

The advice of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents' Party – aka the Merton Park Ward Residents' Association - and the John Innes Society (two organisations whose management committees overlap) may, in my opinion, have been tainted by politics.

My understanding from a meeting convened by PlanWimbledon is that the discussions about the boundary for PlanWimbledon coincided with a fight to retain three seats for the above political party when the Boundary Commission wanted to reduce the size of the ward and the number of Council seats to two. It makes sense that it was politically expedient to showcase the significance of the Conservation Areas north and south of the Kingston Road. The boundary of the Conservation Area was thus given undue emphasis.

In actual fact, people living north of Circle Gardens see Wimbledon as their Town Centre whether they are wealthy enough to live in the Conservation Area or not. It is as easy – and far more pleasant – for us to walk or cycle into Wimbledon as it is to Morden, and we choose Wimbledon. If you ask anyone living north of Circle Gardens where they go to the library, hairdresser, gym, food shops, restaurants, take-aways, pubs, clubs, entertainments and the rest, they will say they go to Wimbledon. If you ask people living south of Circle Gardens, they will say Morden, due to convenience. IF MERTON PARK RESIDENTS HAD BEEN ASKED, THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN CLEAR. Social media posts by members of PlanWimbledon apologise profusely for the fact that the pandemic severely restricted consultation. SOME SECTORS OF THE COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO DO NOT OWN OR USE COMPUTERS (POORER PEOPLE, ELDERLY PEOPLE) HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY EXCLUDED FROM VIEWING ANY PROPOSED BOUNDARY.

There has been no possibility of canvassing neighbours during lockdown.

In the northern part of Merton Park, we care very much what happens to Wimbledon Town Centre and want to have a say in its future development. If asked where we live, we would always say “Wimbledon” or “SW19”. Those of us who live north of Circle Gardens would never say “Morden”.

It is important that the Council gets this right. The battle with the Boundary Commission has been fought and lost, and the MPWIR Party will be down to two seats at the next election.

The impact of PlanWimbledon on Merton Park residents will long outlive that political battle. The line of the Conservation Area is not relevant to PlanWimbledon and there is no reason to retain it as a boundary except if politicians want to defend an entrenched position. Surely the advice about the southern Merton Park border must be ruled out, given that political interests may have been involved and there was no consultation about where the boundary should be.

The line can easily be put back to include Kenley Road and Poplar Road north of Circle Gardens, and other parts of Merton Park within the one-mile radius