**Stephen Hammond MP – speech to Boundary Commission – 18.10.16**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I consider this not just as my personal response to the consultation as MP for Wimbledon since 2005, but a representation of the views expressed to me from the numerous Residents Associations meetings I have been attending on the topic, and the many letters and emails I have received.

The Boundary Commission’s current proposals for the Wimbledon constituency are both disappointing and detrimental beyond the numerical mandatory criteria. The Boundary Commission set out four criteria which it seeks to take account of in undertaking this review.

Firstly – size shape and accessibility. The proposed Merton and Wimbledon Central seat clearly fails on shape, as Cricket Green and Ravensbury wards stick out oddly from the side of the constituency. It also fails on accessibility as it is impossible to quickly and sensibly get from Cricket Green to West Barnes (Motspur Park).

Secondly – existing Local Government Boundaries. Under the current proposals, the London Borough of Merton moves from having two MPs to five. I understand you heard strong representations on this point yesterday, with the likely difficulties for both the Local Authority and the quality of representation.

Thirdly – the boundaries of existing constituency. The seats created from the current Wimbledon constituency take little account of previous boundaries.

Fourthly – local ties. The current Boundary Commission proposals have ripped Wimbledon apart, and equally have ripped Mitcham apart. In particular, it destroys community interest and cohesion by removing Village and Wimbledon Park and adding it them to a new Wimbledon Common and Putney constituency.

By the Boundary Commission’s own criteria, the new Central Wimbledon and Merton seat fails significantly against their own criteria.

Moreover, the seat called Merton and Wimbledon Central is bizarre. Why Wimbledon Central? Whist it indicates the presence of the Town Centre (made up of Dundonald, Trinity, Hillside and Abbey Wards), it fails to take account of Raynes Park, Motspur Park, Morden or indeed the newly added parts of the current Mitcham and Morden constituency, Colliers Wood and Cricket Green which is a key part of Mitcham town centre.

I can therefore only conclude that the Boundary Commission knows very little about this part of London – for whilst there is a Merton Park, and there is Merton Abbey, there is not a defined place called Merton! The Borough’s title is merely a historic convenience to link disparate centres of Wimbledon and Mitcham into one administrative unit.

Locally, there is widespread concern and upset at that the proposals do away with a single Wimbledon seat, which has existed in various forms since 1885. Wimbledon is a key local centre and transport hub for the South London area, with a vibrant town centre and a unique suburban village, which is known all over the world.

The current Wimbledon constituency is remarkably cohesive, in terms of where residents live, and where they go for shopping, leisure and public transport. For me, this has meant that as Member of Parliament for Wimbledon I am able to represent and understand the issues faced by residents, as they are mostly self-contained within the constituency.

For example, the biggest local issue facing us in Wimbledon at the moment is Crossrail 2. This affects Wimbledon Park in North of my seat where they plan to construct a Crossrail 2 depot, Abbey, Trinity, Hillside and Dundonald, the town centre wards which will face the effects of the construction around the station, Raynes Park which will have a new station constructed and West Barnes, which may have level crossings closed to allow the trains to travel North. Furthermore, while there will be no Crossrail 2 construction in Wimbledon Village, most Village commuters travel from Wimbledon Station in the Town Centre, and so they are directly affected. All these issues are interlinked; so a change to the configuration at Wimbledon station will have knock on effects up and down the line across the constituency. I am able to represent and inform these residents in relation to Crossrail 2 much more effectively given that the impact across my constituency. This would not be the case under the new boundaries which would represent a serious decrease in the quality of representation. This is just one example of a number of issues I work on as the MP for a cohesive community.

To discuss Wimbledon Village specifically, residents here do not look north to the Putney constituency at all, and there are very few interests of shared concern. Indeed most residents in Village ward are physically separated from residents in the current Putney constituency by both the Common and the A3 road.

Residents do not believe that Wimbledon stops on Wimbledon Hill Road, instead they see the Village and Wimbledon Town Centre as a natural continuum. The current proposals would lead to a completely arbitrary break between the top and bottom of Wimbledon Hill Road, split across the Ridgway, with the north side being in Putney and the south side being in Wimbledon. All residents in this area very strongly identify with the current Wimbledon constituency, as they are physically in Wimbledon, and have very little, or no, interaction with Putney.

Whilst I accept the previous Boundary Commission proposals in 2013 put Wimbledon Park into the Putney constituency, this is equally incongruous. I live in Wimbledon Park ward, in the NB polling district, on Vineyard Hill Road. This polling district is literally a stone’s throw, or decent golf shot from Wimbledon Town Centre, and was previously in the Wimbledon Village ward. Nobody in Wimbledon Park looks to Putney. Earlsfield in Tooting possibly, maybe even Wandsworth, but definitely not Putney!

I hope the Boundary Commission will take notice of what the Chairman of AFC Wimbledon, Eric Samuelson, said yesterday in his evidence. After a long struggle, AFC Wimbledon will soon be returning home to Wimbledon, which under these current proposals will actually be in Putney. Wimbledon Park ward stretches from Wimbledon Park itself, down Haydons Road into South Wimbledon, showing that it is intrinsically part of Wimbledon.

I have noted that in their attempt to justify a Wimbledon Common and Putney seat, and ripping Wimbledon Village out of Wimbledon, The Boundary Commission cite putting the whole of Wimbledon and Putney Commons into one seat as a good reason to bring Wimbledon Village into Putney. Firstly, there are two Commons, not one as the Boundary Commission assume. The official name is Wimbledon and Putney Commons, and they are governed by conservators elected by both Putney and Wimbledon residents. The Commons are enjoyed by residents across both the whole of the current Putney and Wimbledon constituencies. The Commons are in fact a barrier between residential zones, not a uniting factor, making the current proposals perverse. Therefore, this justification from the Boundary Commission shows a total local of local knowledge and community interest. Furthermore, in order to unite Wimbledon and Putney Commons, the Boundary Commission have split Mitcham Common. The logic is perverse

Wimbledon Park and Village, which strongly identify with the rest of Wimbledon, are replaced with Colliers Wood, Lavender Fields, Ravensbury and Cricket Green, wards which have very little community interest or identification with Wimbledon.

If you look at the map closely you can see why. Most of the residential areas of these four wards from the current Mitcham and Morden are separated from the rest of Wimbledon by the River Wandle, Wandle Valley Park, the Sainsbury’s Superstore, the Deer Park Industrial Estate, Morden Hall Park, and Merantum Way.

Residents of Lavender Fields, Ravensbury and Cricket Green are integral parts of Mitcham, and see that as their centre of gravity, and not any part of the existing, or proposed Wimbledon constituency. Hence in the previous revised proposals the Boundary Commission were convinced that Mitcham town centre should remain united, but it is split under the current proposals. Moreover, I understand that there was persuasive evidence to this effect yesterday.

The proposed constituency lacks a cohesive network of transport links, which the current Wimbledon constituency benefits from. There are a number of different transport links through the width and breadth of the constituency. For example Motspur Park and Raynes Park connect to Wimbledon Town Centre via SW Trains and bus links, Thameslink connects South Merton in Morden, to Wimbledon Chase and Wimbledon town centre, the Northern line connects Morden to South Wimbledon and the District line connects Wimbledon town centre to Wimbledon Park. There are fewer transport links between the heart of Wimbledon and Colliers Wood, Lavender Fields, Ravensbury and Cricket Green. To travel across the proposed Merton and Wimbledon Central seat, from Cricket Green to West Barnes, would mean leaving the newly created constituency at Cricket Green and travelling through two other constituencies to get to West Barnes!

In the month since the Boundary Commission have released their plans, I have attended a number of local public meetings to discuss these proposals and nobody I have spoken to agrees with them. The current constituency arrangements in the London Borough of Merton have natural centres of focus and community interest which the new proposals take no account of. I believe the local Chamber of Commerce also made the point to you yesterday that for local businesses the current arrangements are superior to the proposals and work well.

Whilst Wimbledon is seen as a rich leafy suburb, but that is a parody. Wimbledon has areas of wealth (like Wimbledon Village), 1930s suburbia where young families live (in Cannon Hill), but also areas of poverty and deprivation (in the number of Housing Estates in my constituency). Amongst all this however, the current Wimbledon constituency is a remarkably cohesive set of 10 wards with overlapping community focal points which are all self-contained in the constituency. All 10 will look to Wimbledon Town Centre to some degree, given it is a major local hub for transport, shopping and leisure. Indeed residents from across the constituency will most likely travel through Wimbledon station on their commute. But we also have Morden town centre, to which residents in Abbey, Merton Park and Cannon Hill will also look to. Additionally there is Raynes Park High Street, and Mostpur Park Village, which residents in West Barnes, Raynes Park, and parts of the town centre wards of Hillside and Dundonald look towards.

The current Wimbledon constituency contains the vast majority of the “SW19” postcode, the most famous postcode in the word, and the brand of ‘Wimbledon’ itself. Many landmarks across the Wimbledon area contribute to this. The All England Tennis Club, Wimbledon Theatre, Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon Village, the Town Centre, Wimbledon Hockey Club and the Royal Wimbledon Golf Course and AFC Wimbledon’s return will add to this.

Wimbledon’s community is best served when united in a single Parliamentary constituency, with a single MP who can champion the brand and the community.

So, the proposals need to be rethought and the Boundary Commission has to accept that if their proposal fails against their own criteria, an urgent re-examination is required.

As to alternatives, an obvious improvement based on the Boundary Commission proposal is to

* Add Earlsfield to Wimbledon Common and Putney, from Tooting
* Add Colliers Wood to Tooting, from Merton and Wimbledon Central
* Add Village to Merton and Wimbledon Central, from Wimbledon Common and Putney

This would be within the quota.

There are several benefits to this.

* Colliers Wood residents look towards Tooting
* Wimbledon Village obviously look towards Wimbledon
* Earlsfield is residentially continuous with Putney. The Boundary Commission acknowledged this in its last revised proposals.
* This makes Putney comprise of the same wards as was proposed in the Boundary Commission’s 2012 Revised Proposals.
* It would also improve, but not completely remedy, the divided community links.

However, I note that both the Lib Dems and Labour parties have laid down alternative proposals.

I reserve the right to make further comment on alternatives and introduce new alternatives in written submission I intend to make in due course.

Thank you