The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), draft recommendations for Hammersmith & Fulham

Response from Andy Slaughter, MP for Hammersmith

1. **Introduction**

I am the Member of Parliament for the Hammersmith constituency, a position held since the General Election of 6 May 2010. Between 2005 and 2010 I was MP for the former constituency of Ealing Acton & Shepherds Bush. Between 1986 and 2006 I was a councillor in LB Hammersmith & Fulham, representing Gibbs Green, later North End, wards in West Kensington. From 1991-1996 I was Deputy Leader and from 1996-2005 Leader of the Council. I am resident in Askew ward in Shepherds Bush. I have lived in Hammersmith & Fulham all my life and have been an elected representative in the area for over 30 years.

1. **Reason for responding**

I welcome the LGBCE’s plans to review the local Government boundaries in Hammersmith & Fulham and recognise that there is a need for this review to take place. The current boundaries have been in effect since 2002 and since then there have been shifts in the population of the Borough as new housing has been built and people have moved into the area.

I welcome many of the suggested changes to the existing ward boundaries and welcome the increase in the number of Councillors from 46 to 50. The population of the Borough is predicted to continue to increase and it is important that any proposed boundaries are ‘future proofed’ so that they can remain in place as the population continues to grow.

However, while I support most of what is proposed I am concerned that some of the recommendations do not accurately reflect the nature of some of the local communities and will divide existing communities, leading to poorer governance and representation.

1. **Comments on proposals**

3.1 I recognise and accept the need for the proposed changes in the north of the Borough, particularly College Park & Old Oak ward. With the planned development through the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, and with other housing currently being built east of White City underground station, the population of this ward will increase significantly.

3.2 In addition, while it has been a two-member ward for many years, it has felt that it was under represented especially given the large geographical size of the ward compared to others. Given its physical size and the increasing population, I welcome its change to a three-member ward.

3.3 Similarly, I agree with the plans to separate the current Wormholt & White City ward into two separate wards of Wormholt and White City, which I think would improve the representation in what is the most deprived part of the borough.

3.4 Lastly, I agree with the creation of the new Grove ward as this would unite the Brackenbury Village area into one ward, which would significantly aid this area’s representation on the Council.

3.5 Despite what is an otherwise sensible set of proposals, I am very concerned with the plan to split the current Fulham Reach Ward and create two new two-member wards of Fulham Reach and Margravine.

3.6 I recognise the sense in moving the streets north of Charing Cross hospital such as Beryl Road into the new Hammersmith Broadway ward. These feel slightly separate from the existing Fulham Reach ward and it makes sense that they would be joined with neighbouring streets from the existing Hammersmith Broadway ward.

3.7 Similarly, it is sensible to move the few houses on Talgarth Road out of Fulham Reach ward, although I think they would be better placed in the new North End ward, so they share the same Councillors as the other homes on the south side of Talgarth Road.

3.8 On page 15, paragraph 60 of the draft proposals report, the LGBCE argues that Fulham Palace Road represents a potentially strong ward boundary between the two proposed wards of Fulham Reach and Margravine. I disagree strongly with this as it does not reflect the nature of this part of the Borough.

3.9 This is an area of the Borough I know well. My constituency office is on Greyhound Road, near to the junction with Fulham Palace Road, and I lived for a short time in Rannoch Road. This section of Fulham Palace Road represents the hub of the community in this area, and not a dividing line.

3.10 The shops along both sides of Fulham Palace Road are used by residents from both the Crabtree Estate to the west of Fulham Palace Road, as well as the residents of streets on the other side such as Aspenlea Road. Shops on both side of the road are also well used by many residents from the Field Road Estate and the Bayonne Estate. Charing Cross Hospital, the future of which has recently been confirmed, is a major hub, as the main healthcare campus which includes residential accommodation and a popular gym.

3.11 Similarly, Melcombe Primary is another community focal point, with many of its pupils and some of its staff living on the Field Road and Bayonne estates. It has recently joined a federation with Bayonne nursery, partly because this nursery sits within the same ward and because many children who attend Bayonne nursery will move on to Melcombe Primary.

3.12 Formerly, one of the most important hubs in this ward was the Southern Belle pub on the corner of Fulham Palace Road and Greyhound Road. This pub was formerly known as the Greyhound and has been operating since before the turn of the 20th Century. It was a famous music venue for a while and was well-used by locals from the Crabtree Estate and the streets running parallel to Greyhound Road. It is currently undergoing redevelopment, but I am hopeful that once reopen it will once again become an important meeting place for people from across the current Fulham Reach ward.

3.13 I am equally as concerned about the dividing of the Bishops Park estate into two with the creation of the new Fulham Reach and Hurlingham wards. The streets running from Bishop’s Park Road to Niton Street represent a coherent community with many shared interests in terms of local governance. These streets are known locally as the alphabet streets, and this area has a long-established identity.

3.14 Currently these streets are united in the existing Palace Riverside ward. These streets are affected by many of the same local issues due to their proximity to Craven Cottage. All of these streets suffer from problems during Fulham match days, owing to the number of fans that pass through the area on their way to the stadium. Currently these streets are all represented within the existing Palace Riverside ward, allowing the two councillors in this ward to represent the interests of the whole area when dealing with issues relating to the football club.

3.15 The proposed new boundary between Finlay Street and Ellerby Street is completely artificial and doesn’t represent any natural boundary between communities. The current boundary between Crabtree Lane and Niton Street makes far more sense as this represents the existing boundary between the Crabtree Estate and the Bishops Park Estate.

3.16 I do accept the need to bring the various wharf areas together into one ward. The Labour proposals placed the wharf areas to the west of Stevenage Road into a new Fulham Reach ward. These areas of Adam Walk, Millshott Close and surrounding street and closes have a lot in common with the areas currently in Fulham Reach such as Dorset Wharf, Rainville Court and Thames Wharf.

3.17 The riverfront walk area is used extensively by walkers, cyclists and other residents looking to enjoy the riverfront walkway. However, this level of use also brings issues with the management of the area and residents along the river often suffer from issues with anti-social behaviour and low-level crime. This issue has become worse more recently as further areas of the riverfront are made more accessible. Moving these riverfront areas from the existing Palace Riverside ward into a new, three-person Fulham Reach Ward would allow these riverfront residents to have their shared interests represented by the same ward Councillors.

3.18 Similarly, almost all of the properties in the wharf areas are much more modern than the Victorian properties in the Bishops Park estate. These wharfs are former industrial areas and as such were developed into residential areas at a much later date. Much of it is sheltered accommodation or semi-sheltered accommodation for older people and these residents struggle with issues related to access to transport and shops.

3.19 Given the more modern nature of these buildings, and their proximity to the river, they also often suffer from similar issues relating to disrepair. Also, given the small, piecemeal nature of these estates, they have never formed a unified Tenants and Residents Association as are found on larger estates. However, this is not an issue faced by the residents of the Bishops Park estate as that is almost entirely private housing. It is therefore even more important that these wharf areas have unified representation within the local Council.

3.20 Given this, I do not see the merit in splitting up Fulham Reach and treating Fulham Palace Road as a boundary between wards. As I have already stated, it is not a boundary but is a focal point in the community. Similarly, I cannot see the benefit of splitting the existing Palace Riverside ward between Finlay Street and Ellerby Street. This splits up a community that has shared interests and currently has shared representation. To split up this unified community would not represent convenient and effective local government.

3.21 I agree with the proposal for a new Fulham Reach ward that was put forward by the local Labour Group as it sensibly deals with the issues I raised while maintaining the unity of the community along Fulham Palace Road.

**Conclusion**

As someone who has lived in Hammersmith & Fulham all my life and who has been an elected representative in this area for over 30 years, I know the communities very well. It is my considered opinion that the proposals put forward by LGBCE are good, but I disagree strongly with the plan to split Fulham Reach into two smaller wards. This needs to be looked at again with a view to maintaining the integrity of the community with some smaller changes to ensure that the new ward is not out of balance with regards to population.

Andy Slaughter MP

MP for Hammersmith