and Gloucestershire as one area, because both counties have half a constituency each too many voters. From that follows the creation of an additional constituency on the border of the southern part of Gloucestershire (ie around Cirencester) and the northern part of Wiltshire (ie around Malmesbury), and a considerable knock on impact on the rest of Gloucestershire.

Any change I propose therefore has to bear in mind both the constraints of the Commission's task re Gloucester and its impact on Gloucester's neighbours, and the rest of the county/two counties.

My proposals must be:

- Within the bands of number of voters allowed
- Identify relevant existing connectivity between parts of the constituency

On the first point, the current total number of voters (as of the calculation point) in Gloucester is 81,509, and the number of voters in both Elmbridge (4,814) and Barnwood (4,980), or together 9,794, implying a new reduced total of 71,715 voters for Gloucester constituency. However adding back in either Barnwood or Elmbridge would give a number within the bands (76,529 including Elmbridge but not Barnwood or 76,695 including Barnwood but not Elmbridge). Of course there would be a knock on impact on Tewkesbury of c4,000 fewer voters, but this would not affect Tewkesbury's total number, which would remain within the min/max band allowed, or anywhere else in the county/two counties. So this proposal has no important ripple effect. The question is (apart from the maths) what is the case for voters in either ward continuing to vote for an MP for Gloucester, rather than Tewkesbury?

The reason why this matters is that the main risk of the proposal is that the vital connectivity between voter and constituency, already tested by the decision before the 2010 General Election to oblige Longlevens Ward residents vote for an MP for Tewkesbury, could now be weakened further. Residents of Elmbridge live in many cases within a mile and a half of The

Cross, which marks the City Centre, and residents of Barnwood not much further away. If connections are broken that can be dangerous for democracy

So in order to provide evidence to inform both my views and the consultation, I direct mailed every household in both Barnwood and Elmbridge with a survey: and attach copies of both surveys, and the summarised results. Of a total of 5,028 surveys sent we received 864 responses (as of this evening), or a response rate of 17.2%. I attach a summary of the results and would like to highlight the following key points:

An overwhelming number of all respondents (817 or 94.6%) replied that if there was an option to vote for an MP for Gloucester they would prefer that. The number of those who did not think it would make a big difference/were unsure or did not answer the questions was 39 (or 4.5%).

The figure was even higher in answer to the question 'where do you feel strongly connected to?' with a combined total of 818 or 94.7% saying Gloucester.

Given that residents of both wards live in Gloucester City this is perhaps not surprising, but the survey also shows the break down under the different categories of where do residents work, shop, visit their GP, dentist or PO, travel to on the bus & go to the cinema – their ward, Gloucester or Tewkesbury. The figures are again very strongly show the connectivity to Gloucester, with average response rate of over 60.65% of replies replying that they do these things in Gloucester v 2% in Tewkesbury.

So I conclude from this that residents of both wards absolutely meet the criterion of very strong connections to Gloucester not Tewkesbury constituency.

However, since I cannot argue for voters in both wards to remain voting for an MP for Gloucester (because of the maths), the question is which group of voters has – at the margin – the stronger claim to be more connected to Gloucester. The survey results show that:

The numbers who replied from Barnwood were 471 (or 18.7% of households) and from Elmbridge 393 (or 16%). Of those who replied, 34.3% from Barnwood said they worked in Barnwood, whereas a broadly equal number 27% said they worked in Elmbridge and Longlevens. Longlevens is the adjoining ward to Elmbridge and also the name of the county division; residents of Longlevens ward vote for an MP for Tewkesbury in a general election

Understandably the links between Elmbridge and Longlevens are very strong: as many replies consider that they live in Longlevens as Elmbridge, and quite a high number consider they live in both (which is also true because of the name of the division).

Whereas 91% of Barnwood residents say that it would make a difference to the likelihood of them voting if it was for an MP for Gloucester or Tewkesbury, and only 24.6% think that it would either not make a difference/or not much of a difference or unsure if it would make a difference: the figures were 73% and 25% respectively for residents of Elmbridge, implying that although hardly any from either ward welcomed the prospect of voting in Tewkesbury constituency, more in Elmbridge were sanguine about the impact on them voting.

It is therefore hard not to conclude that, at the margin, there are more residents who both feel strongly enough to reply (18.7% v 16% rate of response) and have stronger views about who they wish to vote for (see 3c above) in Barnwood than Elmbridge. Because of the decision made about constituency boundaries in Parliament in 2007 that impacted Longlevens residents there is also a logic about all voters in the Longlevens division voting for an MP for Tewkesbury, than half that division and half the Barnwood & Hucclecote division. Barnwood's links with its immediate neighbouring wards – Abbeymead, Abbeydale, Hucclecote and Coney Hill, which will all continue to vote for an MP for Gloucester – are as strong as the links between Elmbridge and Longlevens.

Lastly it is also true that whereas the boundary between Barnwood and its neighbours above

are complicated and weakly defined, the boundary between Barnwood and Elmbridge is the Gloucester to Cheltenham railway line for the entire length of the Elmbridge/Barnwood boundary – and this is the most natural break point both between both communities (increased by the parallel dual carriageway Eastern Avenue) and constituencies. I believe that such a boundary, while not welcomed, would be widely understood.

In short although I would rather not have any changes at all, in order to comply with the requirements of the Commission's task, I believe that it is both possible and desirable for the residents of one of these wards to vote for an MP for Gloucester in a General Election.

I believe the evidence shows the case is slightly stronger for Barnwood, and this reflects its strong links with neighbouring wards which vote for an MP for Gloucester. The local GP surgery, two supermarkets, Police station, library and bank branch are in Hucclecote, and Hucclecote Rd becomes Barnwood Rd; this is a straight line road (the Roman Ermin Way) and the boundary between the two is indistinguishable except for a small sign.

The same is true for Elmbridge and Longlevens: the boundary much of the time is Cheltenham Rd, where voters on one side vote for the MP for Tewkesbury and on the other for an MP for Gloucester. It is more logical for both to vote for the same MP, and the case for a new constituency boundary along the railway line between Barnwood and Elmbridge is much stronger than for any other boundary.

On that basis I counter propose that the Commission should allow the 4,980 residents of Barnwood ward should continue to vote for an MP for Gloucester in a General Election, which would represent an improvement both under common sense, local government boundaries and connectivity (under Rule 5 (1) b, c & d) and provide a widely understood boundary.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Graham', written in a cursive style.

Richard Graham
MP for Gloucester