

MERTON

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The Liberal Democrats (or their predecessors) have not gained a majority on a London council directly from Labour since Tower Hamlets in 1986 - 40 years ago. They've come close; in Southwark in 2002; in Brent and Haringey in 2006; and in Islington in 2002 - but that was won from no overall control. Will Merton become the next Tower Hamlets?

This will not be an easy task because Merton is a borough of two very different halves and Labour is deeply entrenched on the Mitcham side. Merton is also quite different from the sort of borough in which the Lib Dems have occasionally served as the lightning rod party of protest against a long-term Labour council: it is outer London not inner, and while Labour has had the upper hand more or less since 1990 it is not the sort of place where Labour can govern for decades.

The Lib Dems have done - or believe they are in the process of doing - to the Conservatives in Merton what they did to Labour in boroughs like Kingston, Richmond and Sutton. That is: pick off wards held by the opposition to establish a bridgehead and then take on the majority.

They may succeed in 2026: Labour's unprecedented unpopularity following immediately from a period of exceptional Conservative unpopularity gives the Lib Dems a once in a generation opportunity. But a more realistic target is to become the largest party on a hung council. Labour has twice as many councillors as the Lib Dems and only a couple of Labour seats look remotely vulnerable. They need 13.

Merton, and the two constituencies that comprise it, often flatter to deceive. On the one side is Wimbledon, regarded as a very affluent, very Conservative part of the world. On the other side is Mitcham, very much outer London (with the electricity pylons to prove it), far less affluent than Wimbledon.

In between: a suburban hinterland along the rail-tracks arcing from Southfields and the river Wandle in the east to Morden and Raynes Park in the west.

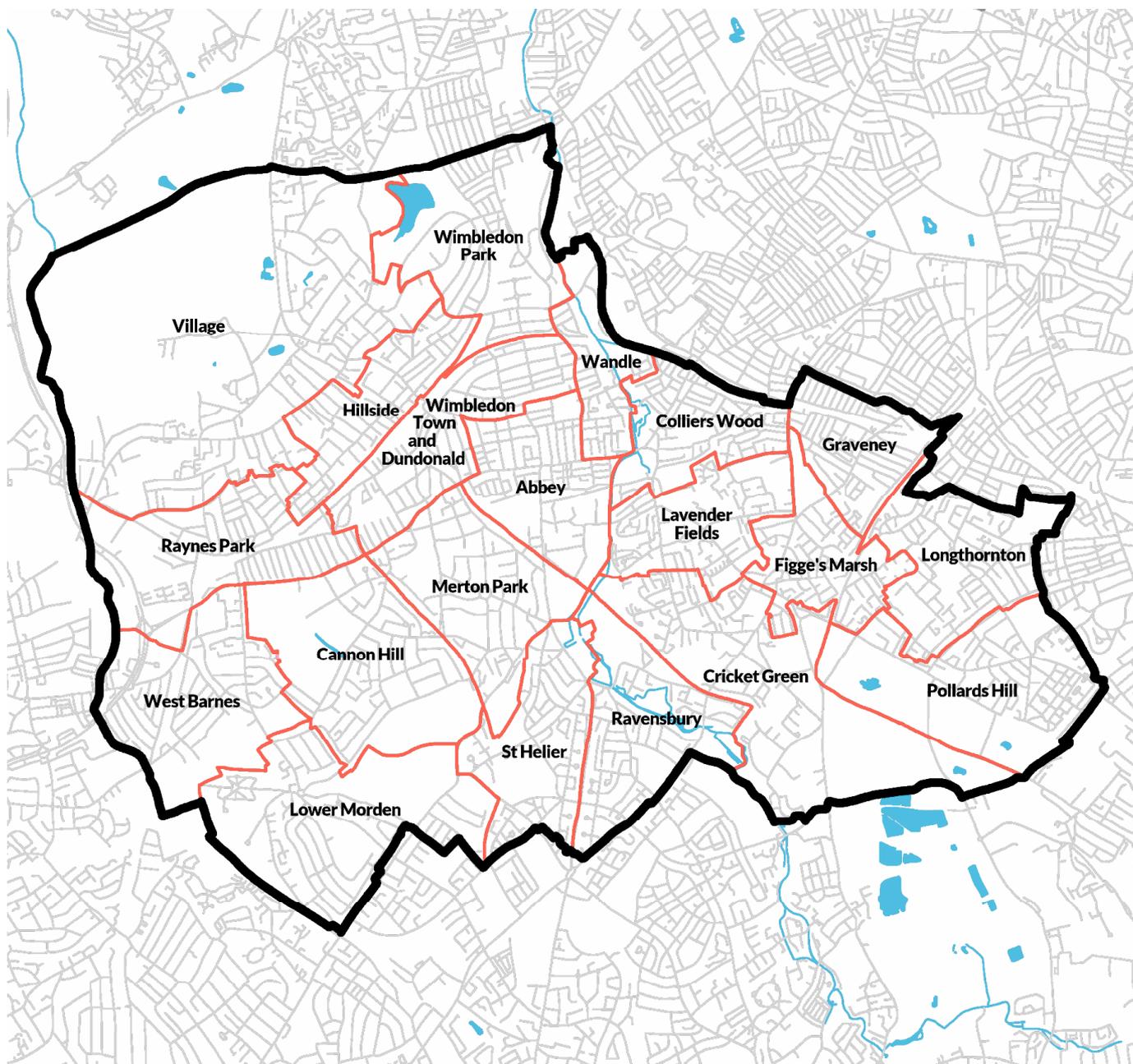
This flatters to deceive because, until the 1990s dawned, Merton looked a secure Conservative borough. Labour had never before won. There were plenty of Merton wards that were not especially affluent but voted Conservative: for whatever reason it just took until 1990 to start breaking them down.

As for the parliamentary constituencies, except for 1945 Wimbledon had never elected a Labour MP until the Blair landslide in 1997. Mitcham and Morden was a Labour seat more often than not - and yet had a Conservative MP from 1950 to 1974 and from 1982 to 1997.

Yet both seats were always far less Conservative than they looked: Wimbledon because the Conservatives benefited from an evenly divided opposition that padded out their majority; Mitcham and Morden latterly because of the Labour-SDP split which allowed the Tories through the middle for four elections.

In the otherwise poor London borough elections of 1990 for Labour, their saving grace was gaining Merton - a result that was obscured by the masses of council seats Labour lost across Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Brent, Wandsworth and Westminster: a mixture of "loony-left" misadventures and Conservative boroughs setting very low Community Charge/Poll Tax levels.

Labour only gained four seats off the Tories in Merton - but that was three more than they needed. Because Residents Associations - then and now a presence on the council - gained three Labour seats, Labour only won by one seat overall too.



But they'd got control and would stay there more often than not ever since. It marked a turning point as Merton's veneer of Conservative impregnability shattered for good.

There were several constituencies in London throughout the 1980s that elected Conservatives but did not look like especially Conservative-inclined areas: Mitcham, Croydon North West, Edmonton, Ilford South, Feltham and Heston and Hayes and Harlington, for example. Some moved away from the Tories because of demographic change, especially "white flight": the phenomenon of Londoners moving out of the capital in huge numbers and being replaced by non-Londoners, often migrants. Others were long-term marginals that regularly swung between the two big parties.

Both trends: demographically lost neighbourhoods for the Conservatives and those that swung back to them as they recovered their popularity, presented in Merton. Following their narrow win in 1990 Labour surged to two successive landslides in 1994 and 1998, winning 40 seats and then 39.

In those two elections, the Conservatives were pushed back to the three super-affluent Wimbledon wards of **Village, Hillside** and **Raynes Park**; plus much more closely fought **New Malden, Wimbledon Park** (then called Durnsford and a much better ward for Labour), Abbey, Dundonald, Trinity and Cannon Hill all went Labour.

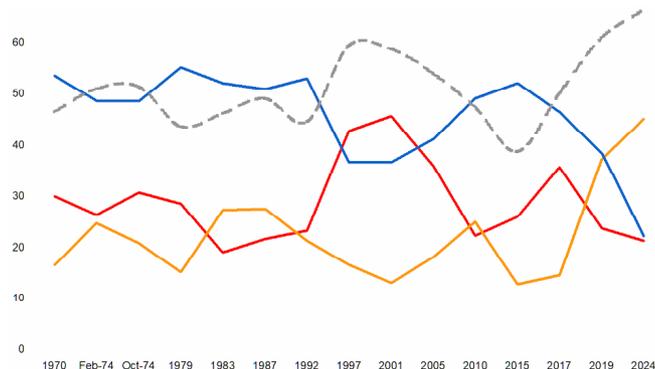
At the 1997 general election, Labour gained both Mitcham and Morden (which was expected) and Wimbledon (which wasn't).

This was the start of a tussle between Labour and Lib Dems in Wimbledon and when the two halves of Merton began to diverge. 1990 was the last time the Conservatives could win wards in Mitcham: they would lose them by increasingly large margins from thereon. But Wimbledon, with its rock solid Conservative enclaves and much more volatile marginals, stayed competitive.

Labour's Roger Casale held Wimbledon in the 2001 general election but lost it in the Conservative revival in south west

London in 2005, which also saw Putney, Hammersmith & Fulham (constituency) and Croydon Central won back from Labour.

The following five elections saw a battle royal between Labour and Lib Dems for second place: Labour coming second in 2005, 2015 and 2017; the Lib Dems in 2010 and 2019 - and then winning the constituency in 2024.



General Election vote shares in Wimbledon constituency from 1970 to 2024. The grey dashed line shows the combined Labour and Liberal Democrat vote

Although it's not especially clear from these numbers, what did for the Conservatives in Wimbledon was the EU referendum in 2016. The constituency voted 73% to remain in the EU (Mitcham and Morden, in contrast, is estimated to have backed Remain by only 51/49), but the Conservatives oversaw our departure from the bloc as bluff, bullish leavers. Overlook the fact that the exit deal Theresa May attempted to get through parliament showed her to be anything but.

This three-year saga broke Conservative support in Wimbledon. They'd almost certainly have lost the seat in 2019 has not the incumbent Tory MP, Stephen Hammond, been an outspoken Remainer: one of those from whom Boris Johnson withdrew the whip for failing to vote for his Brexit deal. Even with Hammond on the ballot, the Tories only held Wimbledon by 628 votes on a 15% swing to the Lib Dems.

The Lib Dem who almost won in 2019, and then did so comfortably in 2024, was Paul Kohler. Kohler had received a lot of media coverage after being badly beaten up during a home invasion and burglary in Wimbledon in 2014 - and he has stated that the incident turned him towards politics, becoming a Merton councillor in 2018 and then MP.

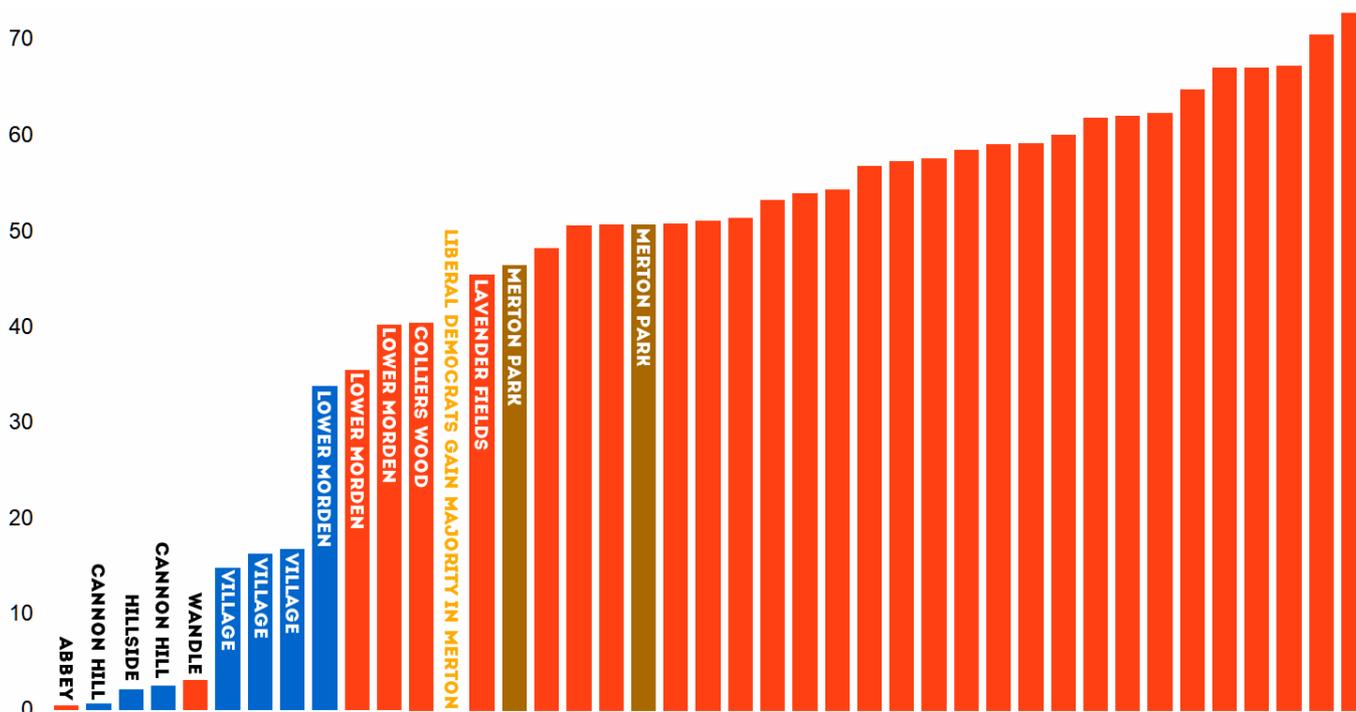
The massive problem the Lib Dems have in winning a majority in Merton is the Mitcham and Morden constituency and the fact that Labour is very well organised in this constituency. The chart below shows the wall the Lib Dems have to climb just to win a majority of one seat.

They need twelve gains, the twelfth of which is the least safe seat in Colliers Wood ward. That seat has a Labour majority of 1,287 or 40.6%. In other words the swing the Lib Dems need to gain Merton is 20.4%.

That is more than Labour requires to gain Kensington and Chelsea, the Greens require to gain Newham, and the Conservatives - who remember have no seats there at the moment - need to gain Richmond. Indeed, it's actually more than the Conservatives need to regain Merton.

Yes: on paper it's easier for the Tories to win Merton than it is for the Lib Dems despite them having more seats. The reason for that is because the Tories came second in nearly all the wards they lost, and are much closer in the wards the Lib Dems won than the Lib Dems are in the wards Labour won.

The Lib Dems have a couple of substantial problems in the Mitcham and Morden wards. The first, and biggest, is the massive majorities Labour holds. And, unlike in places like Tower Hamlets or Bermondsey, they aren't majorities that have always existed without Labour having to do much work.



The second is that in every single one, the Lib Dems aren't even runners-up. In most they came fourth in 2022.

The Liberal Democrat response to those points probably goes something like this:

First, they haven't organised in Mitcham and Morden since Bruce Douglas-Mann defected to the SDP and caused a by-election to justify his change of party (he lost). That was more than forty years ago and more recently all Lib Dem effort has gone into winning Wimbledon. Now they are taking Mitcham and Morden more seriously.

Second, they will point to their success in taking over wards that, in some cases, were even more heavily Labour in Sutton, or Tower Hamlets, or Southwark. And, indeed, convincing thousands of Labour voters in Wimbledon that they should switch their support to them.

Third, they might note that 2026 sees Labour at an unprecedented polling low where its long-term supporters could be tempted, in the same way as long-term Tories were tempted in 2018 and 2022, to punish their party for its perceived shortcomings.

Fourth, they might say that they don't need a 20% swing everywhere in Mitcham: they only need to crack two - ideally three or four - wards.

And finally, they might note that, even if Labour has been a lot more active in its Mitcham and Morden strongholds than other Labour parties in London were, "time for a change" resonates after years of the same party representing an area. In other words: these massive majorities may look more solid than they might actually be.

How credible those arguments are we'll only have an answer to on election night. But let's just say it would not be plausible in most circumstances for any party to secure a 20% swing in one election - it just does not happen normally.

It would be easier for the Lib Dems to become the largest party in Merton, though to do so they would need to win all seven remaining Conservative seats. There are two Residents Association councillors in **Merton Park** and the Green Party could win Colliers Wood, so there is a small chance that the council could fall to no overall control.

Whenever Merton has hung in the past the Residents' Association councillors usually played a straight bat: implicitly endorsing whichever of the Tories or Labour won the most seats and so had a stronger mandate to take power. That meant they let the Conservatives take over in 2006 and, in 2010, did the same for Labour.

But the Lib Dems may also take the tactical decision that, because **Merton Park** is a Wimbledon constituency ward and they've been better organised there for longer, they could attack those Residents Association seats. That despite them being, on the 2022 results, even harder for the Lib Dems to win than a few of the Mitcham Labour wards.

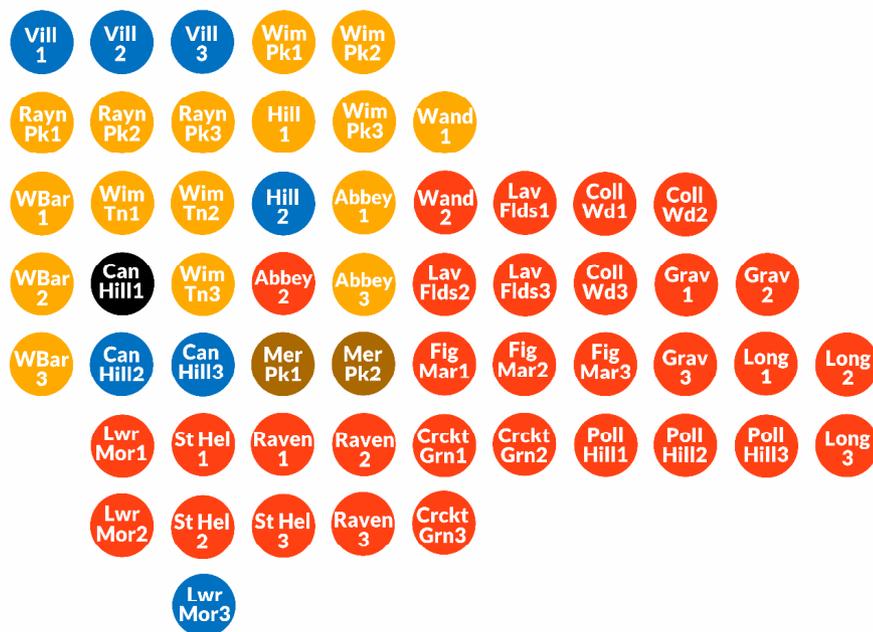
Of course, Labour could survive - possibly on the mayor's casting vote - with the party holding exactly half the seats.

There are only two Labour seats with very small majorities over the Lib Dems in split wards: one in **Abbey** ward, the other in **Wandle**. The next most vulnerable Labour majority is in Lower Morden of over 1,300, with the Lib Dems fourth. They are highly unlikely to win Lower Morden: a split Labour-Conservative ward where Reform probably has more chance.

If Labour only loses those two seats in Abbey and Wandle they'll be on 28 with whichever mix of opponents also on 28. Labour keeps power.

But that would be a remarkably good result for Labour in the current political climate. Given that party's surging poll ratings they are almost certainly vulnerable to the Greens in **Colliers Wood** and maybe adjoining **Lavender Fields** and **Graveney**, though there are subtle differences in the demographics between these wards that make them less likely to be tempted by a Green offer.

These wards are not dissimilar to neighbouring wards across the borough boundary in Tooting with lots of young professionals seeking relatively affordable properties to rent or buy, with little council housing and quite ethnically diverse.



On paper **Wandle** would also be a good Green target with its large amount of new housing built around the Wimbledon Football Club ground in Plough Lane (some of this is in Wimbledon Park ward). But being in Wimbledon the Greens would need to overtake both Labour and the Lib Dems. How easy it is to reach the occupants of these new apartment blocks behind their entry-phones, and how familiar with the local political dynamics these new residents are might give the Greens some hopes.

But Labour is also under threat in **Lower Morden** from the Conservatives and, possibly, Reform. Although the Tories are at rock bottom as well as Labour, there has been a Labour to Conservative swing in London since 2022: enough to tip the two Labour seats in this split ward. If the Conservatives do

win and the Lib Dems pick up those two seats in split wards, Labour holds fewer than half the seats. If the Greens take Colliers Wood Labour will be down to just 23 seats and almost certainly out of power.

Lower Morden was always the aberrant safe Conservative ward in Mitcham and Morden until even it succumbed to the relentless Labour organisation in that constituency.

While it's not that dissimilar from the other Malden wards in Kingston borough which are Lib Dem these days, the Tories regained a seat there against the trend in 2022 and, as long as Reform don't sabotage their chances, poised to win the other two.

Although it is likely that the political flow in Wimbledon is still from the Conservatives to Liberal Democrats, it is worth just looking at all these "freshmen" Lib Dem councillors because they aren't beyond the reach of the Tories, on paper at least.

The Liberal Democrats are very confident about being able to pick off at least the remaining Conservative in **Hillside** and the three in **Village** - once in the top ten safest Tory wards in London.

That said, the Lib Dem winner in split Hillside ward - the ward in which Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch and her family live, incidentally - only won by ninety votes.

The other ward the Conservatives and Lib Dems split (two Tories, one Lib Dem) was **Cannon Hill**, immediately south of Raynes Park. This is a very suburban dormitory ward of interwar detached semis in streets with grass verges - uphill Morden but touching the edges of several other neighbourhoods.

Cannon Hill was a Wimbledon ward - one of those that swung to Labour in 1994 and mostly stayed in their column. But it was moved into Mitcham and Morden in the boundary changes that came into being in 2024. The Lib Dem councillor who won in 2022 and who had been their deputy leader on the council, resigned her seat in January as she is moving abroad, so for now at least, it is 100% Conservative again.

Next is **Wimbledon Park**. This is an odd ward in that it is quite a mix. It contains what might be called the overspill of Wimbledon Village: exclusive streets of gated off villas over the rolling hillside between the common and the tennis club.

There is also the humdrum neighbourhood around Durnsford Road and Gap Road: new apartment blocks built amidst what were industrial and warehousing sites by the river Wandle.

Finally there is the Merton section of Southfields; just to the east of Wimbledon Park itself. The Southfields grid is what it says on the label: a tight grid of criss-crossing, entirely residential streets attractive to pretty affluent families because of its proximity to Southfields and Wimbledon Park tube stations, the village-y shops and the nearby park.

The Wandsworth side of the Southfields grid is still in Conservative hands but **Wimbledon Park** ward went Lib Dem for the first time in 2022 by just short of 400 votes.

Without wishing to take anything away from the Lib Dems, the fact that they could only win Wimbledon Park quite narrowly despite a huge campaigning effort suggests that Conservative support is quite resilient.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Abbey	48.1	13.3	37.9	47.1	5.2	8.0	69.6	30.4	63.6	9.6
Cannon Hill	74.3	6.6	18.7	50.0	3.9	8.4	58.7	41.3	46.8	13.7
Colliers Wood	42.6	12.3	41.3	38.9	8.6	10.3	60.0	40.0	55.2	12.5
Cricket Green	38.7	32.6	27.1	31.3	18.1	13.6	35.9	64.1	34.6	21.9
Figge's Marsh	42.5	29.3	25.9	23.5	20.3	14.3	35.8	64.2	35.3	20.8
Graveney	56.0	5.7	37.5	25.7	13.6	14.6	46.5	53.5	44.8	17.0
Hillside	47.5	10.1	42.2	48.4	2.4	4.8	77.4	22.6	70.8	7.2
Lavender Fields	43.9	21.1	33.6	30.8	11.2	11.5	43.2	56.8	41.8	18.4
Longthornton	62.2	10.9	25.9	23.6	19.6	14.3	41.7	58.3	39.2	18.4
Lower Morden	76.6	7.2	15.7	57.1	5.0	8.6	46.5	53.5	34.5	17.7
Merton Park	71.1	3.9	24.5	46.2	2.8	12.5	65.3	34.7	57.7	11.3
Pollards Hill	53.6	26.2	18.9	25.4	28.4	14.7	36.7	63.3	34.2	20.0
Ravensbury	55.7	22.7	20.9	37.0	10.7	12.4	40.7	59.3	35.7	20.1
Raynes Park	58.7	7.7	33.0	51.2	2.8	5.4	70.7	29.3	61.6	9.2
St Helier	44.2	28.7	26.1	38.5	7.8	16.3	40.9	59.1	37.4	19.1
Village	66.9	7.5	25.1	57.4	1.8	4.8	80.5	19.5	67.5	7.4
Wandle	46.4	19.4	33.5	48.1	5.4	6.5	65.7	34.3	58.3	11.8
West Barnes	70.5	6.7	21.4	48.1	4.0	6.7	60.7	39.3	51.6	12.5
Wimbledon Park	58.0	10.3	30.1	54.3	3.7	7.3	74.3	25.7	65.6	7.6
Wimbledon Town & Dundonald	59.7	5.3	34.4	49.6	2.4	4.5	78.4	21.6	70.7	6.5

Raynes Park is another incredibly affluent ward on the other side of the constituency to Wimbledon Park with long streets of gated off McMansions south west of Wimbledon Common. Raynes Park lacks the sort of regeneration zone grit of Wimbledon Park ward and may be too affluent a ward for the Lib Dems to be hold for long (though they hold similar wards in Richmond). The Conservatives were about 500 votes short last time.

Abbey ward - South Wimbledon to everyone else - became a three-way marginal in 2022, with the Lib Dems gaining two seats and Labour holding the third. Abbey is something of a contrary ward: it was nearly always Labour but switched to the Conservatives in 2006 and has been marginal ever since: they won seats here in 2010 and 2018. Although they lost out in 2022, they weren't all that far behind: Lib Dem 33.5%, Labour 31.5%, Conservative 24.0%. Abbey has some of the same characteristics as Colliers Wood and Wandle and this could become a four way fight with the Greens.

The two best Lib Dem wards adjoin each other. One is **Wimbledon Town and Dundonald**: more or less a fusion of the old Dundonald and Trinity wards, which cover the residential streets south west and north east of Wimbledon station. This is comfortable rather than opulent Wimbledon, down the hill and along the railway tracks. But they are somewhat different areas.

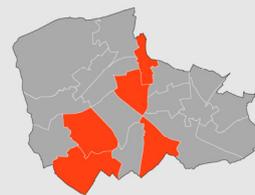
Trinity comprises streets of tightly packed Edwardian terraced cottages, somewhat like Fulham and Putney: workers houses that traditionally packed a large Labour vote. These then gentrified and swung towards the Conservatives. Dundonald is a newer community along the railway tracks characterised by clusters of short cul de sac terraces spurring off from through roads. Wimbledon MP Paul Kohler is councillor for this ward (presumably until May).

The last ward is **West Barnes**, on the border with Motspur Park: very much outer suburbia and the first ward the Lib Dems won in Merton back in 1994. The Conservatives regained it in the early 2000s, wins that were key to the party holding the same number of seats as Labour.

Potential target wards

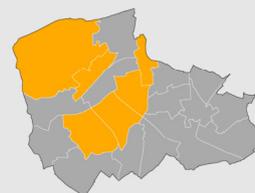
Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Abbey (2 LD)
- ▶ Cannon Hill (2 Con, 1 LD)
- ▶ Lower Morden (1 Con)
- ▶ Ravensbury (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Wandle (1 LD)



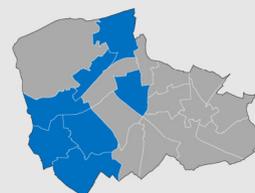
Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Abbey (1 Lab)
- ▶ Cannon Hill (2 Con)
- ▶ Hillside (1 Con)
- ▶ Merton Park (2 Res)
- ▶ Village (3 Con)
- ▶ Wandle (1 Lab)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Abbey (2 LD, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Cannon Hill (1 LD - vac)
- ▶ Hillside (1 LD)
- ▶ Lower Morden (2 Lab)
- ▶ Raynes Park (3 LD)
- ▶ West Barnes (3 LD)
- ▶ Wimbledon Park (3 LD)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Colliers Wood (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lavender Fields (3 Lab)
- ▶ Wandle (1 LD, 1 Lab)



The Conservatives aren't out of contention in West Barnes but the Lib Dems won fairly comfortably in 2022: 42% to 28%.

The Liberal Democrats have shown considerable resilience in defending areas that they gained from the Conservatives in the years leading to the 2024 general election. But there isn't that much evidence of this trend yet, which is why those Lib Dem-Conservative battlegrounds matter.

On the other hand, while Wimbledon has some characteristics of a typical Lib Dem South West London constituency, it also has some that don't, and the Conservatives may prove hard to steamroller out of existence.

Labour will likely lose Merton to no overall control, and the Lib Dems will end up with a group of fairly similar size to Labour's - a few seats in it either way.

A Labour collapse in their Mitcham fortresses is unlikely, though there's a strong possibility that the Greens will win Colliers Wood. Labour will emerge looking more vulnerable in Mitcham and that may set up a more realistic Lib Dem challenge for a majority in 2030.

If the Conservatives manage to retain a few seats, maybe offsetting losses to the Lib Dems with gains from Labour in Lower Merton, it will be interesting to see how they and the Merton Park Residents (should they too survive) handle the balance of power.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	7	31	17		2
Jan 24 defection: Caroline Charles (Ravensbury) - Lab to Ind	7	30	17		3
Jul 24 by-election: Figge's Marsh - Lab hold	7	30	17		3
Jul 24 by-election: St Helier - Lab hold	7	30	17		3
Jan 25 vacancy: Jennifer Gould, LD (Cannon Hill) - resignation	7	30	16		3

NEWHAM



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Newham has strong claims to being Labour's strongest London borough over the long-run, though Barking and Dagenham might take exception to that. Five times, including in three consecutive elections, Newham has returned full slates of Labour councillors.

It is the only borough in which Labour has polled over 50% at each of the past four elections - over 60% in three (and facing a wide variety of opponents, unlike Labour in Barking and Dagenham). Just 8 Tories have ever won council seats in this corner of the East End: six in 1968; the last two 36 years ago.

Yet, as we approach the May elections, there is the possibility - nothing more, that Labour might lose either the mayoralty or the council - or both - in 2026.

Newham was the earliest borough to opt for a directly elected mayor and council leader Robin - later Sir Robin - Wales was elected, then re-elected by landslide margins in 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014.

He would have stood again in 2018 but was deselected in favour of the more left wing Rokhsana Fiaz, in no small part because of her pledge to hold a referendum on abolishing the position and return to a more collegiate model of governance in Newham. In turn, Fiaz won with nearly three quarters of the vote in 2018, held and lost that referendum to abolish the mayoralty and then got re-elected comfortably, (but nowhere near as comfortably) in 2022.

The point at which Labour's decline in Newham began might well have been the moment the United Kingdom won the 2012 Olympic Games, famously and successfully staged in Stratford. Almost the entire justification for bidding for the games was to regenerate an abandoned corner of the East End straddling the River Lea, to create a lasting "legacy" for the host boroughs.

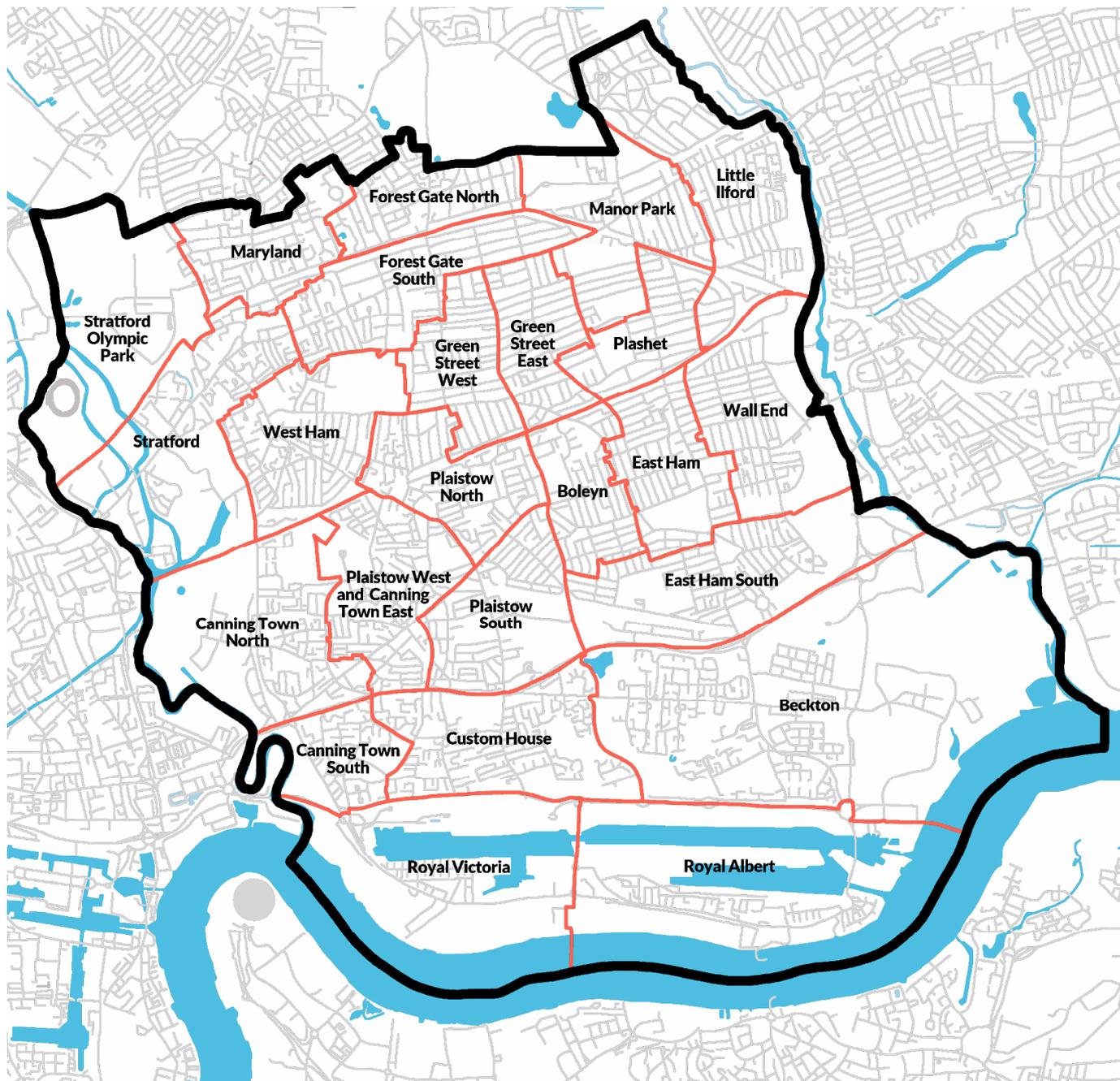
So much was promised as an Olympic legacy that these games would leave Newham with that the reality could probably never have lived up to the hype. The expectations that that thousands of new homes in the Olympic Village would go to local people, world-class facilities would be available for all, forever, and the whole borough would emerge materially better off were never going to survive contact with reality.

There is a legacy: the Olympic Village site has been transformed into a brand new neighbourhood and West Ham Football Club have moved into the stadium to the noisy complaints of its fans and high costs to the taxpayer. Some of the facilities like the Zahra Hadid-designed aquatics centre do benefit the community, and stretches of the River Lea have been cleaned up for good and opened up into new publicly accessible wildlife havens.

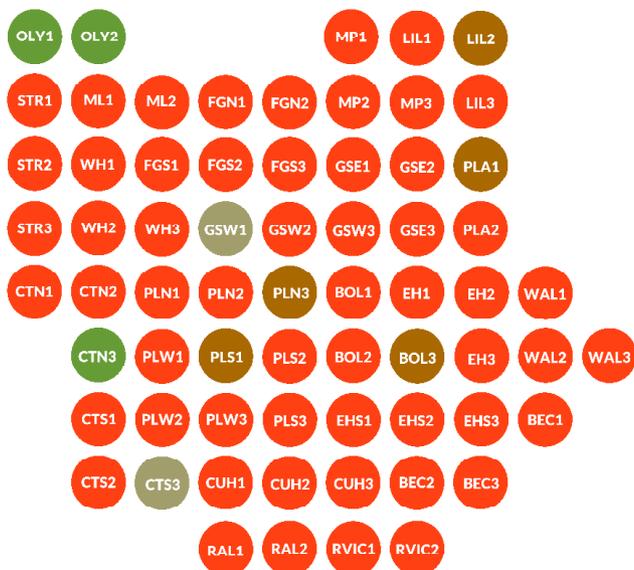
But serious allegations of corruption and gangland crime, the tentacles of which brushed the Labour administration of Sir Robin Wales, were made by investigative journalist Michael Gillard in his book *Legacy: Gangsters, Corruption and the London Olympics*. These were substantiated in the judgement to a failed libel action against the Sunday Times by a local "property tycoon". How aware of the seedy side of the Olympics Newham residents were (or have since become) is questionable but what is not is that residents feel the Olympic legacy that was promised has not been delivered.

And it wasn't just the Olympics. Just as Wales was the first elected mayor in the UK, so he was one of the first pioneers of so-called "regeneration" schemes way before the Stratford sites were identified as being a suitable site for the games.

Regeneration is the euphemism by which (mainly) fading council estates are demolished to be rebuilt at a much higher density, containing many more properties, a large proportion of which are private to pay for the redevelopment.



The public housing that's retained cannot be accessed by local residents not close to the top of the council waiting list, while the private homes are often far beyond the means of local residents. Hence, the area gets "gentrified": new, more affluent residents move in, pushing house prices in the wider area up and the sons and daughters of local people out. It's really not hard to see why these schemes antagonise residents, yet politicians roll over the down-sides because there is no other way to improve the housing stock when it is so vast and in relatively poor condition.



The backlash against these regeneration schemes was one of the earliest signs of a resurgent grassroots activism broadly seen as on the left of British politics and last seen in the 1980s rate-capping demonstrations. It was a portent of the sort of groundswell that swept Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership and almost into government in 2017.

Parts of Newham have been undergoing transformation since the birth of Canary Wharf as London's second financial hub. Though the new financial centre was on the Isle of Dogs, the

surge in demand for warehouse-style living along the edge of the Thames continued into the Royal Docks - "Docklands" in the south of Newham. London City airport was built and a lot of the investment that followed the Lawson boom and the Big Bang of 1988 had already transformed - for good and ill - the derelict docks and the neighbourhoods like Custom House and Canning Town that adjoined them.

	C	L	LD	O
2022	14.0	56.0	5.4	24.6
2018	13.5	68.0	6.0	12.5
2014	22.2	60.6	3.6	13.6
2010	17.6	62.8	4.2	15.4
2006	13.6	41.9	2.9	41.7
2002	20.2	48.3	4.1	27.5

Party vote shares in Newham council elections 2002-2022

But there's a big difference between building gated-off ivory towers on derelict industrial land and demolishing occupied council estates full of life-long Newham residents. The pace at which parts of the borough were being transformed, the belief that the change was not benefiting local people anywhere near the degree it should, and the transformation of neighbourhoods into places locals no longer recognised over 20 or 30 years began setting life-long Labour voters against their party.

Labour is so deeply entrenched in Newham that the party can shed votes by the bucket-load without there being much visible impact. That was the case in 2022, for example, when Rokhsana Fiaz's mayoral vote collapsed by 17 points to 56%. Yet she still won easily and Labour actually won more council seats than they had in 2018 because the size of the council increased. The only place Labour missed out, somewhat ironically, was the brand new Stratford Olympic Village ward, which voted Green.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Beckton	28.8	37.0	32.3	20.4	16.7	22.4	36.4	63.6	38.3	20.5
Boleyn	37.0	26.0	34.7	10.9	12.8	45.7	37.3	62.7	36.2	23.1
Canning Town North	21.6	43.2	31.7	19.9	25.6	24.8	40.7	59.3	40.6	20.1
Canning Town South	19.9	37.4	38.6	20.0	21.4	20.1	54.2	45.8	51.9	16.7
Custom House	26.8	42.9	26.7	22.4	24.8	18.5	35.2	64.8	36.9	23.0
East Ham	40.1	16.2	42.9	8.4	7.6	45.9	31.0	69.0	34.6	23.7
East Ham South	40.6	28.6	29.6	16.1	16.6	39.2	32.0	68.0	32.8	23.6
Forest Gate North	38.4	28.3	30.9	23.6	17.8	27.8	43.8	56.2	41.8	18.4
Forest Gate South	30.0	27.7	40.3	13.2	14.8	40.5	40.4	59.6	39.2	21.9
Green Street East	39.8	13.3	45.8	4.7	9.4	51.6	31.6	68.4	34.1	24.6
Green Street West	41.1	14.7	43.6	4.9	7.0	53.3	33.5	66.5	34.1	25.5
Little Ilford	33.0	29.1	36.2	7.5	15.9	51.9	30.7	69.3	31.2	24.4
Manor Park	35.1	21.5	42.1	9.4	11.2	51.6	33.5	66.5	33.0	24.9
Maryland	28.2	32.5	37.2	18.8	19.2	25.2	40.5	59.5	40.8	19.9
Plaistow North	29.3	34.7	32.9	11.2	17.1	43.2	35.6	64.4	35.4	23.7
Plaistow South	39.9	24.8	33.8	17.6	17.5	32.0	33.3	66.7	35.2	23.8
Plaistow West & Canning Town E.	24.9	37.3	35.7	19.8	19.9	27.9	30.9	69.1	33.7	24.0
Plashet	44.8	14.6	39.7	3.8	8.1	55.6	34.2	65.8	34.4	25.8
Royal Albert	22.4	35.0	38.1	20.1	24.2	20.1	44.9	55.1	46.2	15.3
Royal Victoria	23.2	17.4	55.1	20.0	14.7	14.2	71.5	28.5	68.6	7.1
Stratford	20.8	26.8	46.6	20.3	15.7	19.5	60.9	39.1	57.4	11.7
Stratford Olympic Park	16.9	24.0	50.8	27.2	12.7	17.9	78.4	21.6	69.9	5.1
Wall End	39.6	16.4	43.2	9.0	7.8	36.7	30.5	69.5	33.7	22.7
West Ham	28.9	37.2	31.9	17.2	21.2	24.9	38.6	61.4	38.6	21.0

Had the 2018 boundaries remained in place Labour would probably have won everywhere yet again.

But gravity applies to electoral politics: there are only so many substantial drops in support a party can endure before their candidates can no longer take their election for granted. That point may - may - have been reached in Newham.

Even a party rapidly losing popularity can survive if its opponents are very weak and splitting the opposition vote evenly. And that too has benefited Labour hugely in Newham.

The only time Labour lost power, in 1968, it was principally residents associations that people opted for. It may go like that again in 2026 as Newham Independents have developed rapidly into an organised challenger to Labour. It's highly unlikely to be any of the other parties that are represented in the House of Commons.

The turbulence within Labour that began with the deselection of Robin Wales continued with the failed Labour Party-pushed referendum to abolish the mayoralty and then the rapid disillusionment with Rokhsana Fiaz. She appeared to deliver even less of what was promised than the Olympics did.

Newham has tottered on the brink of financial insolvency leading to service cuts and large Council Tax hikes, its housing department was given the lowest possible inspection rating by the Regulator of Social Housing; as well as internal staffing issues and allegations by councillors of bullying by the mayor.

Even before the votes had been counted in 2022 Labour had suspended one of its candidates, Belgica Guaña, for anti-Semitic social media posts.

Then, in July 2023, a by-election was held in the East Ham ward of **Boleyn**. Labour was already on the slide in this ward, falling from 74% of the vote in 2018 to 60% in 2022, but in 2023 they managed just 32% as the newly-formed Newham Independents won by nearly 300.

Yet in nearby **Wall End**, also the scene of a by-election the same day as Boleyn, Labour easily retained the seat (caused by the resignation of Luke Charters who was to become MP for York Outer) - the party's vote actually rising by eleven points. The difference? No Newham Independent in Wall End.

In November 2023 - just a month after the Hamas attacks on Israel and that country's retaliation in Gaza, Newham Independents won their second by-election, this time in the central Newham ward of **Plaistow North**. 41% of the ward's residents originate from the Indian sub-continent.

This time Labour's vote slumped forty percentage points to just 27% - over 500 votes behind. Newham Independents picked up a third seat when a **Plashet** ward councillor defected, citing his party's position on Gaza.

In July 2024 a Canning Town councillor defected to the Greens while, in that month's general election Labour's vote fell by 26 percentage points in all three Newham constituencies, independents taking distant second places in all three. And the upheaval continued.

The Newham Independents picked up a brace of Plaistow councillors in September 2025 when they gained **Plaistow South** after another huge collapse of Labour support.

They picked up a further defector from Labour in November. Labour successfully defended three by-election seats in this time, albeit shedding support on very low turnouts.

By-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Ind	Grn
Boleyn	-14.2	-27.7	+0.8	+42.5	+3.3
Wall End	+14.6	+11.8	+5.1		-4.1
Plaistow North	-6.5	-40.4	+2.7	+56.3	-12.2
Forest Gate North	-4.8	-16.3	-5.3	+26.3	+0.8
Maryland	-0.1	-16.3	-5.3	+23.7	+2.8
Beckton	-5.8	-9.0	+6.2	+30.9	-17.0
Little Ilford	-4.7	-14.7	+0.9	+23.1	-1.7
Plaistow South	-9.7	-35.5	-7.7	+44.7	-7.8

A 2022 council of 64 Labour and 2 Greens has become a 2026 council of 58 Labour, 5 Newham Independents, 3 Greens and 2 Independents. That's still a majority many Labour group leaders across London would love to enjoy, but what matters far more than the numbers of seats held is the number of votes Labour has lost. If the scale of vote share losses Labour has suffered in these by-elections is repeated - or anything like, the party will lose the council. The question is: will they?

The Newham Independents are serious about challenging for power: they are not a rag-tag assembly thrown together to win the odd by-election in protest over a single issue. They are led by a charismatic and articulate councillor: Mehmood Mirza, their Boleyn by-election winner, who will be their mayoral candidate. They claim to be strong enough to be able to contest all 66 seats. They have the continuing seething anger of Newham's Muslim and leftist community over Gaza and the other grievances against the Labour government or council to ride.

But Newham is not Tower Hamlets: it does not comprise one largely homogenous ethnic contingent (Bangladeshi Muslims). Newham is far more - literally - multicultural.

East Ham, Manor Park and Forest Gate are heavily Asian - principally Muslim but with a huge Hindu population as well. West Ham, Canning Town and Stratford have much larger African and Caribbean communities.

There is a reason why the Christian People's Alliance (CPA) was able to win both Canning Town wards and come close in Custom House in 2006: it is because the deeply religious African community in these wards aligned behind them, along with others who wanted to beat Labour.

In October 2025 while 35% of those with Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage cited Gaza as a top issue, just 9% of Indians and 7% in the black community did so (according to YouGov). Gaza simply does not have the same salience, however much leftist agitators wish to imagine there is universal fury against the state of Israel.

Newham Independents need to widen their appeal to make this a vote about fixing the council's housing services; about development serving Newham's existing residents; about putting the council back on a sound financial footing. And they need candidates from more than one community too. They clearly grasp this, though their pledges are either vague or impossible for a council in the financial mess it is to deliver.

But let's say they can't convince wider Newham that they are more than a sectarian interest group and, therefore, end up tethered to the wards that have large Asian populations.

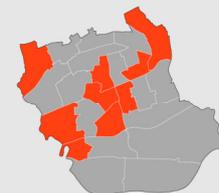
That would still put in play **Boleyn, East Ham, East Ham South, Green Street East, Green Street West, Little Ilford, Manor Park, Plashet, Plaistow North, Plaistow South** and **Wall End** - and those wards contain 33 seats - exactly half the council.

Add on the two Green seats in **Stratford Olympic Park** and that's Labour out of power. Labour would have to be doing so astonishingly badly to lose every seat in every one of those wards, by the way - but if they are doing that poorly they will almost certainly lose a few seats somewhere else.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Boleyn (1 New Ind)
- ▶ Canning Town North (1 Grn)
- ▶ Canning Town South (1 Ind)
- ▶ Green Street West (1 Ind)
- ▶ Little Ilford (1 New Ind)
- ▶ Plaistow North (1 New Ind)
- ▶ Plaistow South (1 New Ind)
- ▶ Plashet (1 New Ind)
- ▶ Stratford Olympic Park (2 Grn)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Beckton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Maryland (2 Lab)
- ▶ Royal Albert (2 Lab)
- ▶ Royal Victoria (2 Lab)



Newham Independents hopefuls

- ▶ Boleyn (2 Lab)
- ▶ East Ham (3 Lab)
- ▶ East Ham South (3 Lab)
- ▶ Forest Gate North (2 Lab)
- ▶ Forest Gate South (3 Lab)
- ▶ Green Street East (3 Lab)
- ▶ Green Street West (3 Lab)
- ▶ Little Ilford (2 Lab)
- ▶ Manor Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Plaistow North (2 Lab)
- ▶ Plaistow South (2 Lab)
- ▶ Plashet (2 Lab)
- ▶ Wall End (3 Lab)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Custom House (3 Lab)
- ▶ Royal Victoria (2 Lab)



Events 2022-2026	C	L	G	N Ind	O
May 22 council election result		64	2		
May 22 suspension: Belgica Guaña (Canning Town South) Lab to Ind		63	2	1	
Jul 23 by-election: Boleyn - New Ind gain from Lab		62	2	1	1
Jul 23 by-election: Wall End - Lab hold		62	2	1	1
Nov 23 by-election: Plaistow North - New Ind gain from Lab		61	2	2	1
Nov 23 defection: Zuber Gulamussen (Plashet) - Lab to New Ind		60	2	3	1
Jul 24 by-election: Forest Gate North - Lab hold		60	2	3	1
Jul 24 by-election: Maryland - Lab hold		60	2	3	1
Jul 24 by-election: Beckton - Lab hold		60	2	3	1
Jul 24 by-election: Little Ilford - Lab hold		60	2	3	1
Jul 24 defection: Areeq Chowdhury (Canning Town North) Lab to Grn		59	3	3	1
Sep 25 by-election: Plaistow South - New Ind gain from Lab		58	3	4	1
Oct 25 defection: Lewis Godfrey (Green Street West) Lab to Ind		57	3	4	2
Nov 25 defection: Nur Begum (Little Ilford) - Lab to New Ind		56	3	5	2
Jan 25 defection: Nur Begum (Little Ilford) - New Ind to Ind		56	3	4	3

The Greens may be able to grow beyond the atypical **Stratford Olympic Village** ward - but it won't be easy because there are no similar wards. They polled 32% in **Beckton** last time but that vote collapsed to Newham Independents in the ward's July 2024 by-election. But it does show a huge non-Labour vote in that ward.

Royal Albert and **Royal Victoria** - the two dockland wards, may have some potential because they contain a lot of the sort of housing the Olympic Village now boasts and for a not too dissimilar (though wealthier) demographic. Of these, **Royal Victoria** is the better prospect.

Maryland ward is the second whitest ward in Newham and adjoins Stratford Olympic Park, but it is not similar. The Greens polled 19% in that ward's 2023 by-election and whether they can advance here depends on who else stands.

Other than a fluke result there are no prospects for the Conservatives or Lib Dems in Newham. The highest Tory vote in 2022 came in **East Ham** ward, but their 22% and slammed up against Labour's 63%. That vote will likely disintegrate to Newham Independents this year in a ward that is 55% Asian.

If the first Conservative Party leader of African heritage has any appeal, perhaps there will be some boon for Kemi Badenoch in Canning Town and Custom House. But the Tories need a perfect split in the vote to get them over the line on a low vote share.

These London borough elections are topsy-turvy, with long-term safe boroughs at risk for Labour while the party looks more robust in traditional marginals. A mid-term election is purpose built to punish the government and the desire to do so hasn't been this great since 1968 - it's bigger than 2006. That is why Newham is at risk, but the backlash against Labour here has been a long time fomenting.

REDBRIDGE

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For decades there was nothing red about Redbridge: London's outer East End covering Ilford, Wanstead and Woodford plus the outlying council estate ward of Hainault, originally part of Chigwell district.

This was a rock solid safe Conservative borough which saw very little change from election to election. The ward map of 1990 looked little different to that of 1964.

In 1994 the Conservatives lost their majority, enabling Labour and the Lib Dems to run the borough in coalition for eight years. At the time that was put down to the deep unpopularity of John Major's Conservative government, rather than any change in the borough's underlying political preferences.

The borough returned to the Tories in 2002 and they held it comfortably in 2006 and 2010. Yet there was an intrinsic swing going on. It was driven initially by migration of Bangladeshi and Pakistani families out of Tower Hamlets and Newham to similar but more suburban Ilford.

Ilford proper: the core of the town, was pretty much all squeezed into the Ilford South constituency: grids of long streets north of Barking. There are nine wards in a sort of checkerboard arrangement either side of the Elizabeth Line and south of Eastern Avenue.

Until 1994, the year they lost their majority, the Conservatives were competitive in all these wards: but back then Ilford South was a whiter constituency. Only 20% of Ilford South was from an ethnic minority background at the 1981 census. Just twenty years later, the figure was 55%.

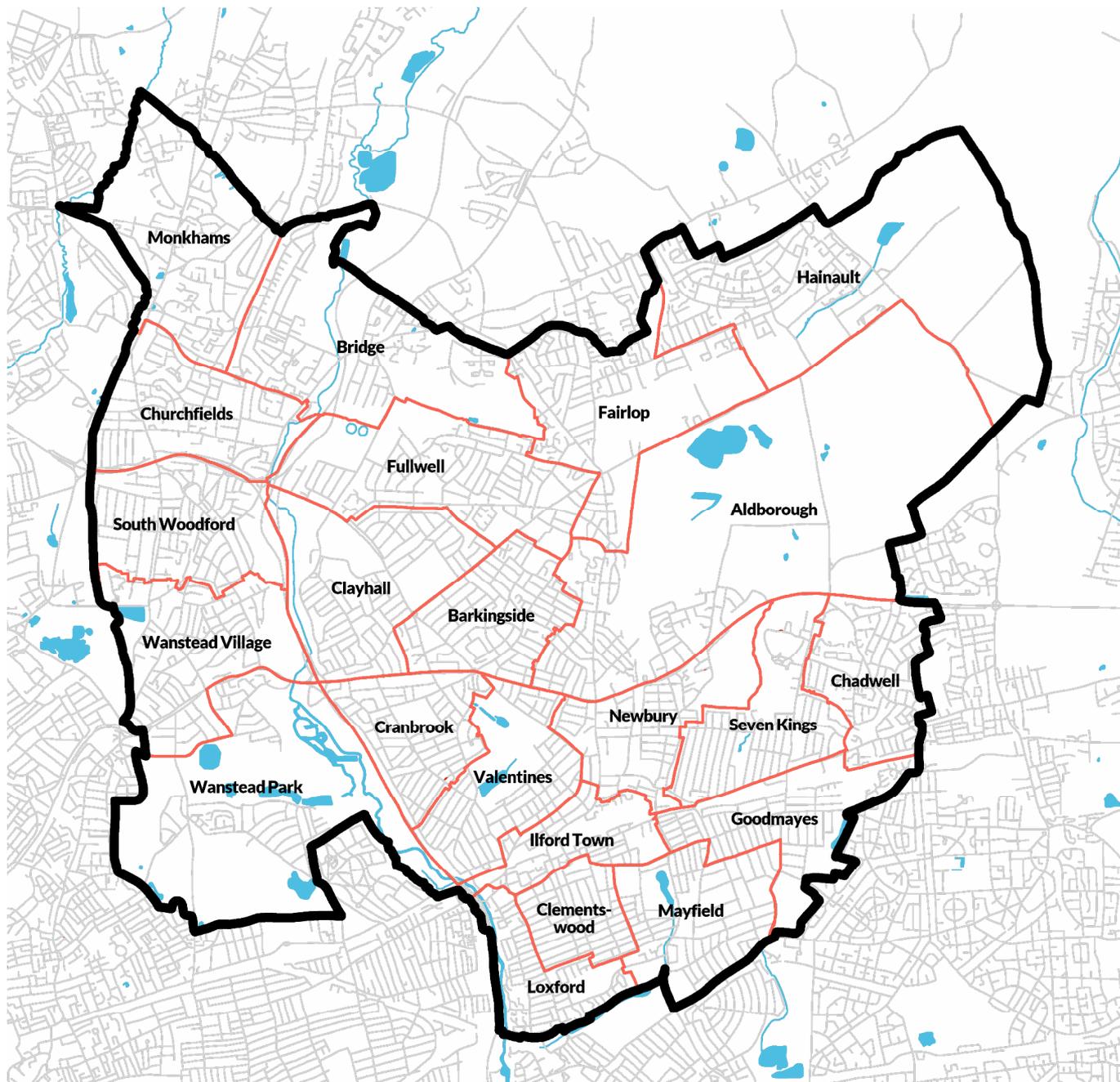
The Conservatism of places like Ilford South was not founded on great affluence - it was not a constituency where all that many went to university and then into the professions - but rather on home ownership.

It is a regular London suburb like Thornton Heath or Southall or Kenton. And that is the reason the borough's demography has changed - could change - so quickly. Just like Southall, had Ilford been a neighbourhood rebuilt in the 1950s with massive council estates, it would not have been attractive to upwardly mobile ethnic minorities - and nor would council homes have been necessarily available to them given the priority for council housing is based almost entirely on need.

The Conservatives won five of the nine Ilford South wards in 1978 (**Seven Kings** split), six in 1982, five again in 1986 (again with **Seven Kings** split), and four in 1990. Then just one: the more affluent Cranbrook, from 1994 to 2010. **Cranbrook** split in 2010 and switched fully to Labour in 2018. Every ward in Ilford South is now massively safe for Labour: Cranbrook voted 60% Labour to 29% Tory in 2022; Labour won over 80% in **Clementswood** and **Loxford** and well over 70% in **Ilford Town**, **Goodmayes** and **Mayfield**.

But this was only half the story of how demographic change in Redbridge has wiped out the Conservatives' chance of probably ever winning back the borough. In the far more affluent parts of the borough: Wanstead and Woodford, young professional families priced out of the centre of London were moving in. These were university-educated liberals replacing staunch Conservative households, perhaps themselves moving out to Epping or Bishop's Stortford or a village life somewhere.

There are two Wanstead wards: **Wanstead Village** (the old Snaresbrook ward with its Crown Court) and **Wanstead Park**; and three and a half Woodford wards: **Churchfield**, **Monkhams**, **South Woodford**, and the western side of **Bridge** ward which straddles the river Roding (the red bridge from which the borough derives its name was further down this river, demolished when the North Circular was being expanded).



Labour won seats in the two Wanstead wards in 1998 but couldn't defend them; then took them both in 2018. Woodford is slightly different: **Monkhams** remains, even today, a very safe Conservative ward (59% to 31% Labour in 2022, and that was down from 70% Conservative in 2018).

Some of that staunchness transfers across to Bridge, which was pretty reliably Conservative until 2022 when it split: two Labour, one Conservative. But **Churchfields** and **South Woodford**, albeit in a rejigged alignment, voted Lib Dem from the late 1990s to 2014 before switching to Labour.

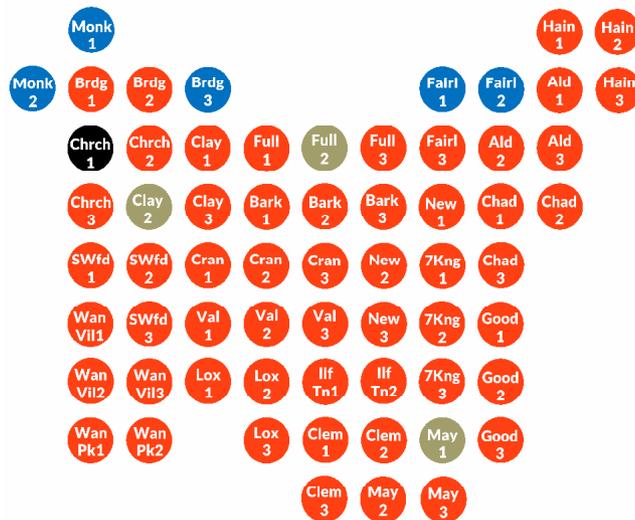
Then there is outer Ilford: the semi-rural **Aldborough**, atypical **Hainault**, **Fullwell** and **Fairlop**, **Barkingside** and **Clayhall**. **Hainault** was always reliably Labour until the Blair government, then swung heavily to the right electing both Conservative councillors and (briefly) a BNP representative before returning to the Labour fold, somewhat reluctantly.

All the other wards in this bunch used to be rock solidly Conservative and now aren't. **Fairlop** is the only one returning any Tory councillors: two out of the three there. Ilford North is undergoing the same demographic changes as Ilford South did, just later and at a slightly different pace. In 1980 just 7.5% of the residents here were from an ethnic minority. In 2001 it was 24.3% and in 2021 it was 48.5%. That's still massively lower than Ilford South (71%); and Ilford North is also a mix of the Ilford and Wanstead demographics.

These twin demographics worked wonders for Labour for thirty years or so. But now, with the party dredging the depths of support they are an existential threat.

They did, for example, enable Wes Streeting to gain Ilford North in 2015 - an election not memorable for Labour success - and significantly improve his majority in 2017, getting hauled back a little in 2019. But now remember how much the demographics of Ilford have changed and we get to the Gaza conflict. Who are the two groups most outraged by Labour's response? Muslims and affluent university-educated social warrior middle classes.

Streeting won re-election in 2024 by just 528 votes over a Gaza-focussed independent, Leanne Mohamad, Labour's vote down twenty points to just 33%. That's a lower share than Labour lost with in 2005 and 2010, and it certainly wasn't part of Streeting's plan to become Prime Minister fairly soon.



In Ilford South, the Labour MP who won the seat back in 1992, Mike Gapes, left the party after Jeremy Corbyn became leader. He was one of those who joined the short-lived pro-remain Independent Group for Change party.

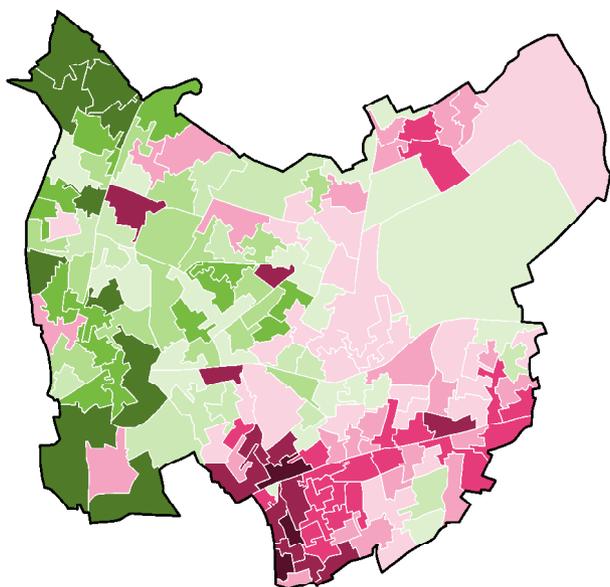
Corbyn-controlled head office then engineered a complaint to suspend the non-Corbynite council leader Jas Athwal from standing to replace Gapes. That enabled left-winger Sam Tarry - Angela Rayner's partner - to win the selection and, of course, the constituency, in 2019.

But with Sir Keir Starmer as leader the tables were turned on Tarry. Local branches deselected him and Athwal replaced him as the Labour candidate in 2024.

Ilford South had, like the wards within it, swung massively to Labour in the almost thirty years Gapes represented it. He won 76% in the 2017 general election and a majority of well

over 31,000. Tarry won in 2019 with two thirds of the vote and Athwal - also getting an independent Gaza-focussed challenger, Noor Begum, in 2024 - won with 40%. But he was still almost 7,000 votes ahead.

Athwal's term as a Labour MP did not start off well. He was revealed as being landlord of fifteen properties in Ilford, some of which were badly neglected and whose tenants had been unable to contact him to get problems fixed. This from a party that had made clamping down on "rogue" landlords and championing tenants' rights an election issue.



Redbridge index of deprivation map

Had Athwal resigned his council seat as soon as he was elected MP Labour might - just possibly - have done alright, though the anger over Gaza would still have been problematic in a ward that had a population of origin from the Indian sub-continent of 61%.

But he didn't stand down from his **Mayfield** ward until the new year of 2025, when pretty much everybody would have been aware of his property portfolio debacle. Noor Begum, his general election opponent (and standing for election to the Your Party management board), stood in the by-election and won with 45%. The Labour candidate polled just 26%.

In the wider left-of-centre political sphere, Jeremy Corbyn was co-operating with the independents who were elected in 2024. Redbridge Independents, and Redbridge Matters have both been registered with the Electoral Commission in the past year. They appear a lot more likely, and have been building the organisation, to stand in May than Corbyn's Your Party - and Your Party has indicated that it will be supporting "community independents" where they stand.

There were two other by-elections apart from Athwal's in Redbridge, and they both offer insights into what might happen at the local elections. The first was in **Wanstead Park** in November following the election of councillor Bayo Alaba as MP for Southend East and Rochford.

The Conservatives collapsed in this ward in 2022, seeing their vote almost halve from 32% in 2018 to just 18%. That was a mix of the deep unpopularity of Boris Johnson's government and the evolving demographics of the ward. This isn't an especially ethnically diverse ward despite adjoining Newham: it's affluent and white and professional.

So it was impossible that the Conservatives could win. But they didn't come close - and this was during a period when the Tories were doing well in by-elections, before the surge to Reform UK of 2025. In fact the Conservative vote fell further while an independent came second. Reform polled just 4.5%. All the parties that stood lost vote share to accommodate the new entrants: Labour down six, Tories down one, Greens down eight and Lib Dems down three. Labour held on easily.

The other by-election was caused in **Hainault** in May 2025 when Labour councillor Sam Gould was convicted of an indecency offence having exposed himself to a 13 year old girl and then chasing after her in Romford.

Such a horrible offence would hardly be approved of anywhere but for him to represent as marginal a ward as **Hainault**, of all places, looked disastrous for Labour. Gould had also worked for Wes Streeting: perhaps an even poorer choice of association for Streeting than Peter Mandelson?

Redbridge Independents again stood in this by-election and, given the ward's profile and electoral history, Reform were guaranteed to do well. Yet Labour hung on - by a single vote. Helen Mullis won 835, independent Glen Haywood won 834, Reform (who picked the wrong candidate for this ward) took 611, the Conservatives 421, Greens 125 and Lib Dems 73.

This was a surprising win for Labour, showing the difference their "ground game": their knowledge of the ward and having the activist base to work it, makes compared to newer parties.

But Labour only won 29%. In comparison, when they lost Hainault in 2010 they had polled 30% - so their win was due entirely to a split field against them. A win's a win but it was as close to a pyrrhic victory as we get .

Therein lies the perfect example of an outcome we're going to see a lot of in these elections: the prospect of Labour being salvaged despite big falls in support due to votes splitting between several opponents. Labour will not mind too much if it wins 32 seats (the barest majority) on the council by one vote and with less than 30% of the vote. Of course, that won't happen, but how many will it save?

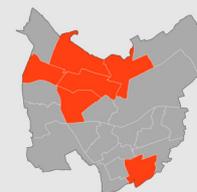
We have no idea yet how many candidates the Redbridge Independents will field but its likely they're strong enough to contest most wards. Had they stood in Mayfield in 2022 then the swing would have been 43.7% from Labour. That would be enough for Labour to lose every seat in Redbridge - and again, that won't happen.

But if Mayfield is typical of inner Ilford - it is - and if it's likely the independents will contest everywhere in inner Ilford - it is - then that's up to twenty six Labour seats wiped out. And that's why Redbridge is towards the top of the list of likely Labour losses in May.

Potential key wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Bridge (1 Con)
- ▶ Clayhall (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Fairlop (2 Con)
- ▶ Fullwell (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Mayfield (1 If Ind)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Aldborough (3 Lab)
- ▶ Barkingside (3 Lab)
- ▶ Bridge (2 Lab)
- ▶ Churchfields (2 Lab)
- ▶ Clayhall (3 Lab)
- ▶ Fairlop (1 Lab)
- ▶ Fullwell (2 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Hainault (3 Lab)
- ▶ South Woodford (3 Lab)
- ▶ Wanstead Village (3 Lab)



Redbridge Independents hopefuls

- ▶ Barkingside (3 Lab)
- ▶ Chadwell (3 Lab)
- ▶ Clayhall (3 Lab)
- ▶ Clementswood (3 Lab)
- ▶ Cranbrook (3 Lab)
- ▶ Goodmayes (3 Lab)
- ▶ Ilford Town (2 Lab)
- ▶ Loxford (3 Lab)
- ▶ Mayfield (3 Lab)
- ▶ Newbury (3 Lab)
- ▶ Seven Kings (3 Lab)
- ▶ Valentines (3 Lab)



Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Bridge (2 Lab, 1 Con)
- ▶ Fairlop (2 Con, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Hainault (3 Lab)
- ▶ Monkham's (2 Con)



When I've referred to any putative Conservative recovery in London elsewhere I've mentioned that the swing in the capital since the 2022 elections is about four to six points from Labour to the Conservatives. Usually that's been in the context of boroughs in which the Tories need much larger swings to win.

Nobody should be expecting the Conservatives to rise like Lazarus in Redbridge either - they'd need an 11% swing for that. But there are a few seats within the borough that might fall on that sort of swing. For starters they'd pick up the three seats in split **Fairlop** (0.2% Labour majority) and **Bridge** (4.9%).

They'd also have a good shot of regaining **Barkingside** (3.1%), **Churchfields** (2.1%), **South Woodford** (3.7%) and **Aldborough** (9.8%).

At a stretch they might be able to regain **Fullwell** (12.4%) and **Clayhall** (13.2%). Clayhall, though, may well be a more natural Ilford Independents target these days (56.5% of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage).

In theory the Tories should also win **Hainault**, though I still expect Reform to be the more likely winner than anyone else there - not least because the huge resource Labour poured into the by-election will not be replicated this time.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity			Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Bang	Pak	Indian	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Aldborough	66.1	6.3	27.1	9.9%	10.6%	20.2%	51.3	48.7	45.6	16.2
Barkingside	66.4	13.4	19.7	15.5%	12.0%	22.0%	53.4	46.6	40.3	16.4
Bridge	56.3	13.5	28.4	3.7%	4.3%	6.9%	44.8	55.2	39.0	17.7
Chadwell	57.7	16.1	25.4	15.5%	12.3%	13.9%	60.5	39.5	48.3	13.3
Churchfields	74.2	3.7	21.8	3.4%	4.6%	7.4%	53.4	46.6	44.1	15.5
Clayhall	48.1	8.7	42.7	14.8%	17.0%	24.7%	35.6	64.4	32.5	24.0
Clementswood	61.6	5.7	32.2	13.0%	31.4%	19.2%	51.0	49.0	44.5	18.5
Cranbrook	61.3	10.4	27.1	13.9%	22.9%	22.9%	45.3	54.7	39.4	17.1
Fairlop	65.8	14.3	18.8	6.4%	6.9%	12.9%	47.8	52.2	39.2	18.4
Fullwell	48.3	8.4	42.2	7.0%	13.3%	15.9%	40.8	59.2	37.7	20.5
Goodmayes	55.5	24.7	16.6	13.9%	20.5%	21.3%	42.1	57.9	35.6	20.5
Hainault	21.8	17.4	57.0	4.6%	6.7%	7.1%	47.7	52.3	47.0	17.8
Ilford Town	33.2	22.4	42.0	16.6%	13.6%	28.7%	35.1	64.9	35.9	21.8
Loxford	64.3	7.7	27.5	13.3%	25.0%	12.5%	43.8	56.2	36.2	18.9
Mayfield	77.5	3.4	18.7	12.7%	28.8%	19.8%	67.3	32.7	49.1	12.8
Monkhams	56.5	8.1	34.2	2.3%	3.7%	9.9%	44.1	55.9	41.1	17.5
Newbury	49.8	7.6	42.4	13.4%	16.5%	20.3%	42.5	57.5	37.7	20.1
Seven Kings	61.8	6.4	31.0	15.4%	16.2%	23.1%	65.4	34.6	54.1	12.1
South Woodford	44.9	7.6	46.3	3.5%	7.7%	10.2%	47.0	53.0	43.4	18.2
Valentines	71.1	10.8	17.6	14.6%	18.7%	24.5%	65.7	34.3	53.0	11.5
Wanstead Park	59.0	12.3	28.2	4.2%	6.6%	7.0%	68.8	31.2	56.5	11.2
Wanstead Village	56.6	11.2	30.5	2.1%	4.4%	7.1%	47.4	52.6	43.0	17.3

In all of these potential targets the Conservatives could do with help from other parties taking votes off Labour that they could never reach. But if they are able to reclaim them Redbridge will have a Tory group numbering close to twenty - which would be a significant step towards a hung council. If the Conservatives do return with a councillor group of that size, no overall control becomes substantially more likely an outcome than any other. That is unless Redbridge Independents fail to break through in Ilford town.

So while Labour may well hang on to some seats by tiny majorities on low vote shares, it's equally likely they'll lose seats that way too. It could save the Tories in a borough where they've been pushed to the edge of extinction.

Reform has limited opportunities in Redbridge, even though it borders two of their best chances in London: Barking and Dagenham and Havering. Redbridge is neither of those boroughs.

This despite the Electoral Calculus MRP of December 2025 showing Reform winning both Ilford North and Ilford South. But this model did not include Redbridge Independents so, even if we do find its results of some curiosity generally, they can be discounted here.

As previously discussed, **Hainault** is their best shot and one in which they badly underperformed at the by-election. Chingford-adjacent **Monkhams** is probably too affluent a

ward for them to win - though they should poll well there. Somewhat less affluent, still largely white, **Bridge** and **Fairlop** should be better prospects, especially as these are already closely fought wards where the amount needed to win is less.

The Lib Dem vote in that part of South Woodford they used to win has evaporated and they didn't even contest **Chadwell** - the third Redbridge ward they have won. There really aren't likely to be any Lib Dem councillors here on May 8th.

As for the Greens, it is likely that most who might otherwise be inclined to support the party will vote for the Redbridge Independents. This is what happened in the **Wanstead Park** by-election: the Greens' best ward in 2022 (of a very limited number - they only contested six).

I suspect most Labour Redbridge activists would agree that the 2022 council result exaggerated the degree of Tory decline somewhat due to their unique unpopularity that year. The results got a bit ahead of themselves.

But Labour didn't win these wards by fluke: the 2022 result was a genuine premonition of what lays in store for the Conservatives unless they can start winning more votes from the newer residents who've moved in. Likewise, the by-election results in Mayfield and Hainault were not weird quirks of fate for Labour either: their vote really has collapsed in Redbridge and their feted destiny of turning this into another rock solid London borough is in real peril.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	5	58			
Dec 23 defection: Shanell Johnston (Fullwell) Lab to Ind	5	57			1
Jun 24 defection: Rosa Gomez (Churchfields) Lab to Ind	5	56			2
Nov 24 by-election: Wanstead Park - Lab hold	5	56			2
Mar 25 by-election: Mayfield - If Ind gain from Lab	5	55			3
May 25 by-election: Hainault - Lab hold	5	55			3
Sep 25 suspension: Kabir Mahmud (Clayhall) Lab to Ind	5	54			4
Mar 26 vacancy: Rosa Gomez (Churchfields), resignation	5	54			3

2026 will see the end of a minor yet interesting experiment in cross-party political co-operation. For the past two elections the ruling Liberal Democrats in Richmond have gifted the Greens a handful of seats.

The Lib Dems have only stood two candidates in six 3-councillor wards, which has enabled the sole Green standing in those wards to get elected in third place (though there were two wards in 2018 and one in 2022 where the Tories defeated the Green).

What the Liberal Democrats got from this arrangement was no Green challenger anywhere else in the borough or, to put it another way, no split in the "progressive" vote. And what that meant was that it became much harder for the Conservatives to win seats because the non-Tory vote was less split. Simply put, it pushed the post in our First Past The Post electoral system far further from the Tories.

Did the Liberal Democrats need to manipulate the voters this way in Richmond? Since the 2015 general election, when Zac Goldsmith won the Richmond Park constituency by 23,000, the Conservatives have collapsed in this borough.

There was the Brexit referendum in which 69% of Richmond-upon-Thames voted Remain; then watched aghast as the Conservatives struggled to deliver Brexit.

There was the futile vanity project of Goldsmith resigning his seat and re-standing to show that he opposed the expansion of Heathrow airport. While he wanted the by-election to be about Heathrow his electorate got to decide for themselves the issues that mattered. They chose, instead, to have a go at David Cameron for calling the EU referendum, turfed Goldsmith out and returned the seat to the Lib Dems. Goldsmith regained his seat at the 2017 general election by just 45 votes but lost it by nearly 8,000 two years later.

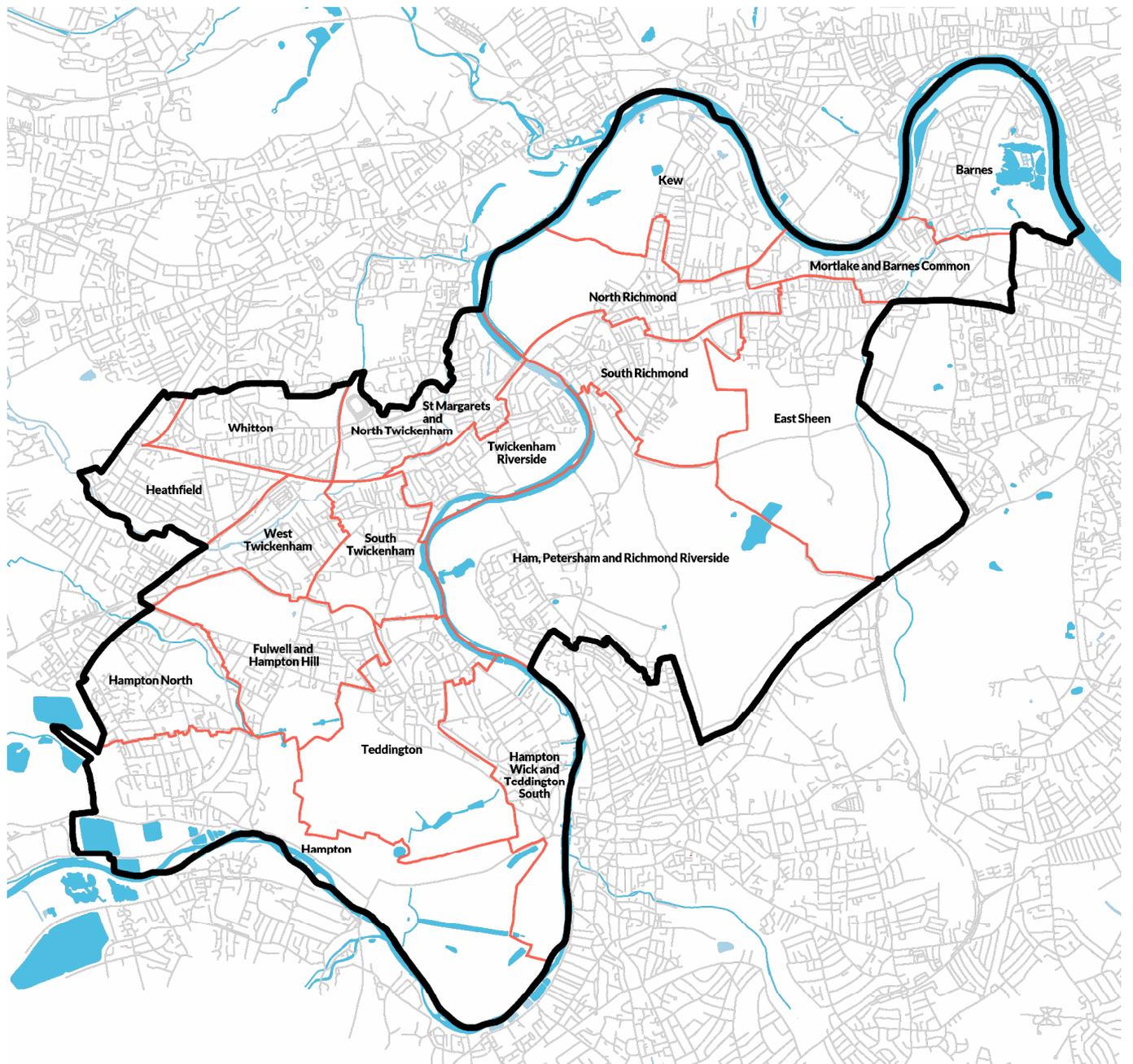
At the 2018 council elections the Conservatives, who'd regained control of the borough in 2010, crashed from 39 seats to just 11 - trading a 2014 Tory majority of 24 with one of the same size for the Lib Dems. This was the first election where the Lib Dem-Green pact came into being. And it worked everywhere except Barnes - where three Tories held on comfortably enough, and South Richmond - where two Conservatives and a Lib Dem won. But Greens were elected in **Fulwell, Ham, Hampton Wick** and **South Twickenham**.

The Conservatives had still not hit rock bottom. The one politician genetically programmed to drive Richmond liberals demented - even though, Brexit-aside, he was one of them - was Boris Johnson. In the 2022 elections the Conservatives were reduced to just one councillor: long-serving Geoffrey Samuel in **Hampton North**. Their borough-wide vote collapsed to just 22.6% - compared to 42% in 2010.

The renewed pact delivered five seats for the Greens in 2022 and some massive majorities for the Lib Dems in wards that had returned Conservatives just a few years earlier. They won **East Sheen** by a thousand votes, for example - a ward that stayed resolutely Tory when the Alliance was winning landslides in the 1980s. They won **Hampton Wick** by 2,000.

The pact worked in its own terms but it was not the reason the Conservatives were defeated - they did that all by themselves. And, when the Lib Dems went head-to-head with the Greens in by-elections (when the pact did not apply) the Lib Dems thrashed the smaller party. So it was obviously superfluous from a Lib Dems' perspective.

In late 2023 Geoffrey Samuel, that last surviving Conservative councillor, died and the Lib Dems easily won the by-election. The Greens stood in this by-election and took 5% compared to the Lib Dems' 53%. For the first time, no Tory sat on Richmond council.



At the 2024 general election Lib Dem MP Sarah Olney won a 17,000 majority in Richmond Park while Munira Wilson held Twickenham by 21,457. This was as comprehensive a defeat as the Conservatives could possibly sustain.

Maybe the depth of the Conservative nadir prompted the Lib Dems to end the pact. Maybe they wanted the five council seats, denied to their activists by Greens, back. It's even possible that the Lib Dems regard having a real opponent back on the council - if the Conservatives manage it - as better for local democracy and a sharper contrast to their brand of political progressive politics.

But this was before the Green surge that followed Zack Polanski winning the party's leadership. While the Greens have not really shown any strength in Richmond so far, there's no reason why they can't. There is, or at least there should be, huge potential for a radical party championing the fight for environmental and social justice here; though whether Polanski's brand is too extreme for Richmond is a question that will be answered in May.

But the threat - such as it is - to the Lib Dems is not Green gains: this may be the only London borough where the Greens lose seats: very probably all five of them. It is the very reason that the pact was formed in the first place: to avoid a stack of Green votes large enough to split the "progressive" majority and allow Conservatives back in. But even if that does happen, the Conservatives aren't in contention to regain Richmond-upon-Thames. Not from zero seats.

They have prospects, and could at a stretch get back to double figures in the council chamber. But we are several years away - if ever - from Richmond forgiving the Tories for choosing working class northern Leave voters over liberal London Remainers.

Yet the Conservative path is clear.

Possible target wards

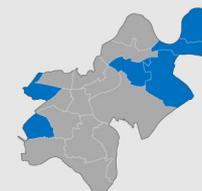
Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Fulwell and Hampton Hill (1 Grn)
- ▶ Ham, Petersham & Rich. Riv. (1 Grn)
- ▶ Mortlake and Barnes Common (1 Grn)
- ▶ South Richmond (1 Grn)
- ▶ South Twickenham (1 Grn)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Barnes (3 LD)
- ▶ East Sheen (3 LD)
- ▶ Hampton North (3 LD)
- ▶ Heathfield (3 LD)
- ▶ Mortlake and Barnes Common (2 LD, 1 Grn)
- ▶ South Richmond (2 LD, 1 Grn)



Labour hopeful

- ▶ Heathfield (3 LD)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Fulwell and Hampton Hill (2 LD)
- ▶ Ham, Petersham & Rich. Riv. (2 LD)
- ▶ Mortlake and Barnes Common (2 LD)
- ▶ South Richmond (2 LD)
- ▶ South Twickenham (2 LD)



Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Barnes	57.9	15.9	25.9	59.8	1.5	4.1	78.2	21.8	63.9	7.9
East Sheen	70.9	5.7	23.3	66.6	0.8	2.8	78.3	21.7	68.2	5.8
Fulwell & Hampton Hill	69.6	8.0	22.0	72.8	1.1	2.8	72.6	27.4	61.0	8.4
Ham, Petersham & Richmond Riv.	58.6	18.7	22.1	55.7	1.8	6.5	69.0	31.0	55.7	12.4
Hampton	68.8	12.3	17.9	72.3	1.4	3.3	69.7	30.3	56.6	9.9
Hampton North	60.6	21.7	16.0	63.4	2.5	4.8	58.5	41.5	45.9	14.3
Hampton Wick	61.6	13.7	23.8	69.3	1.6	2.8	73.7	26.3	62.1	8.6
Heathfield	62.0	22.3	14.9	47.7	4.1	12.9	50.1	49.9	38.7	18.4
Kew	60.9	10.0	28.1	57.4	1.6	5.0	79.8	20.2	70.0	6.7
Mortlake and Barnes Common	54.8	16.6	27.9	64.4	1.9	4.0	76.3	23.7	64.2	8.0
North Richmond	55.6	15.7	27.6	57.9	1.6	4.0	77.0	23.0	65.7	7.7
St Margarets & N. Twickenham	66.0	4.3	28.7	63.5	1.2	3.1	78.4	21.6	68.0	5.9
South Richmond	51.3	13.1	35.3	56.0	1.1	3.3	82.2	17.8	69.7	6.6
South Twickenham	68.4	6.6	24.4	71.3	1.1	2.4	75.8	24.2	61.2	6.3
Teddington	64.2	8.7	26.0	73.1	1.2	2.0	75.2	24.8	63.8	7.3
Twickenham Riverside	56.3	6.1	36.8	61.1	1.5	3.4	78.2	21.8	68.6	6.0
West Twickenham	69.4	11.6	18.4	64.7	1.9	4.5	67.6	32.4	53.3	10.5
Whitton	72.1	8.6	18.5	58.3	2.0	6.9	59.6	40.4	45.1	14.7

The Green in **Mortlake and Barnes Common** won by just 73 votes last time, though the two Lib Dems there won a lot more comfortably. This and **Barnes** - something of an isolated idyll since Hammersmith Bridge closed - are the top two Conservative targets.

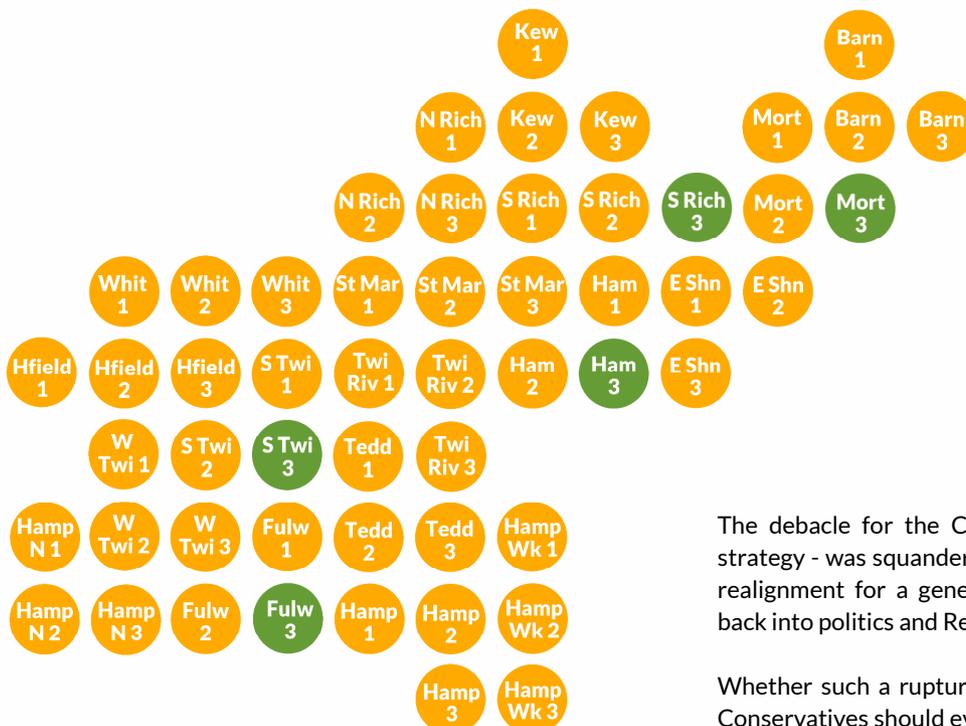
Then, across the Thames, the Tories might hope to get **Hampton North** back, though they lost by a lot in the by-election.

Things become harder thereafter. **South Richmond** is the next best Tory prospect: they were about 17% behind there. And then, back on the Middlesex side of the borough, is **Heathfield**: Labour's best (or least bad) prospect where they polled 26% in 2022. The Lib Dems have been able to win Heathfield despite this fairly deep split in the non-Conservative vote, but does that hold true with Greens back on the field?

Further gains would require a swing to the Conservatives of more than ten points - which is realistic only if the Greens take a huge chunk of the Lib Dem vote. Perhaps their long history of representing them could shunt **East Sheen** or **Hampton Wick** back to them in what would be something of a freak gain on huge swings.

Could the Greens gain - or at least hold - any seats? We are at the disadvantage of having no measure of real Green strength in this borough, because of the pact, since 2014: another era. There are two wards where a Green councillor has served for eight years and may have built up sufficient local support to get re-elected on their own merits instead of a stitch up.

Those are **Ham, Petersham and Richmond Riverside**, and **South Twickenham**. The other three Greens: in **Fulwell and Hampton Hill, Mortlake and Barnes Common**, and **South Richmond** were first elected in 2022.



Unfortunately for the Greens, Ham is usually the best Lib Dem ward in the borough, so that'll be a tough hold. But they all will be given how poorly they've fared when they have gone toe-to-toe with the Lib Dems here.

Whenever politics realigns there are going to be places that suddenly feel heard by whichever political party has shifted its way - and others that feel abandoned. At its crux, that is what happened in the second half of the last decade between the voters of Richmond-upon-Thames and the Conservatives.

It could be argued, given how much of a cropper the Tories came in 2024 and the years up to it, that they traded away Richmond for absolutely nothing: but that is a facile analysis. Whatever your views on Brexit, at least one party had to stand with those that delivered a Leave majority. The electoral reality of the referendum was that vastly more areas voted Leave than Remain despite the closeness of the result.

The debacle for the Conservatives - in terms of electoral strategy - was squandering their opportunity to entrench the realignment for a generation and so allowing Nigel Farage back into politics and Reform to split the Tory vote.

Whether such a rupture can be repaired - and whether the Conservatives should even try - is a question for the long-run. It won't be answered this year. That's great news for the Liberal Democrats in Richmond. But only if the Green surge isn't too big. That might jeopardise rather too many seats.

On the subject of Mr Farage, his party will not be expecting any councillors in Richmond. Reform could, in fact, do to the Conservatives what I've been speculating the Greens will do to the Lib Dems: deprive them of enough votes to win. Most Leave voters come from a pool that votes either Reform or Conservative and every vote for the former sets back the latter. So if the Tories do fail to win a seat again, it'll probably be Nigel Farage the Lib Dems have to thank.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	1		48	5	
Jan 24 by-election: Hampton North - LD gain from Con			49	5	
Jan 24 by-election: Teddington - LD hold			49	5	

SOUTHWARK

45

11

4

3

Southwark has the potential to be the best example of an electoral pincer movement against Labour: where different parties threaten their majority in different parts of the borough.

It is far more likely that, if Labour are going to lose Southwark, they will do so to no overall control than to a majority for some other party. Southwark is also one of the somewhat less likely boroughs that Labour will lose.

That may seem slightly odd given it's sandwiched between Lewisham and Lambeth: both boroughs the Greens are not-so-quietly confident that they'll win. They blend together: the borough boundaries are soft, running through residential backstreets in many cases. They divide neighbourhoods incoherently. But Southwark is a little different to both of its neighbours: it has typically massively Labour neighbourhoods similar to, say, Deptford or Vauxhall - but more of them.

No party has ever made serious inroads into the core of Peckham. It's why, even in Labour's disaster year of 1968, Southwark stayed loyal. Lambeth and Lewisham did not.

If it works, the pincer will look like this: Lib Dems winning half a dozen or more Labour seats in old Southwark and Bermondsey; Greens taking the fight to Labour in Peckham, Camberwell and Dulwich and - just conceivably - the Conservatives regaining a foothold in the borough in Dulwich Village.

For that to happen the Liberal Democrats would have to defy electoral gravity and reverse their decline in the borough's north. They ruled the north for over thirty years: from when Simon Hughes won the Bermondsey by-election in 1983 through to 2015 - in the process almost winning a majority on the council.

In their heyday in 2002 the Lib Dems won thirty seats including in wards like Chaucer, Faraday, East Walworth (North Walworth), Livesey (Old Kent Road) and Newington. Labour holds all these wards today with big majorities - well over a thousand votes in most cases and with the Greens taking distant second place.

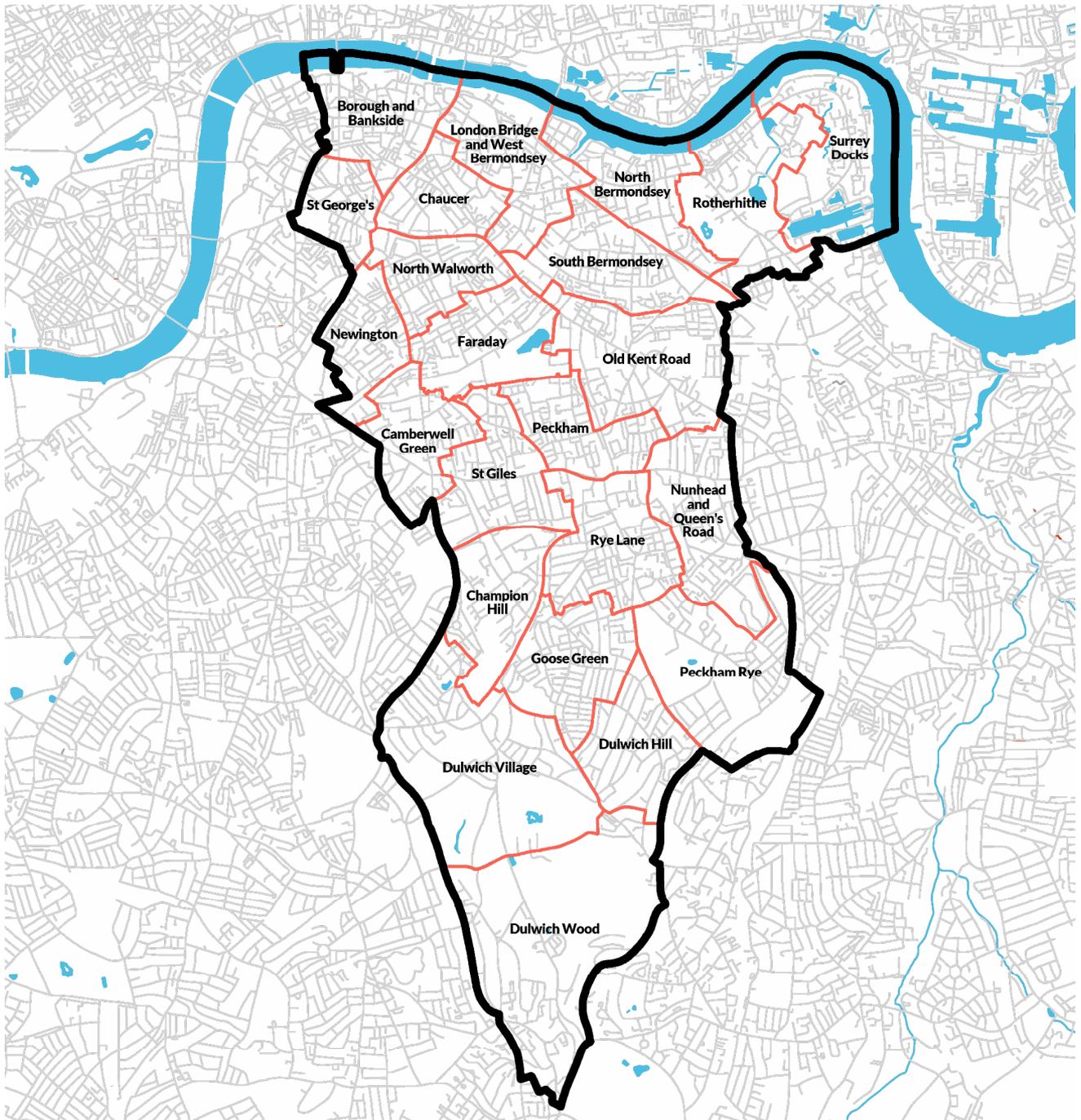
Two of the wards the Lib Dems still hold: **Borough and Bankside** and **North Bermondsey**, still look pretty secure for the party. Two: **St George's** (Kennington as far east as Elephant and Castle) and **Surrey Docks**, have a stronger Labour challenge.

But let's assume for now that Labour's dismal poll ratings have scuppered any hopes of making gains this year. If we push the swingometer in the Lib Dems' favour, where do they have opportunities?

Their best shot is **London Bridge and West Bermondsey** which they lost four years ago. Labour's majority there is about 10% or 350 votes, though their top councillor finished a fair way further ahead. **South Bermondsey**: the old Grange ward (and before that the even more expressive Bricklayers ward), has a similar majority.

One hefty step further is **Rotherhithe**, which fell to Labour in 2018. Labour has an 800 majority here though one of their councillors, Kath Whittam, defected to the Greens last year. Whether that has any electoral consequence we shall see but Bermondsey would not be my top pick for an area with especial fondness for the Greens (what is now very affluent Surrey Docks being the possible exception).

These nine seats are probably the peak of Lib Dem hopes unless they pick up a shock gain somewhere.



Nonetheless, nine added to their existing eleven would make a significant council group and it would create a big no overall control gap between a Labour majority and a Green majority.

But there would still be thirty eight Labour councillors if those Lib Dem gains materialise. And no Greens elected yet. Before we get to them, let's look at that one Conservative (very) long-shot: **Dulwich Village**.

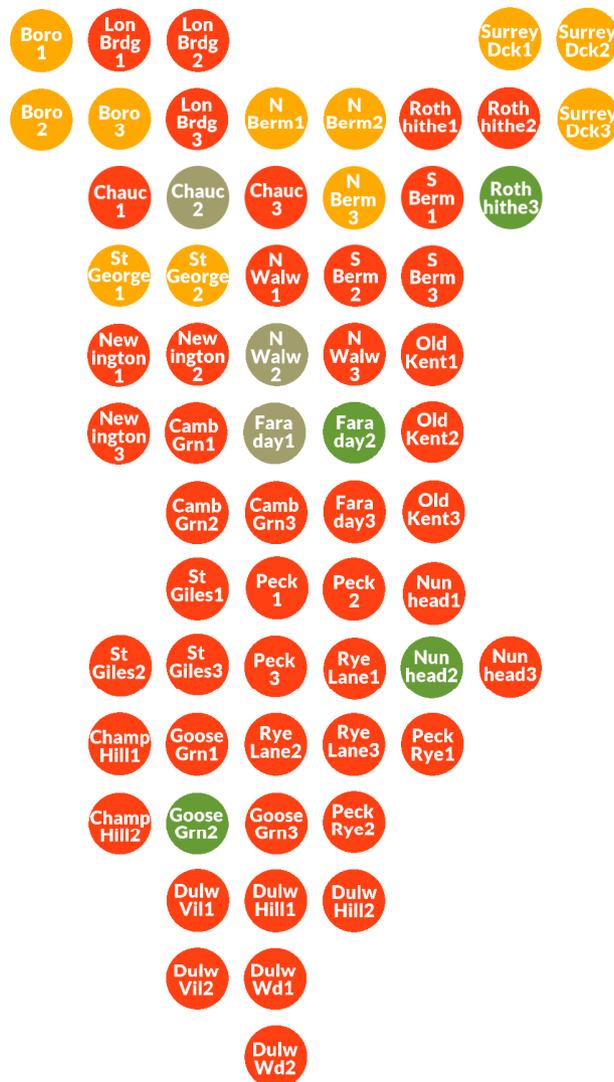
Since the 1950s (and 1968 aside) the Conservatives have only been able to win two - at most three - wards, all in the far south of the borough: **Dulwich Village** (the old Ruskin ward) and what is now **Dulwich Wood** (College). Occasionally they added the old Rye ward, most of which is now **Dulwich Hill**. The Conservative vote has almost completely evaporated in Dulwich Hill, but they still managed 23% in Dulwich Village and Dulwich Wood. They won over a thousand votes in Village which would normally be expected to give them a much higher percentage share.

But **Dulwich Village** produced the highest turnout of any ward in London in 2022 (and in 2018 too): nearly 61%, so Labour polled around 2,000 and easily held the ward. More voters in affluent areas tend to turn out to vote than in poor areas. Hard work by political parties also drives voter turnout up. But 61% is still an absurdly high poll for a council election. Only 15 London wards had a turnout of over 50% in 2022.

This level of voter enthusiasm was a groundswell to prevent Boris Johnson's deeply unpopular Conservatives from winning. Has voter anger with their party of choice for decades ebbed, or will the scourge of hostile demographics that has destroyed the Tory vote everywhere else in Dulwich mean they have no chance here ever again?

Whether the disdain heaped on Lambeth Labour over their response to these residents - and their failure since the court ruling to refund them - has any impact here is questionable but if it does there is really only the Conservatives to support: all the others bar Reform (who can't get anywhere near winning here) are zealots for LTNs.

But it's more likely that anti-LTN fervour won't sweep this ward, the Conservative vote will at best hold steady and this year's anti-Labour wave will switch to the Greens or Lib Dems. Website Britain Votes Now is projecting that the Liberal Democrats will, indeed, win Dulwich Village with the Conservatives fourth.



Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Borough and Bankside	21.8	35.3	40.5	35.1	11.8	7.7	74.7	25.3	57.2	9.4
Camberwell Green	22.1	52.4	21.2	26.9	30.7	12.0	53.0	47.0	49.4	16.6
Champion Hill	38.9	38.3	21.8	37.8	24.6	9.2	64.4	35.6	59.4	11.9
Chaucer	19.5	42.2	36.0	25.5	20.3	16.2	62.2	37.8	54.3	11.8
Dulwich Hill	53.3	19.3	26.6	55.8	10.8	4.1	73.0	27.0	62.6	10.0
Dulwich Village	68.4	12.4	18.9	65.1	5.0	2.3	81.1	18.9	71.9	7.6
Dulwich Wood	48.7	26.2	23.4	43.3	17.7	7.4	65.8	34.2	57.8	11.9
Faraday	15.1	52.4	30.4	22.9	31.5	14.7	44.9	55.1	44.0	20.0
Goose Green	48.0	19.4	31.8	56.6	10.3	4.1	77.3	22.7	68.1	9.0
London Bridge & W. Bermondsey	23.3	36.0	38.1	34.8	15.9	8.7	71.0	29.0	61.4	11.1
Newington	20.9	56.3	21.0	28.6	29.5	12.8	53.4	46.6	47.0	17.3
North Bermondsey	24.2	35.2	37.0	39.8	13.6	7.8	67.1	32.9	58.7	13.7
North Walworth	18.5	40.0	35.8	28.2	22.0	12.2	60.4	39.6	54.4	14.1
Nunhead and Queen's Road	30.0	47.5	19.4	35.4	30.3	9.4	58.4	41.6	50.4	16.8
Old Kent Road	17.5	58.5	20.2	23.1	33.4	12.3	43.0	57.0	42.1	19.1
Peckham	19.3	57.9	19.8	18.9	40.4	14.0	45.3	54.7	45.1	18.2
Peckham Rye	50.5	27.8	20.5	50.2	18.0	5.4	66.4	33.6	58.6	11.9
Rotherhithe	22.5	39.5	35.0	33.1	16.1	8.3	63.6	36.4	57.3	13.4
Rye Lane	33.2	37.9	26.0	40.7	24.7	7.4	63.5	36.5	56.7	14.1
St George's	22.4	40.0	31.5	30.7	16.8	12.7	67.8	32.2	55.8	10.9
St Giles	31.3	40.6	25.8	35.0	25.6	9.7	58.4	41.6	54.8	13.2
South Bermondsey	20.4	47.3	29.9	35.2	20.7	10.8	51.3	48.7	45.7	18.2
Surrey Docks	35.5	20.8	41.0	39.5	7.7	5.9	71.5	28.5	65.8	9.8

Other than the Bermondsey wards and the two Dulwich wards we've just discussed, the Greens were runners-up everywhere in Southwark last time. They came closest in **Nunhead and Queen's Road** ward, losing by about 500 or 13%. One of the Labour councillors here defected to the Greens in 2025 but the party had already picked its candidates so he is standing in the considerably harder - but not impossible - **Rye Lane** next door.

The Greens won a council seat in the old South Camberwell ward - most of which is now **Champion Hill** - in 2006, the last time Labour was deeply unpopular in government. Jenny Jones, then a London Assembly member and now Baroness

Jones of Moulsecoomb, was their councillor but she couldn't hold her seat in 2010. There hasn't been an (elected) Green on Southwark since. Labour polled 60% in this ward to the Greens' 20% in 2022.

Nonetheless, this middle belt of the borough: **Champion Hill, Goose Green** (the old East Dulwich), **Nunhead, Camberwell Green, Rye Lane, St Giles** (Peckham in other words) is where control of Southwark will be won and lost. We might also add **Faraday** ward where what's left of the massive Aylesbury estate - and there's still a lot of it left - festers away. This is the estate to which Tony Blair came to launch the 2001

general election, and the estate used in that Channel 4 ident of archetypal run-down council housing.

The Aylesbury was the twin of the nearly identical Heygate estate in Elephant and Castle which has now been completely "regenerated". Elephant and Castle is split between three wards: **North Walworth**, **St George's** and **Chaucer** - where the Greens have a decent shot at taking at least one of the seats; especially as the occupants of those new mostly private tower blocks are exactly the sort of demographic that is most allured by that party of more radical left-wing politics.

Faraday should be the absolutely last ward in the country to abandon Labour - and they won with 70% of the vote in 2018. But that fell to 58% in 2022, and there is a whole lot of antagonism about Labour's "regeneration" of the Aylesbury: not least the tiny proportion of so-called affordable homes the estate is gradually being replaced by.

And remember: this was a ward the Lib Dems were able to win in the 1990s: it does not have an untarnished Labour pedigree. Piers Corbyn, Jeremy's brother, stood here in 2022 for his Let London Live Party which opposed lockdown and was anti-vax. He got 200 votes.

If the Greens can harness that local unhappiness with Labour's plans for the Aylesbury, which makes up about a third of the ward, along with all the other reasons Londoners are considering supporting the party, this could seal the deal on Labour losing Southwark.

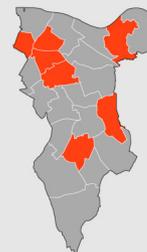
The consequence of Labour's radical efforts to change the housing mix across the centre of the borough, coupled with a far more conventional capitalist transformation of the historic Southwark riverfront, is changing the borough.

Surrey Docks ward is now the most affluent ward in the borough. This ward - the old Dockyard - used to be the epicentre of deprivation in Bermondsey borough with poverty and desperate housing conditions not dissimilar to the Isle of Dogs on the opposite bank.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Chaucer (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Faraday (1 Grn, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Goose Green (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ North Walworth (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Nunhead & Queens Road (1 Grn - def)
- ▶ Rotherhithe (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ St George's (2 LD)



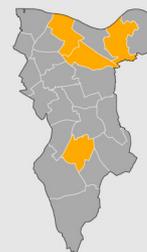
Green hopefuls

- ▶ Camberwell Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ Champion Hill (2 Lab)
- ▶ Chaucer (2 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Dulwich Hill (2 Lab)
- ▶ Dulwich Village (2 Lab)
- ▶ Dulwich Wood (2 Lab)
- ▶ Faraday (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Goose Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ North Walworth (2 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Nunhead and Queen's Road (2 Lab)
- ▶ Peckham Rye (2 Lab)
- ▶ Rye Lane (3 Lab)
- ▶ St Giles (3 Lab)



Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Goose Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ London Bridge & W. Bermondsey (3 Lab)
- ▶ Rotherhithe (3 Lab)
- ▶ South Bermondsey (3 Lab)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Dulwich Village (2 Lab)
- ▶ Dulwich Wood (2 Lab)



Tackling this abject deprivation was why Bermondsey council has the reputation of being one of the most radical Progressive (Liberal) then Labour boroughs. A borough where the Moderates then Municipal Reform (the names the Tories traded under in local government) struggled to win a majority even in the desperate years for Labour of the 1920s.

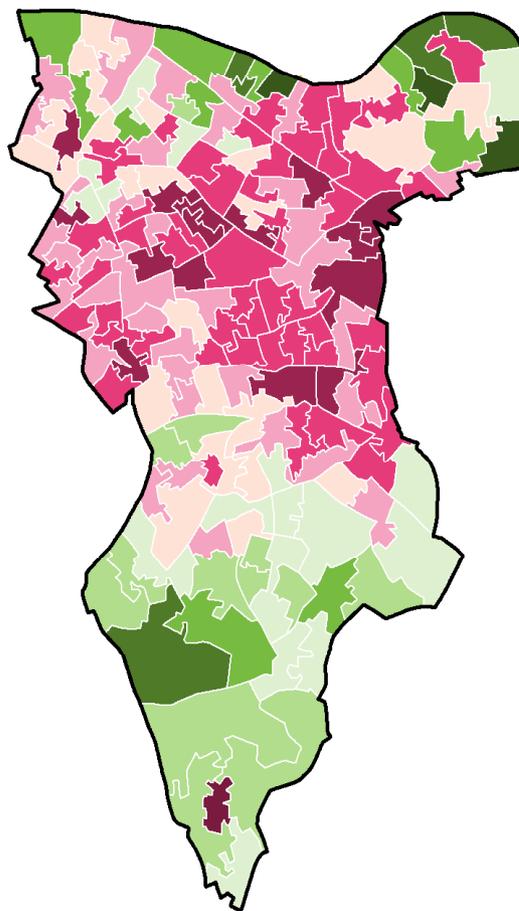
Until the Liberal Alliance breakthrough in 1983, caused by incumbent "right wing" Labour MP Bob Mellish resigning after endless battles with an increasingly left-wing constituency party, Bermondsey was phenomenally safe for Labour. He'd won with over 63% in 1979 - hardly a great election for Labour; 73% in October 1974; and 81% in 1966.

If Mellish was still alive (he died in 1998) he wouldn't recognise Bermondsey of 2026, dominated by the Shard and the former City Hall building near Tower Bridge; the former warehouses turned into open plan apartment blocks; the brasseries along the Thames-bank and the completely new residential district at Surrey Docks that has replaced the boatyards and joiners and other industry.

In the early days of this ward, after the more gritty Rotherhithe end had been removed, the Conservatives were the main challengers. They got within 300 of the Lib Dems in 2006 but then they fell off and, by 2022, were down to just 10% in a ward that, measured on affluence, they should win handily.

Parts of Bermondsey are more wealthy than much of Dulwich, while the mass demolition of admittedly poor quality council estates has been one way for parts of Kennington, Walworth and Peckham to become less deprived. It's just not how one might expect a Labour council to approach that problem.

It would normally make no difference to Labour's support that Southwark is "gentrifying" - or at least becoming considerably less deprived given the huge gains Labour has made in London among more affluent groups. If anything, as council housing is lost and council tenants become less loyal to Labour, this demographic change would have helped them.



Index of deprivation map for Southwark

The more affluent are still more inclined to stay with Labour than other groups but the party's support has declined across the board.

After the 2022 elections the Lib Dems needed a 22% swing to win a majority - long before the much anticipated Green surge. That's huge and was never going to be on the cards. But the swing required to remove Labour's majority with the Greens winning a substantial group is much lower.

If the Lib Dems can get to twenty and the Greens can then pull off wins in five or six wards in the centre of the borough the council will fall to no overall control. It might be difficult for Labour to get power back for a while if they do let their majority slip away.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result		52	11		
Jun 23 by-election: Newington - Lab hold		52	11		
Jul 24 by-election: Faraday - Lab hold		52	11		
Jul 24 by-election: Rye Lane - Lab hold		52	11		
Jul 25 defection: Kath Whittam (Rotherhithe) Lab to Ind		51	11		1
Jul 25 defection: Laura Johnson (Chaucer) Lab to Ind		50	11		2
Sep 25 suspension: Sam Foster (Faraday) Lab to Ind		49	11		3
Sep 25 suspension: Ketzia Harper (Faraday) Lab to Ind		48	11		4
Sep 25 defection: Ketzia Harper (Faraday) Ind to Grn		48	11	1	3
Nov 25 defection: Kath Whittam (Rotherhithe) Ind to Grn		48	11	2	2
Nov 25 defection: Darren Merrill (North Walworth) Lab to Ind		47	11	2	3
Jan 26 defection: Reginald Popoola (Nunhead & Queen's Road) Lab to Grn		46	11	3	3
Feb 26 defection: James McAsh (Goose Green) Lab to Grn		45	11	4	3

SUTTON

28

21

4

2

In theory, Sutton is the second easiest London council for the Conservatives to gain (after Westminster). They are just eight seats behind the Lib Dems and they'll gain the six they need for a majority on a swing of 2.1%.

There are hardly any seats in this borough that would, on normal measures, be called safe. Just five councillors have majorities greater than 20%. A growing proportion of residents are fed up with the Liberal Democrat administration here, in power non-stop since 1986.

And yet the likelihood is that, once again, the Conservatives are going to be thwarted - possibly falling back a long way. The main reason is that there is a more significant Reform threat in this Leave-voting borough than the Conservatives typically need to worry about in South West London.

Here's what that threat looks like. In a May 2025 by-election in the **Carshalton South and Clockhouse** ward - a split ward with two Tory councillors and one Lib Dem, Reform won 18% and the Conservatives dropped 19%. Meanwhile, those who did not want a Conservative or Reform councillor lined up behind the Lib Dems, support for Labour and the Greens collapsed and the Lib Dems rose 13 points, winning with over half the vote.

That was a by-election, of course - and Lib Dems thrive on by-elections. They won't be able to invest that much effort in every ward in May. But if that 16% Conservative to Lib Dem swing is replicated borough-wide there will be no Tory councillors left.

There'll only be one non-Lib Dem in fact: a Labour councillor in **Hackbridge** - and I suspect Labour would lose that one too. So: are we about to see Sutton, which first went Lib Dem in 1990, emulate the near-monopolies the party has won in Kingston and Richmond? It's possible but it's still not likely.

Elections in Sutton have become rather like throwing fifty five coloured tiles into the air and then waiting to see which ones have landed where.

The Conservatives went into the 2022 elections requiring six gains to remove the Lib Dem majority. They gained six seats while Labour won three. So why are the Lib Dems still in power?

It is because they gained from the Conservatives five seats at the same time as they were losing those nine. Twelve councillors won by fewer than one hundred votes; five by fewer than fifty. Seats broke kindly for the Lib Dems: with so many knife-edge wins there is no way such a result could be achieved by strategy and tactics, though almost certainly the Lib Dem Get Out The Vote (GOTV) effort was better and larger than the Conservatives. The Lib Dems generally have younger activists and are better at getting them to travel where they're needed.

That get out the vote (gotv) organisation could well have turned out the last minute Lib Dem supporters who made the difference.

In 2022 Labour also clawed their way back onto Sutton council - the first time they've won councillors here since 2002. Like the other two South West London Lib Dem boroughs, back in the day there used to be a decent Labour contingent in Sutton from the St Helier council estate, Beddington, Hackbridge and central Sutton.

Labour held 17 seats in 1964 and 21 in 1971. In the 1971 council elections Labour won almost exactly the same number of votes as the Conservatives in Sutton - just 0.1% separated them. But the Conservative vote was distributed better giving them four council seats more.



Marginal seats in Sutton

● Edward Joyce	South Beddington	18	0.6
● Patrick Magnus	South Beddington	22	0.7
● Wendy Clark	St Helier West	28	1.1
● Patrick Ogbonna	The Wrythe	50	1.5
● Steve Alvarez	St Helier West	43	1.7
● Amy Haldane	Carshalton South	73	2.0
● Jonathan Pearce	S. Beddington	66	2.2
● Sam Cumber	Sutton North	79	2.3
● Ruth Dombey	Sutton North	80	2.3
● Louise Phelan	Sutton South	87	2.5
● Bryony Lindsay-Charlton	Sutton North	119	3.4
● Cumar Saha	Stonecot	84	3.6
● Sheila Berry	St Helier West	97	3.8
● Tim Crowley	Carshalton South	146	3.8
● Qasim Esak	Sutton West	136	4.1
● Moira Butt	Carshalton South	175	4.1
● Christopher Woolmer	Sutton West	150	4.5
● Colin Stears	The Wrythe	162	4.8
● Jane Pascoe	Belmont	170	4.8
● Joe Quick	Worcester Park Nth	167	5.0
● Cryss McGeachy	Sutton Central	180	6.0
● Luke Taylor	Sutton West	203	6.1
● Rob Beck	Stonecot	144	6.3
● Trish Fivey	Sutton South	257	7.4
● Edward Parsley	Sutton Central	244	8.1
● Neil Garratt	Belmont	287	8.1
● Andrew Jenner	Carshalton Central	394	8.1
● Gemma Munday	St Helier East	132	8.2
● Richard Clifton	Sutton South	284	8.2
● David Hicks	Belmont	293	8.2
● Paul Cole	St Helier East	144	9.0
● Bobby Dean	The Wrythe	317	9.4
● Param Nandha	North Cheam	363	9.7

Nonetheless, the image of Sutton as a once very safe Conservative borough, similar to Kingston or Richmond is wrong: the Tories only polled 43% in 1964 and 1971 and 41% in 1974 (albeit that some otherwise-Conservatives will have voted for Residents' Association councillors in parts of the borough).

Although Sutton was not Kingston or Richmond the Liberal playbook was the same: establish themselves by annexing Labour's vote, take their seats and build a bridgehead from which to attack Tory wards. Initially this didn't quite work to plan. The Conservatives surged back in the 1978 and 1982 elections, and it was to the Tories that these Labour wards fell initially.

In December 1972 a parliamentary by-election was held in Sutton and Cheam following Edward Heath's appointment of the seat's Tory MP, Richard Sharples, as governor of Bermuda. Liberal Graham Tope won on a near 33% swing, beating the Conservatives by almost 8,000 votes.

Although the Liberals lost the constituency in the first 1974 general election, in the May 1974 council elections their vote surged from 4% in 1971 to 25% borough-wide. 25% won the Liberals just three wards and six seats (all in Sutton town) whereas 26% - because it was concentrated in St Helier, Beddington and Hackbridge, won Labour thirteen.

Setting aside the 1978 results when Sutton swung fiercely behind the Conservatives led now by Margaret Thatcher - catnip to small-c conservative suburban values - the Alliance now had a foothold.

Equally, the Labour government of 1974 to 1979 didn't just appeal Conservative voters: it alienated large chunks of Labour's also small-c conservative vote in Sutton. Bennite Labour did not appeal to Sutton's Labour voters - and this matters because the split in the party: the creation of the Social Democratic Party and its alliance with the Liberals, was the ingredient the centre needed to break through.

1982 were the first borough council elections the SDP-Liberal Alliance fought. Their vote again surged, to 35%: up 20 points, with Labour losing ten to finish on just 14%. This surge netted the Alliance just one extra seat because the Tories had large enough majorities to withstand it.

But Tory majorities collapsed: in Beddington North from 830 in 1978 to 106; Beddington South: 1,221 to 141, Carshalton North: 1,137 to 274, North Cheam: 562 to 14, Rosehill: 600 to 118, Sutton Common: 591 to 23, Worcester Park South: 1,282 to 156 and Wrythe Green: 1,160 to 100.

There was also a north-south divide in the borough: wards south of the Sutton & Mole Valley rail-line remained, in the main, strongly Tory while those north of it became marginal.

Then, in 1986, the dam broke. In what was a poor year for the Conservatives they lost a further 11% while the Alliance gained seven. There was a direct swing from the Tories to Alliance of 25 seats - more than half of Conservative seats were lost. The Conservatives were removed from control with Labour's seven councillors holding the balance of power. The Tories have never run Sutton since.

There's a symmetry to the centre's advance in south-west London: they gained Richmond in 1986, Sutton in 1990 and Kingston in 1994 - successive elections. Yet Sutton is a quite different borough: its demographics and attitudes are differ.

That's manifest in how the boroughs voted in the EU referendum: Richmond 69% Remain; Kingston 61% Remain; Sutton 54% Leave. The relationship between the Lib Dem and Conservative votes in Sutton is also different.

Typically in Kingston and Richmond - indeed in earlier elections to Sutton, when the Lib Dems have surged, Conservatives have ebbed. In Sutton, since the gap between the parties narrowed in 2006, the two parties have largely tracked each other: rising together in some years, falling together in others. This is why there exists that unique Sutton fetish of both main parties trading seats like Panini stickers.

Possible target wards

Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Beddington (3 Ind)
- ▶ Belmont (3 Con)
- ▶ Carshalton South & Clockhouse (2 Con)
- ▶ Cheam (3 Con)
- ▶ North Cheam (3 Con)
- ▶ St Helier West (3 Con)
- ▶ South Beddington & Roundshaw (2 Con)
- ▶ Sutton North (1 Con)
- ▶ Worcester Park North (2 Con)
- ▶ Worcester Park South (2 Con)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Carshalton South & Clockhouse (1 LD)
- ▶ South Beddington & Roundshaw (1 LD)
- ▶ Stonecot (2 LD)
- ▶ Sutton North (2 LD)
- ▶ Sutton South (3 LD)
- ▶ Sutton West and East Cheam (3 LD)
- ▶ The Wrythe (2 LD, 1 Ind)



Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Beddington (3 Ind)
- ▶ St Helier East (2 LD)
- ▶ St Helier West (3 Con)
- ▶ Sutton Central (3 LD)



Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Beddington (3 Ind)
- ▶ Belmont (3 Con)
- ▶ Cheam (3 Con)
- ▶ North Cheam (3 Con)
- ▶ St Helier East (2 LD)
- ▶ St Helier West (2 LD)
- ▶ South Beddington & Roundshaw (2 Con, 1 LD)
- ▶ Hackbridge (2 Lab)
- ▶ Worcester Park North (2 Con)
- ▶ Worcester Park South (2 Con)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Carshalton Central (3 LD)



Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Beddington	77.9	8.3	13.4	56.2	8.0	6.9	49.1	50.9	35.6	15.7
Belmont	64.7	10.7	23.5	53.3	4.3	9.3	60.8	39.2	47.4	12.7
Carshalton Central	73.6	6.8	19.1	67.3	3.5	3.4	60.4	39.6	45.7	11.6
Carshalton South and Clockhouse	80.7	9.9	9.1	68.0	4.5	3.8	57.9	42.1	42.0	13.1
Cheam	79.0	3.9	16.6	62.6	2.0	7.3	61.6	38.4	45.7	12.9
Hackbridge	60.3	12.2	22.9	48.9	9.2	7.8	52.3	47.7	44.6	12.2
North Cheam	80.6	3.2	16.0	63.4	2.1	5.7	48.7	51.3	35.3	14.4
St Helier East	47.5	40.1	11.4	58.0	7.3	6.3	35.0	65.0	27.3	22.2
St Helier West	47.6	37.3	13.4	54.2	6.2	7.7	36.4	63.6	28.9	22.2
South Beddington & Roundshaw	53.9	35.9	8.0	53.1	8.2	7.9	48.9	51.1	36.1	17.5
Stonecot	79.1	4.8	15.7	57.1	4.2	8.8	43.9	56.1	32.5	17.2
Sutton Central	40.9	20.0	35.4	44.1	6.8	10.0	50.5	49.5	43.4	14.5
Sutton North	70.5	10.9	17.8	53.5	4.7	8.2	49.4	50.6	37.3	17.2
Sutton South	45.5	11.0	43.2	47.2	4.9	9.3	55.8	44.2	48.5	13.4
Sutton West and East Cheam	63.4	7.4	28.6	52.4	4.2	6.9	54.6	45.4	44.1	13.0
The Wrythe	67.6	16.2	13.6	63.5	6.0	5.6	47.6	52.4	35.2	16.7
Wallington North	62.8	14.2	21.9	62.0	6.5	6.2	51.6	48.4	40.0	14.2
Wallington South	61.2	15.9	22.6	57.7	6.7	7.5	52.2	47.8	39.0	15.3
Worcester Park North	68.7	9.1	20.9	58.0	2.9	6.4	57.2	42.8	43.4	13.5
Worcester Park South	85.1	4.0	10.7	69.1	1.1	3.9	57.2	42.8	39.8	14.3

The Lib Dems' decline is partly to do with fatigue at their long stay in power. Unlike those other South West London boroughs the Lib Dems haven't experienced defeat since they became the largest party - and forty years in power is a very long time.

Although Labour won seats in 2022 which it hadn't in 2018, the party scored the same vote share in both elections. It was just that ward boundaries were more helpful and Labour votes distributed themselves better. Unfortunately, their time back in government - and one that far more closely resembles that of the 1970s than the late 1990s - will probably not make May's elections an extended recovery.

Hackbridge is the safest ward for any party in the borough and they might hold on here. Or they might not: they've

already lost their seat in **St Helier West** to the Conservatives after a very tight by-election in 2024. The Tories won by six votes from the Lib Dems as Labour fell back. And that was before Labour got back into government.

Likewise, Labour has - or had - a decent vote in Sutton Central but it vanished in a 2025 by-election: another, less extreme example of that Carshalton South and Clockhouse trend of Reform sapping the Conservative challenge and voters who previously voted Labour or Green coalescing behind the Lib Dems to keep the right out. There are no Labour prospects now beyond St Helier and Hackbridge.

Is there much point talking about Conservative chances? It's not that they don't exist, based on the 2022 results: the opposite is true.

There are literally a dozen or more seats the Conservatives were within easy reach of in 2022. Were it not for the intervention of Reform.

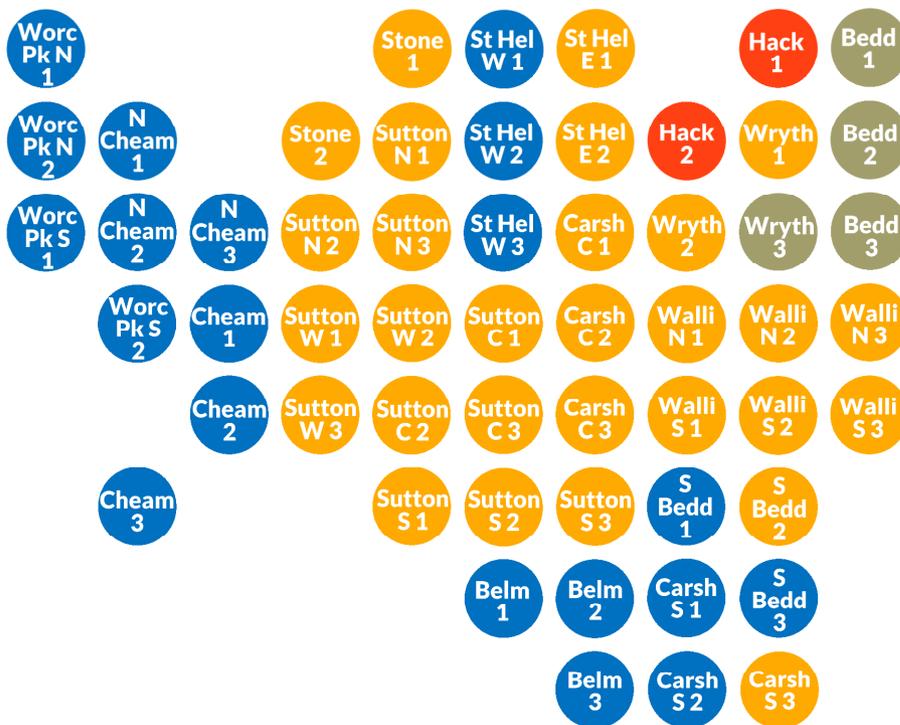
Even in that Sutton Central by-election - Sutton being not especially Reform-friendly and them winning only 12% of the vote - the Conservatives dropped eight points.

An 8% Conservative drop, unless accompanied by a much larger Lib Dem drop (and they were already down to only 37% borough-wide in 2022) isn't likely to gain seats.

Reform have somewhat better prospects in two clumps. There is a cluster in the south west, around Cheam: **Cheam, Worcester Park North, Worcester Park South, Belmont** and maybe Sutton **South**.

And there's a cluster in the north and east around St Helier and Beddington: **St Helier East, St Helier West, The Wrythe, Hackbridge, Beddington** and **South Beddington and Roundshaw**. It would be surprising if Reform don't win some seats. But they aren't very likely to challenge for a majority - or come anywhere close to so doing.

The battle royal may come in **Beddington**, an unusual and atypical ward that runs down the boundary with Croydon.



This is a mix of common and derelict land, a controversial waste incinerator and lots of warehousing, with the population living in the south. It's held by independents, but is one of the best wards for Reform demographically. The independents won with 35% in 2022 so who knows what low vote share winners will need this year? Most Reform targets, though, are Conservative-held. That, plus the haemorrhage of votes to Reform the Tories will take in marginal Lib Dem seats is why, yet again, they'll probably miss out on Sutton.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	20	3	29		3
May 24 by-election: St Helier West - Con gain from Lab	21	2	29		3
Apr 25 by-election: Sutton Central - LD hold	21	2	29		3
May 25 by-election: Carshalton South and Clockhouse - LD hold	21	2	29		3
Mar 26 defection: Patrick Ognonna (The Wrythe) - LD to Ind	21	2	28		4

TOWER HAMLETS



Writing a preview of Tower Hamlets is essentially impossible. Almost anything can happen in any ward.

Tower Hamlets is different: it always has been. It has the most romantic social and electoral history of any London borough, steeped inextricably in working class and racial politics. This has always been the entry point to the UK both for goods, via the docks, and for wave after wave of immigrants. And, with the rebirth of the Isle of Dogs as London's second financial centre, for services too.

Tower Hamlets was forged from three of the old London boroughs: Bethnal Green (the north-west by Shoreditch), Poplar (which included Bow, Bromley and the Isle of Dogs) and Stepney (Spitalfields, Whitechapel, Mile End, Shadwell and St Katharine's). Each of these boroughs was steeped in its own working class story. They provided two Labour leaders: Clement Attlee, who was a Stepney councillor and MP for Limehouse; and George Lansbury, a lesser known and more radical leader, who went to jail for refusing to set a rate.

This doesn't sound too exciting, but it went to the core of what the Labour Party was for. In 1921, when the rebellion occurred, councils received no national funding. Poverty mitigation had to be funded by the boroughs and Poplar, being a poor borough where property values and rents were low, had to set a high rate to generate enough income to fund their work. A wealthy borough received far greater income from much lower rates while having much less need to meet.

Thirty councillors were jailed indefinitely for refusing to set what became known as "a lawful rate". Lansbury, his son and daughter-in-law were among those jailed. The rebellion was dubbed "Poplarism": the demand that rates be equalised across London and funding then allocated according to need. In other words, the core of the rebellion was redistribution.

Then there were dreadful housing conditions. Two of the three boroughs covered the heavily industrial, grim Thames-side: working docks where ships from across the Empire offloaded goods. Millwall derives its name from the windmills situated on an embankment around the Isle of Dogs that protected the area from tidal flooding. In between these docklands and mills were lead works, chemical factories, iron works, slate works, oil works, foundries, boat yards - and in between this industry the island's poor lived in slums.

Some of this housing was clustered: for example, in what is now Island Gardens ward right at the bottom of the loop, or in Cubitt Town to the east of Millwall Dock. But other residences were crammed in wherever space could be found, so that industry and housing existed side by side.

The issues of extreme deprivation and lifting the working class East End out of what today is unimaginable poverty and dire housing conditions is one strand through which the politics of Tower Hamlets were forged. The other has been the explosive tension between the established community and the waves of immigration that have transformed the boroughs.

It's quite difficult to define the start of the East End's relationship with migration but some of it was intrinsically linked to Empire and the rest to England being seen as a haven from European conflict.

Not all the cargo that ships docking at Millwall or East India or St Katharine's or Limehouse was goods: plenty of it was humans, many fleeing persecution.

The docks of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were the Heathrow of today: many migrants' gateway to our country.



One of the first waves was the Huguenots in the 1600s: French protestants fleeing purges by Roman Catholics across the Channel. **Weavers** ward: the north-western corner of the borough, derives its name from that Huguenot community and the goods they produced to build their prosperity and move out to more affluent, suburban neighbourhoods.

There followed waves of mass Irish immigration fleeing the famine, Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe and Russia fleeing pogroms. Then, arguably the most consequential and current: an influx from the Indian sub-continent - particularly Bangladesh - as the British Empire collapsed and India fought a civil war as it violently and chaotically split itself between Hindu and Muslim territories.

The three boroughs were amalgamated in 1965 to form Tower Hamlets: literally the hamlets to the east of the Tower of London. All three boroughs went Labour in 1919: the first elections following the end of the First World War and, by 1934, Labour had a monopoly on all three (though it took a while for Labour to oust the Liberals in Bethnal Green). The only non-Labour winners were Communists, Ratepayers Associations or Independent Labour. Communists won St Mary's ward (Whitechapel) up until 1971- the only example of that party winning seats on any current 32 borough.

Other parties weren't just failing to outpoll Labour: they barely existed. In 1964 the Conservatives contested just 19 of the borough's seats, the Liberals 14, losing them all by miles. In 1968 - that blue-wave election in which Labour lost almost everything in London - here Labour councillors were returned unopposed in 23 seats and, bar the three Whitechapel Communists, won all the contested elections. In 1971 Labour polled 89% of the vote; in 1974 86%. That was the peak of Labour dominance. Elections suddenly started to require some effort to win.

In 1978 seven Liberal candidates won seats: in Bow, Grove and Park wards. This sudden re-entry onto the political map by the Liberals was coupled with an explosion of parties contesting elections. The Conservatives fought 27 (of now 50 seats); the National Front 42.

In 1974 82 candidates had contested 60 seats - 1.4 candidates per seat. In 1978, 147 contested the 50 seats: almost three candidates per seat. That's a big increase.

But this limited Liberal breakthrough was not due to a proliferation of candidates - Labour won easily enough everywhere else bar Weavers and still polled 64% borough-wide. It was because Labour was now focussing almost exclusively on deprivation. Because deprivation was worse in migrant neighbourhoods, Labour came to be seen as the party of the borough's immigrant community. This began to drive a wedge between the party and longer-term borough residents. The white working class.

Bow was the whitest neighbourhood in Tower Hamlets and the north of the borough: Bow and then Bethnal Green were to again become the Liberal stronghold.

In 1982 the Alliance surged to 18 seats: all of them north of Mile End Road (the major road that bisects the borough from the City of London to Stratford). Of the northern wards the only one that didn't fall to the Alliance was Spitalfields: the most ethnically diverse, with already sizeable Bangladeshi, Chinese and Vietnamese communities. For the first time Labour polled below 50% of the vote borough-wide: they beat the Alliance by just seven percent.

Then in 1986 the almost unimaginable happened: the Alliance won a majority: 26 seats to Labour's 24 (though very slightly behind in vote share). The Alliance began a radical plan of decentralisation, creating seven neighbourhood councils: Bethnal Green, Bow, Globe Town, Isle of Dogs, Poplar, Stepney and Wapping.

Each of these councils would be run by the councillors elected for the wards within them. Northern neighbourhoods were run by Alliance councillors but some of the southern neighbourhoods were Labour-controlled. One of these Labour ones - and this matters in terms of what happened next - was the Isle of Dogs.

This radical experiment in devolution arguably proved popular enough for the now Liberal Democrats to win the 1990 council elections with an increased majority of ten: 30 Lib Dems, 20 Labour. By now Labour was clearly identified as the party of the ethnic minority side of Tower Hamlets and the Lib Dems the party of the shrinking majority.

Such was the intensity of the political tension between the two sides - epitomised in high levels of racial aggravation outside the council chamber - that neither seemed to pay any attention to what was going on more widely on the political scene. Meanwhile, the British National Party (BNP) was organising in the borough.

In October 1992 there was a by-election in Millwall. Labour retained the seat by 97 votes over the Liberal Democrats. The BNP came third with 20% of the vote, over 600 votes behind.

In the spring of 1993, black teenager Stephen Lawrence was beaten up and stabbed to death in Eltham, just the other side of the Thames from the Isle of Dogs.

And then, in September 1993, another by-election was called in Millwall. This time the result was different. The BNP came top, albeit by just seven votes: with 1,480 to Labour's 1,473 and the Lib Dems' 1,284. The campaign had degenerated into the sort of toxic slanging match that typified Tower Hamlets politics. The Lib Dems delivered leaflets that essentially accused the Labour-run neighbourhood council of pandering solely to the Bangladeshi community.

It wasn't just a race-baiting leaflet that won it: Millwall was changing rapidly with the new financial quarter turning the Isle of Dogs into a massive building site that would be literally exclusive of its resident community - of all ethnicities. But there is little doubt that the simmering racial tension in east London and the willingness of parties to play politics with those tensions paved the way for the BNP win.

Even Paddy Ashdown MP, the then Lib Dem leader said his party's leaflets could be "interpreted as racist". While the two big parties were boxing it out the BNP was campaigning

properly: canvassing, leafleting, compiling lists of who its supporters were and then turning them out to vote.

This was the first time a BNP or National Front candidate had ever won election - 13 years before the BNP won seats in Barking and Dagenham - and it caused a political firestorm. Parliamentary by-elections, let alone council by-elections, don't always make headlines. This one did.

New parliamentary candidates were also installed following the retirements of Labour stalwarts Peter Shore in Bethnal Green and Ian Mikado in Bow and Poplar. And it worked, electorally. Labour won by a landslide in 1994: 43 seats to 7 Liberal Democrats, pushed back to Bow.

The BNP actually added to their by-election vote in Millwall, but it was swamped by those who desperately did not want to be represented by racists lining up behind Labour. The Lib Dems weren't entirely finished: they gained two seats back in 1998 and won 16 in 2002. But Labour was securely in power.

Then the Iraq War happened and divisive racial politics returned. At the 2005 general election, Oona King - only the second black woman ever elected to parliament, was defeated in her Bethnal Green and Bow constituency by George Galloway, standing as the Respect candidate.

King was defending a majority of more than 10,000 but the perceived illegal war against Muslims energised the electorate and Galloway squeezed in by over 800 votes. In 2006 Respect won 12 seats across the central swathe of the borough from Spitalfields and Banglatown in the west, through Stepney and Shadwell to Mile End and Bromley by the river Lea.

Twelve seats were insufficient to imperil Labour's majority but Respect were not the only party newly represented on Tower Hamlets council.

The vast demand for high-end property to house the new "masters of the universe" who worked in the gleaming towers of Canary Wharf had suddenly created affluent new enclaves - albeit safely gated off from the rest of the Isle. This affluence was powerful enough to elect seven Conservatives; three in Millwall, three in Blackwall and one in St Katharine's. So: twelve Respect, seven Conservatives and six Lib Dems (though not representing Bow: the two wards there switched to Labour) versus 26 Labour. Labour kept control by one seat.

And consider this: in 2006, 238 candidates contested the 51 seats on this council: 4.7 candidates for every seat. In barely

20 years council elections had gone from events where Labour had a whole bunch of seats gifted to them unopposed to having the most diverse contests in London with long lists of candidates. This has been true ever since.

2006 was the beginning of the current era in Tower Hamlets. Though it wasn't obvious at the time. George Galloway did not defend Bethnal Green and Bow in 2010 and Rushanara Ali reclaimed it for Labour by 11,000 votes. Respect contested the locals held on the same day as the general election but the big increase in turnout meant they only hung on to one seat in Shadwell - the ward with the largest Muslim population in the borough. Politics appeared to be heading back to normal.

But as one demagogue was departing the borough another had arrived. The era of Lutfur Rahman had begun.

Lutfur had been elected a Labour councillor in 2002 for Spitalfields and Banglatown. He rose through the ranks becoming council leader in 2008, in the meantime seeking the MP nomination for Bethnal Green that Rushanara Ali won. Before it imploded, Respect had organised a petition demanding a directly elected mayor for Tower Hamlets and, forced a referendum despite being the idea being opposed by all the other parties. the borough voted for the figurehead on election day 2010, 60:40.

Lutfur went for the Labour nomination for mayor and won the selection, beating John Biggs and his fellow Spitalfields councillor Helal Abbas. But shortly after that selection ballot, Lutfur's links to the Islamic Forum of Europe, an allegedly fundamentalist Islamist organisation, came to light. Labour stripped the nomination from him, handing it instead to Abbas, who'd come third in the selection ballot. Biggs, the runner-up, was the wrong ethnicity to represent Labour.

Lutfur, having lived experience of the voting power the Bangladeshi bloc - exploited by Respect - had in Tower Hamlets politics, followed the path set by Ken Livingstone when he had been denied the Labour nomination for mayor of London. He resigned from Labour and stood as an

independent in the mayoral election held in autumn 2010. He won with more than twice the votes Labour's Helal Abbas mustered and with over 50% in the first round.

Lutfur then attempted to form a cross-party cabinet to run the borough - after all, there had been no pro-Lutfur councillors elected because he had then been part of Labour. But the other parties were too ideologically distant from his brand of left-wing politics and Labour ordered its councillors not to co-operate, so the five Labour councillors who did join him lost the party's whip. This compelled Lutfur to organise a new political party - essentially inheriting what was left of Respect but tailoring it to more local concerns, especially of the Bangladeshi community. Tower Hamlets First (THF) was born.

In 2014, THF won 18 seats at the same time as Lutfur won re-election to a second term by a 52-48% margin in the second round. These 18 THF councillors plus the five Conservatives from the riverside eradicated Labour's majority. That would mean chaos in a borough without an elected mayor but, with one, the ability of the council to block decisions was constrained.

But chaos ensued anyway, both in the chamber and beyond it. An election petition was lodged with the High Court alleging that Lutfur had won the election via corrupt and illegal practices - essentially the archaic complaint of "undue spiritual influence": telling the Bangladeshi electorate that it was their duty as good Muslims to support him. This message was delivered via mosques, community groups and elders.

There were other grounds on which the election was challenged including postal vote fraud and intimidation of voters outside polling stations.

The election petition was successful: Lutfur's election was annulled, he was disqualified for standing for any elected position for five years and, in the by-election for the mayoral vacancy, Labour's John Biggs returned to defeat THF's Rabina Khan 55-45 in the second round.

Aspire hopefuls

- ▶ Bethnal Green East (2 Lab)
- ▶ Bromley North (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Bromley South (1 Lab)
- ▶ Island Gardens (1 Con, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Lansbury (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Mile End (2 Lab)
- ▶ St Dunstan's (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Spitalfields & Banglatown (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Weavers (1 Lab)
- ▶ Whitechapel (1 Lab)



Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Bethnal Green East (1 Asp)
- ▶ Bethnal Green West (3 Asp)
- ▶ Blackwell and Cubitt Town (3 Asp)
- ▶ Bromley North (1 Asp, 1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Bromley South (1 Lab)
- ▶ Canary Wharf (2 Asp)
- ▶ Island Gardens (1 Con)
- ▶ Lansbury (3 Asp)
- ▶ Spitalfields & Banglatown (1 Asp, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Stepney Green (1 Asp)
- ▶ Weavers (1 Asp)
- ▶ Whitechapel (2 Asp)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Blackwell and Cubitt Town (3 Asp)
- ▶ Canary Wharf (2 Asp)
- ▶ Island Gardens (1 Lab)
- ▶ Limehouse (1 Lab)
- ▶ St Katharine's and Wapping (2 Lab)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Bow East (3 Lab)
- ▶ Bow West (1 Lab)



LD hopeful

- ▶ St Katharine's and Wapping (2 Lab)



Lutfur was unable to seek election at the 2018 ballot and Biggs won a new term with a more decisive victory over Khan: 73-27. Labour also regained a landslide majority on the council: 42 Labour, 2 Tories and Khan a hold-out in Shadwell ward.

That landslide in both the mayoral election and on the council was misleading. THF had split into two factions. Rabina Khan now represented PATH: the People's Alliance for Tower Hamlets, while the rest of the Lutfurite devotees created a new party called Aspire. These two parties split the old TFH vote, allowing Labour to come through the middle in most wards despite winning fewer votes than the two combined.

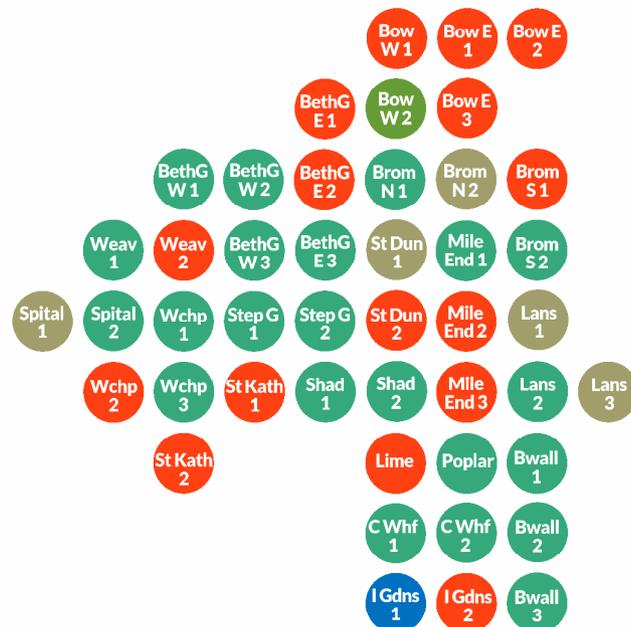
Had the Lutfurite vote not split, Labour would not have won seats in Bromley North, Canary Wharf, Lansbury, Poplar, St Dunstan's, Shadwell and Whitechapel. There was sufficient a swing back for Labour to have still won the council - just not by the lopsided amount they did.

Lutfur's ban from seeking election came to an end well before the 2022 elections and he made little secret that his disqualification hadn't disgraced him and that he fully intended to attempt to reclaim his mayoralty. He fixed the split by becoming leader of Aspire; PATH folded and Rabina Khan joined the Liberal Democrats.

The 2022 election was another disaster for Labour. Lutfur easily won, beating Biggs 47-33 in the first round and 55-45 (the exact mirror of the 2018 result) in the second. Aspire won 25 council seats: an overall majority of three, with Labour on 19 and the Conservatives squeezed to just one.

Lutfur had more power than in his first or aborted second terms though still without a sufficient council majority to be able to force a budget through without some negotiation with Labour. Before it lost power the Labour council had tried to abolish the mayoralty but the borough voted 75% to keep it.

The 2022 to 2026 term has been relatively tranquil, at least compared to the turbulence of almost every election since the Alliance won Tower Hamlets forty years ago.



There has been something of a ping pong in elections with Labour getting ousted, getting voted back in, being pulled down again by different actors and recovering again. This hasn't quite happened every election since 1982 but almost. The Lib Dem implosion of 1994 was followed by three comfortable terms for Labour; then the Respect surge in 2006, followed by a Labour rebound in 2010; Lutfur and Tower Hamlets First in 2014; his disqualification and Labour's loveless return until 2022; and now a period of settled Aspire rule.

It's possible that the pendulum will swing back to Labour this time but given the renewed rage across Muslim Britain over Gaza, the government's wider unpopularity and Lutfur, it's unlikely. The government's imposition of "Ministerial Envoys", installed to ensure that best value is being delivered, has not changed anything, politically. Opinions of Lutfur are largely set and won't change: he knows who his electorate is, where they are, and how to turn them out.

Aspire may not gain very much ground in this election. But they don't have to because Labour is likely to lose votes to other parties of the left - particularly the Greens.

They won a seat in **Bow West** last time and should be able to add the other in that ward. Labour was far more entrenched in **Bow East**: the ward that contains the Tower Hamlets side of the Olympic Park: it's as close as Labour gets in Tower Hamlets to a safe ward. What a turnaround given Bow was once the Liberal fortress in this borough: the Lib Dems polled below 10% in both Bow wards in 2022.

Six of the remaining Labour seats are in wards it split with Reform (**Bethnal Green East, Bromley South, Stepney Green, Whitechapel and Weavers**), and one - in **Island Gardens** - with the Conservatives. They will likely lose all

seven, which leaves the wholly-Labour wards of **Limehouse, Mile End, St Dunstons and St Katharine's and Wapping**.

Of these, single-member Limehouse is most secure but a potential Conservative target. Even though Labour's James King was comfortably ahead of everyone else in Limehouse he only polled 40%: Labour can't afford to drop too far for their majority to become imperilled. And it's a single-councillor ward, so drops in support have a larger impact.

St Katharine's and Wapping sees a Lib Dem challenge: their only credible opportunity in the whole borough. Again, there is potential for a Conservative push: they won a seat here in 2006, 2010 and 2014 but lost too much support post-Brexit to maintain a foothold.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Bangla	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Bethnal Green	23.2	43.9	30.6	26.8	35.7	40.8	57.4	42.6	44.7	16.8
Blackwall & Cubitt Town	23.9	22.1	51.6	19.8	19.6	26.2	72.2	27.8	62.7	9.8
Bow East	28.1	36.0	31.1	37.3	22.0	27.4	68.0	32.0	54.3	14.9
Bow West	31.5	36.0	30.4	39.6	27.4	30.4	64.2	35.8	52.3	17.0
Bromley North	21.6	47.1	27.8	20.2	42.7	47.9	52.1	47.9	43.1	19.3
Bromley South	19.7	43.4	32.6	16.9	43.5	49.6	55.1	44.9	44.2	17.8
Canary Wharf	20.9	23.3	53.4	17.6	18.8	26.4	75.1	24.9	64.0	10.4
Island Gardens	29.1	25.7	43.2	27.3	19.9	25.4	65.6	34.4	55.2	13.4
Lansbury	19.7	44.5	31.9	18.8	39.8	47.5	52.5	47.5	41.4	19.6
Limehouse	32.9	20.5	44.6	29.7	19.6	23.1	73.7	26.3	62.9	11.6
Mile End	22.3	42.4	33.0	19.7	41.9	47.0	55.5	44.5	45.8	18.1
Poplar	18.1	47.3	32.5	14.2	47.3	53.8	50.3	49.7	40.6	20.1
St Dunstan's	17.6	49.9	26.9	16.7	51.9	56.3	53.8	46.2	39.4	20.8
St Katharine's & Wapping	35.0	15.4	47.8	36.4	16.0	18.6	79.2	20.8	68.2	8.7
St Peter's	21.2	40.6	35.6	25.7	37.4	41.3	62.0	38.0	48.2	18.2
Shadwell	17.7	50.2	28.5	14.5	53.4	59.8	47.4	52.6	37.6	23.0
Spitalfields & Banglatown	20.9	32.9	44.1	16.7	41.6	45.0	64.6	35.4	51.8	16.8
Stepney Green	20.2	49.3	28.9	18.9	51.3	56.2	46.4	53.6	37.3	23.1
Weavers	22.3	40.9	35.1	27.7	32.5	37.6	66.6	33.4	52.0	16.5
Whitechapel	16.8	26.8	53.3	15.6	38.2	43.4	66.8	33.2	53.5	13.6

They don't trail the Lib Dems by much which can either be interpreted as a plentiful non-Labour vote for the Lib Dems to squeeze or a decent foundation for the Tories to re-establish themselves. Take your pick.

Mile End and **St Dunstan's** are adjoining wards and are, essentially, exactly like the split wards - it's just that the way the votes fell gave Labour the edge over Aspire in all three seats. The third-placed Labour councillor won by just 78 in Mile End and by 148 in St Dunstan's. All in all Labour's representation could fall to either just three (Bow East) or zero if there's a Green surge across Bow.

The Conservatives' plight is as dire as Labour's: they too could be thrown off the council by the voters. The difference is that such a risk isn't new for the Conservatives: they've only been represented here for twenty of the borough's sixty-two years and they've been struggling (failing) to hang onto their vote since the country voted to leave the EU, upon which so many city jobs are said to depend.

Let's assume they recover a little, just for the sake of it. Their top target is the Labour-held seat in **Island Gardens**. Then there are the other two Isle of Dogs wards: **Canary Wharf** and **Blackwall and Cubitt Town**. They have slipped a long way in these wards: back in 2006 they won the then Millwall

(which by then resembled what is now Canary Wharf - Isle of Dogs West) by 700. In 2022 they were 700 adrift. It's a similar story in Blackwall, though they're a little more competitive there.

But the voters who elected the Conservatives haven't disappeared; they've not been replaced by an electorate that has entirely different political values, as has been the case in other parts of London. In fact they are the interlopers: the voters who moved in and changed the political dynamics of the Isle of Dogs.

Then there are their highly unlikely prospects of **Limehouse** and **St Katharine's and Wapping**. The Tories don't exist in Tower Hamlets beyond this riverside enclave.

The Greens will struggle to do well outside of Bow. Their anti-capitalist rhetoric is unlikely to go down well on the Isle of Dogs - the only other enclave of white voters - while the Bangladeshi community has Aspire as its vehicle to punish Labour. The odds this time around are once again heavily in Lutfur's favour. But if Tower Hamlets again bucks the trend don't be completely stunned: anything really is possible here.

Apart from a Conservative majority, that is.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	Asp	G	O
May 22 council election result	1	19	24	1	
Nov 23 defection: Ayas Miah (St Dunstan's) Lab to Ind	1	18	24	1	1
Sep 24 by-election: Bow East - Lab hold	1	18	24	1	1
Sep 24 defection: Kabir Hussain (Spitalfields and Banglatown) Asp to Ind	1	18	23	1	2
Oct 24 defection: Ohid Ahmed (Lansbury) Asp to Ind	1	18	22	1	3
Oct 24 defection: Jahed Choudhury (Lansbury) Asp to Ind	1	18	21	1	4
Oct 24 defection: Said Uddin Khaled (Bromley North) Asp to Ind	1	18	20	1	5
Nov 24 defection: Sabina Akhtar (Stepney Green) Lab to Asp	1	17	21	1	5
Dec 24 defection: Sabina Khan (Mile End) Lab to Asp	1	16	22	1	5

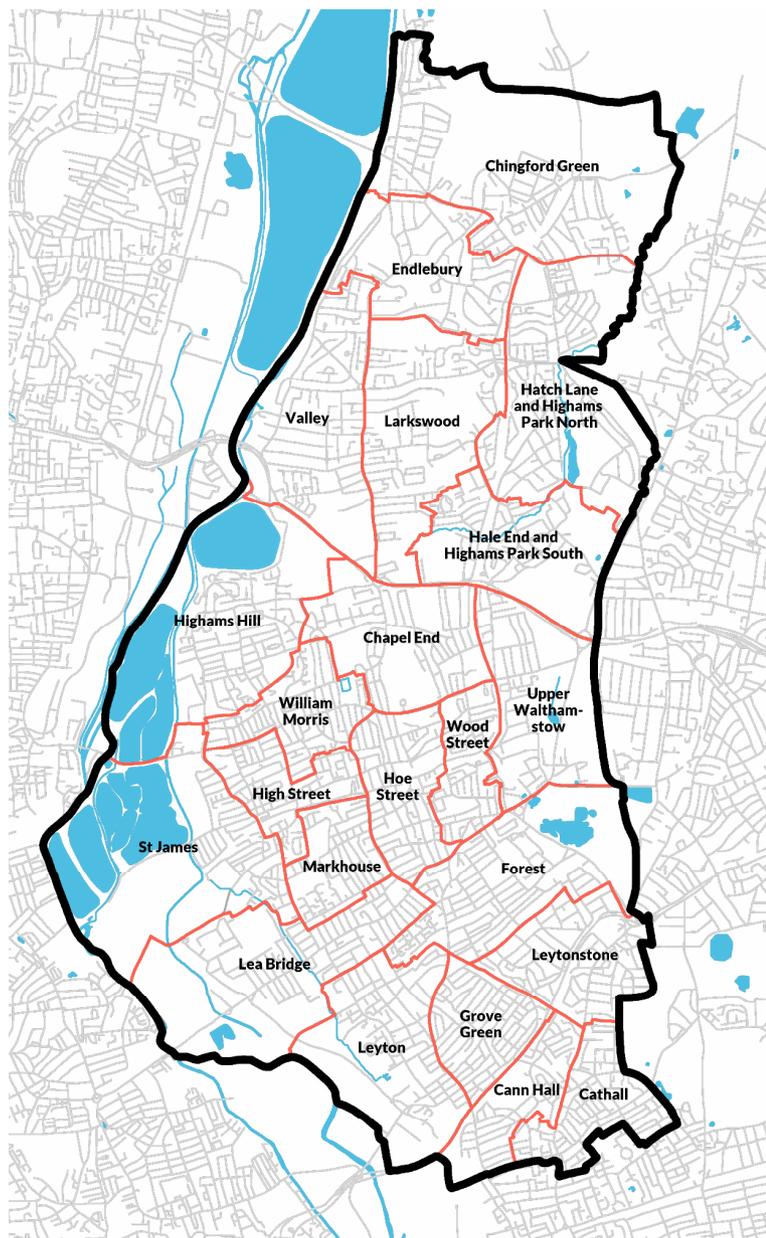
WALTHAM FOREST

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Waltham Forest is a phenomenon. Between 2011 and 2021 it was the only London Borough in which the proportion of white British residents increased.

This isn't some weird statistical fluke: Waltham Forest - especially Walthamstow - is gentrifying, and fairly rapidly. It is almost surreal to discover to read media write-ups of the "coolest" places to live in London and discover Walthamstow top of the pops (according to The Telegraph in May 2025).

"Walthamstow hasn't long been an enclave. Inadvertently it found itself hailed as a hipster neighbourhood - "Awesomestow" - after an influx of young families and media types who couldn't afford to live anywhere else in London. Now they don't want to live anywhere else." the paper gushed in its write-up of the neighbourhood.

It didn't stop there: when the Telegraph repeated this subjective exercise last autumn Leyton came fourth and Walthamstow only managed seventh, behind Deptford and Tooting (the Telegraph does appear to be slumming it). Here they go again:

"A lot of the action is centred around Francis Road, a pedestrianised, leafy thoroughfare which is home to cute coffee shops, independent boutiques and delis, though the railway arches on Tilbury Road by Leyton Midland station are being taken over by exciting local businesses."

Good grief.

A gentrifying Waltham Forest is - or rather, has until recently, been - great news for Labour, and could well now be great news for the Green Party.

Even though there are no Green councillors yet elected this is another of those boroughs in which Labour has had things all their own way for perhaps too long, and now the electorate gets to shake things up a bit.

Waltham Forest was politically a borough of thirds. At the top, beyond the North Circular, was Chingford: rock solid for the Conservatives. But Chingford plus the few wards they could win elsewhere in the borough were, bar 1968, never enough for the Conservatives to win. Pretty much everything south of the A406 was a battle between Labour and the centre parties throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As they fought each other to a draw that solid Tory cluster in the north often took the borough to no overall control.

In 1982, for example, there were 25 Labour councillors, 24 Conservatives and 6 SDP-Liberal Alliance. By 2006 (and notice, incidentally, how well Labour did in this largely awful round of elections in London) there were 26 Labour, 19 Lib Dems and 15 Conservatives. When Labour did eke out a majority it was of the tiniest order: three to five seats.

In Waltham Forest, the Alliance and then Liberal Democrat group was very much a Labour problem. They barely threatened the Conservative-held wards but steadily picked off Labour fiefdoms. In 1982 they won Leyton ward and Cann Hall (basically the Waltham Forest side of Forest Gate). By 1994 they had added three Walthamstow wards: Highams Hill, Chapel End and Wood Street. By 2006 they'd added High Street (St James's) and Forest (with not much forest left in it).

It was because the Lib Dem tanks were parked on Labour's lawn that, when Gordon Brown lost the 2010 general election and a Conservative-Lib Dem government followed, that the centre vote disintegrated.

Waltham Forest voters quickly switched to Labour to express their opposition to the Conservatives; the Labour group surged in blocks of ten - 26 seats in 2006, 36 in 2014, 46 in 2018. Of this twenty seat gain, just one came from the Conservatives. The Lib Dems held nineteen seats in 2006 and zero just eight years later.



In the later years of the Conservative government Labour started challenging their Chingford strongholds. They won a seat in Valley ward in 2018 and 2022, running alongside the river Lea, though they haven't yet found a way to advance further there. Hale End and Highams Park South, on the Woodford side of the borough, fell to Labour in 2018 and already looks like a fairly secure Labour ward.

The Conservatives clung to **Hatch Lane and Highams Park North** by just 57 votes. They polled less than 40% in Larkwood, though an independent campaign to save a leisure centre disrupted all the parties. Only **Endlebury** and **Chingford Green** look secure for the Tories, based on 2022 results. But that was before Reform.

Chingford and Woodford Green was one of the constituencies the Conservatives came close to losing in Theresa May's debacle of a general election in 2017. In 2019, despite the national swing towards the Conservatives, Labour cut his majority further, to 1,262. Surely the writing was on the wall for the former Conservative leader in 2024 with the Tories so much more unpopular than 2019?

The Labour candidate in 2017 and 2019, Faiza Shaheen, was a Corbynite left-winger. She had been chosen to stand again in 2024 but was barred by Labour's NEC. So she stood as an independent and, with huge support from left-wingers and Muslims angered by Labour's response to Gaza, took on the new Labour candidate: Brent councillor Shama Tatler.

In a farcical result, Iain Duncan-Smith, his vote down nearly thirteen percentage points, was re-elected while so many of his fellow MPs with vastly larger majorities were defeated. He won with just 36%; Labour polled 26% while Shaheen finished with just 79 votes fewer than her former party. The Labour and Shaheen votes combined came to 24,969 versus the Conservatives' 17,281. Instead of an Iain Duncan-Smith majority of 4,758, Labour would have won by 7,688.

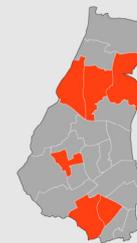
For the Conservatives to be beaten in Chingford is shocking. The Conservative vote is estimated to have been less than the Labour plus Shaheen vote in every single Chingford ward - if only just in Chingford Green. They may again be lucky insofar as being in opposition nationally may spare them being wiped out in Waltham Forest.

Labour, in its current mess, is not going to gain any Tory wards, will almost certainly lose **Valley** and will be hard pressed to hold **Hale End and Highams Park South**.

Possible target wards

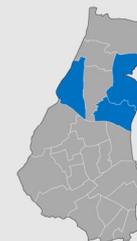
Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Grove Green (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Hatch Lane & Highams Park North (3 Ref)
- ▶ High Street (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Larkwood (3 Con)
- ▶ Leyton (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Valley (2 Con)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Hale End and Highams Park S. (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hatch Lane & Highams Park N. (3 Ref - def)
- ▶ Valley (1 Lab)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Cann Hall (3 Lab)
- ▶ Cathall (2 Lab)
- ▶ Chapel End (3 Lab)
- ▶ Forest (3 Lab)
- ▶ Grove Green (2 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ High Street (2 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Higham Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hoe Street (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lea Bridge (3 Lab)
- ▶ Leyton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Leytonstone (3 Lab)
- ▶ Markhouse (3 Lab)
- ▶ St James (3 Lab)
- ▶ Upper Walthamstow (2 Lab)
- ▶ William Morris (3 Lab)
- ▶ Wood Street (3 Lab)



Liberal Democrat hopeful

- ▶ Grove Green (2 Lab, 1 Ind)



Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Chingford Green (3 Con)
- ▶ Endlebury (2 Con)
- ▶ Larkwood (3 Con)
- ▶ Valley (2 Con, 1 Lab)



Still, the Tories are unlucky because they have to take on Reform. All three Conservative councillors in **Hatch Lane and Highams Park North** have already defected to Reform and, Chingford is almost as Reform-friendly as Romford or Bexley.

Yet, in one of those oddities MRPs throw up, Electoral Calculus has the constituency staying Conservative while Edmonton - Edmonton of all places! - goes Reform. This must be a glitch caused by the massive vote Shaheen polled last time, which has messed up the assumptions the model makes.

Almost every ward in the north of the borough is winnable by Reform, especially with votes splintered all over the place.

They might even be considered favourites in the three wholly-Conservative wards plus the one Reform has gained through defections, but probably not Valley or Hale End.

A general election MRP also, of course, has little relevance to a local election, other than to give a bit of an indication how the parties are faring.

The MRP has the Greens winning both Walthamstow (Green 37.3%, Labour 28.0%, Reform 16%) and Leyton and Wanstead (Green 31%, Labour 24.0%, Reform 19%). In the 2017 general election Walthamstow voted 81% Labour - that they are down at just 28% is remarkable...if it's accurate.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Cann Hall	37.9	31.0	29.8	23.6	17.7	22.8	42.7	57.3	40.2	19.3
Cathall	32.9	29.8	36.5	21.8	18.2	23.2	40.6	59.4	40.9	19.4
Chapel End	55.5	17.5	25.1	33.6	14.4	19.4	53.0	47.0	45.8	15.9
Chingford Green	66.1	14.8	18.1	62.1	6.9	8.5	53.2	46.8	36.7	18.8
Endlebury	68.2	17.2	13.9	53.3	9.4	12.3	51.2	48.8	34.9	18.6
Forest	46.6	23.5	27.6	22.5	14.4	35.9	47.6	52.4	41.4	19.1
Grove Green	46.8	10.6	41.8	29.0	10.3	21.2	52.0	48.0	49.4	16.0
Hale End and Highams Park South	61.6	19.5	16.7	47.8	12.6	14.9	54.9	45.1	42.4	15.8
Hatch Lane & Highams Park N.	61.7	22.8	15.1	56.3	9.3	9.6	51.1	48.9	36.1	19.9
High Street	40.1	17.8	39.4	29.8	10.1	24.4	54.3	45.7	50.2	16.4
Higham Hill	39.4	35.2	20.2	28.8	16.9	23.4	47.9	52.1	40.4	20.2
Hoe Street	39.8	25.2	33.7	36.2	12.3	22.0	56.1	43.9	49.2	16.8
Larkswood	58.6	19.5	18.6	42.1	11.5	16.9	45.7	54.3	35.2	21.7
Lea Bridge	45.5	15.7	36.2	21.3	14.7	29.9	46.4	53.6	41.5	21.0
Leyton	36.5	28.9	31.9	22.5	17.9	28.3	44.9	55.1	41.4	19.0
Leytonstone	46.5	16.1	36.6	34.5	9.6	20.9	57.2	42.8	51.5	14.5
Markhouse	44.3	21.1	33.0	23.3	11.0	35.9	49.1	50.9	44.0	20.2
St James	43.2	18.8	35.0	34.8	11.1	17.5	58.9	41.1	53.6	14.2
Upper Walthamstow	54.3	23.6	21.4	36.2	15.6	19.9	54.3	45.7	45.8	16.2
Valley	64.0	17.2	17.9	36.9	14.1	19.1	40.3	59.7	31.5	22.3
William Morris	49.3	19.2	30.2	33.6	10.7	20.7	55.5	44.5	50.4	16.8
Wood Street	44.9	29.7	23.4	36.2	16.4	20.0	56.6	43.4	48.1	17.2

But then Walthamstow is nowadays the sort of place that agitated against a branch of Gail's bakery being opened in their area - not because they have anything against paying £8 for a croissant but because the co-owner of the franchise was pro-Brexit, anti-lockdown and had raised concerns about attacks on freedom of expression in universities. Apparently the views of shop-owners a noisy section of residents disagree with should mean that their shops get cancelled.

The Greens polled pretty well across several wards in Waltham Forest in 2022: over 20% in nine wards and over 30% in one (St James's). They fell just shy of 20% in a further four wards. As with the Lib Dems when they were a force, these are all Labour wards. But, as we've looked at in other boroughs like Barking and Dagenham, 20%+ shares of the vote are decent in themselves, but if most of the remaining votes go to one specific opponent it means big defeats.

Labour in Waltham Forest is generally nowhere near as ensconced as in Barking and Dagenham: there are much more diverse elections here. The ratio of candidates to seats was 3.5:1, compared to just 1.8:1 in Barking and Dagenham. So those Green vote shares didn't collide against 70% to 80% Labour votes here: typically Labour won a tad over 50%. But that's still a big lead, and a big defeat for the Greens.

But it flags up that a 2026 Green surge could be on the cards.

The wards the Greens polled well in last time were **Cann Hall, Chapel End, Forest, Grove Green, High Street, Higham Hill, Hoe Street, St James** and **William Morris**. Those wards elect 26 councillors. They polled just under 20% in **Cathall, Leyton** and **Upper Walthamstow**. Those are another seven seats.

And they didn't contest **Endlebury, Lea Bridge, Markhouse, Valley** and **Wood Street**. In theory the Green battleground could be as large as 41 seats.

But of course there is that cluster of Chingford wards that neither Labour nor the Greens are likely to win. it doesn't really matter for my purpose here whether the Tories hold them or they go to Reform: there is likely to be a group of maybe 17 councillors who aren't Green and aren't Labour.

In other words, for Labour to be ousted in Waltham Forest, the Greens don't need 31 seats: they need 14. Reform group arguments over who they might choose to install in power out of Labour and Greens would be fun to watch!

Of course, Greens are going for a majority and even thirty one gains may not be beyond them. The similarity between many of the wards should mean that if one goes several will follow. Labour seems to have been put in the same circle of hell as the owner of Gail's and it wouldn't be a shock for them to - at the very least - lose control despite their big majority.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	O
May 22 council election result	13	47			
May 22 expulsion: Anna Mbachu (Grove Green) Lab to Ind	13	46			1
Nov 23 by-election: Higham Hill - Lab hold	13	46			1
Jan 25 defection: Tom Connor (High Street) Lab to Ind	13	45			2
Sep 25 defection: Justin Halibi (Hatch Lane & Highams Park North) Con to Ref	12	45		1	2
Jan 26 defection: Marion Fitzgerald (Hatch Lane & Highams Park North) Con to Ref	11	45		2	2
Jan 26 defection: Tim James (Hatch Lane & Highams Park North) Con to Ref	10	45		3	2
Jan 26 defection: Rhiannon Eglin (Leyton) Lab to Ind	10	44		3	3

WANDSWORTH

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In boroughs where Reform is not going to challenge for seats, let alone control of the council, the fairly dismal contest that awaits us is whether Labour will lose fewer votes to apathy and parties perceived to be to their left than the Conservatives lose to the new party to their right.

Labour won control of Wandsworth in 2022 for the first time in 44 years and, while their majority was plenty, many of their councillors sit on very small majorities. As do a few Tories.

Six wards split, including **West Hill** which elected one independent, one Labour and one Tory (the only Conservative gain in 2022). The others were **Balham, East Putney, St Mary's, Wandsworth Town** and **West Putney**.

The Tories only need six of the eight Labour seats in split wards to win. But there are vulnerable Labour seats beyond. Three wards in Tooting constituency all have similar majorities: **Trinity, South Balham** and **Wandle** - the successors to Nightingale, Bedford and Earlsfield.

The Conservatives have already regained (and then lost following the winner's suspension from their group) a seat in **West Putney** following a 2024 by-election held on the same day as the London mayoral election. Labour may have lost support on the large Ashburton council estate due to the council's plans to build new homes on its garages and greens.

But even though the Tories won, in any context other than right now, Labour would be delighted to only lose West Putney by 8%: typically one of the safer Conservative wards.

Perhaps Labour's decline was mitigated by the higher turnout for the mayoral vote, or maybe the opposition to the Ashburton house-building was both less significant than the Tories hoped for and mostly limited to those who didn't vote Labour anyway.

Nonetheless, holding their remaining two seats in **East Putney** and **West Putney** will be a challenge for Labour given they should arguably never have won in the first place. The Conservatives won't be as complacent this year. Labour has deselected its [first ever] East Putney councillor: she is now standing in West Putney.

Wandsworth marginals

St Mary's	1 Con	0.1
Balham	1 Lab	0.5
Wandsworth Town	1 Con	0.9
West Hill	1 Con	0.9
East Putney	1 Lab	1.9
West Putney	2 Lab	2.1
Southfields	2 Con	2.5
Lavender	2 Con	4.3
Wandsworth Town	2 Lab	4.6
St Mary's	2 Lab	4.7
West Putney	1 Con	5.0
East Putney	2 Con	5.1
Balham	2 Con	5.9
Trinity	2 Lab	6.1
South Balham	2 Lab	7.0
Wandle	2 Lab	7.1
West Hill	1 Lab	7.6
Thamesfield	3 Con	9.1
Nine Elms	2 Con	9.2

There are also two wards slightly beyond this list that might produce a surprise. One is **Roehampton**, where Labour has begun a big house-building plan on the Alton estate and is pushing even less popular plans for a high-rise scheme on the Lennox estate through the planning committee now.



Labour first lost **Roehampton** in 1998 following the closure of the local Queen Mary's Hospital - a decision taken by the ousted Tory government but which occurred on Labour's watch. When plans emerged in 2025 to close down Queen Mary's Minor Injuries Unit (a mini A&E) Labour didn't let history repeat itself: the plans were squashed despite a huge deficit on the hospital trust's balance sheet.

Labour really struggles to turn their vote out in council elections when in government. Look below at how their vote collapsed in **Roehampton** in 1998 (a good year for the party in London) - and did no better relative to the Conservatives in 2002. The numbers are the top vote the two parties received.

If Labour loses anything like the 803 votes they lost in 1998 they won't hold the ward: their majority is 600. And that applies in other wards with large council estates: especially marginals like **Battersea Park, St Mary's, Wandsworth Town, West Hill** and **West Putney** - maybe also **Wandle**.

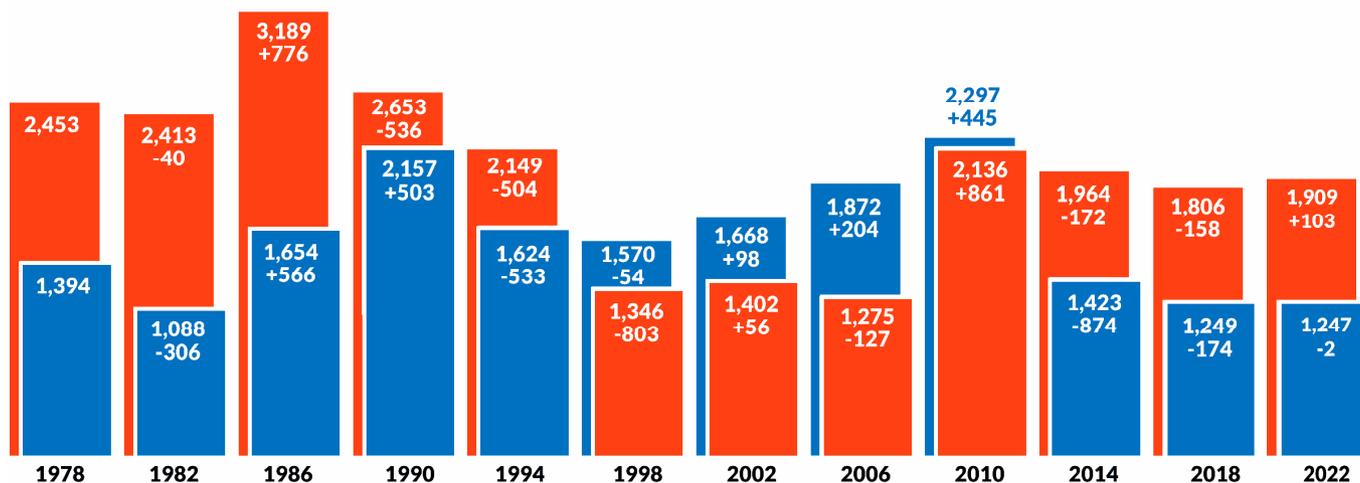
Battersea Park, a new ward drawn in 2022, was also far closer than expected. It includes the high-rise Surrey Lane estate the lego-like Doddington, and far more besides. But it also has the exclusive mansions to the west and south of Battersea Park, newer apartment blocks beside Chelsea Bridge, and a wedge of gentrified riverside.

Fifty-five year council veteran Tony Belton is standing again but Labour suffers from a lack of dynamism in a ward where turnout is crucial. The smallest Labour majority is only 360.

Labour's vote has diversified considerably in Wandsworth in the 20 years since they were last in government: they are now at least as strong in affluent neighbourhoods but there are wards in this borough that are largely council estates. Should not the estates be thrilled at having Labour in power - and if they aren't: why aren't they?

Finally, and perhaps the biggest threat to Labour has been the government's announcement that is redistributing a hefty chunk of grant funding away from four affluent south west London boroughs: Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Wandsworth to more deprived areas in the north.

The funding loss in Wandsworth is going to be £180 per person over the next three years; and that will be so steep that the government will allow the borough in May to increase Council Tax by more than 5% without needing to call a referendum on the matter. This is a clear dividing line - because had the Conservatives won the general election the formula would not have changed: this isn't something that would have happened whoever won in 2024.



It is a direct consequence of Labour being in government that funding is being cut here. And it is the Tories' job to hammer home, again and again until election day, the tax rises coming and who is to blame for them. If they do, they should win. If people aren't paying sufficient attention, or this year's Council Tax freeze means they don't believe the Conservatives' claims, they'll find it harder.

Wandsworth Labour has regarded the borough's lowest Council Tax status as a political third rail: mess with it and they will die. They have reasonably perceived low Council Tax as the biggest single reason the Conservatives won landslide after landslide in Wandsworth. That's why Labour has, to date, chosen to freeze the council's share of the bill other than for adult social care.

As soon as the government made its announcement about the huge "Fair Funding" cut Labour leader Simon Hogg was quick to announce that Wandsworth would not be taking advantage of its ability to raise Council Tax by more than 5%.

Whether that's a pledge Labour can honour beyond 2026 is questionable: we aren't talking about the need to find a few pennies down the back of a sofa. But, in any event, the government deliberately timed the start of its cuts to 2027, not this year - so Labour has been able to freeze tax again.

Now the case for Labour holding on.

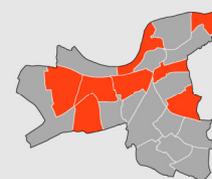
First, they have kept their pledge on Council Tax. It has only risen because of Sadiq Khan's ever-expanding precept and the social care levy. They have also worked hard on keeping streets clean while the borrowing costs on the hundreds of millions they have taken out to build new council housing has not yet started to drive up tax bills.

Second, there is the massive swing to Labour in the 2024 general election where all three constituencies were won with five-figure majorities. Given these landslides it's unsurprising that even with Labour in the doldrums, Electoral Calculus reckons the party wins every Wandsworth ward in a general election.

Possible target wards

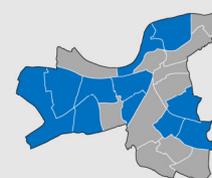
Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Balham (2 Con)
- ▶ East Putney (2 Con)
- ▶ Lavender (2 Con)
- ▶ Nine Elms (1 Con, 1 Ref)
- ▶ St Mary's (1 Con)
- ▶ Wandsworth Town (1 Con)
- ▶ West Hill (1 Ind, 1 Con)
- ▶ West Putney (1 Con, 1 Ind)



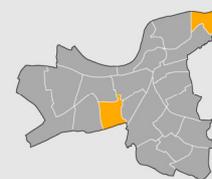
Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Balham (1 Lab)
- ▶ Battersea Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ East Putney (1 Lab)
- ▶ Roehampton (3 Lab)
- ▶ St Mary's (2 Lab)
- ▶ South Balham (2 Lab)
- ▶ Trinity (2 Lab)
- ▶ Wandle (2 Lab)
- ▶ Wandsworth Town (2 Lab)
- ▶ West Hill (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ West Putney (1 Lab, 1 Ind - def)



Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Nine Elms (1 Con, 1 Ref)
- ▶ Southfields (2 Con)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Furzedown (3 Lab)
- ▶ South Balham (2 Lab)
- ▶ Tooting Bec (3 Lab)
- ▶ Trinity (2 Lab)



Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Balham	49.5	11.9	37.6	59.1	5.2	5.3	73.3	6.8	44.3	13.2
Battersea Park	32.2	29.0	36.0	36.5	14.8	11.2	57.0	12.1	39.0	14.8
East Putney	45.7	9.9	42.3	49.6	3.8	8.4	68.7	7.7	38.6	13.8
Falconbrook	23.5	44.9	29.1	30.8	20.9	16.0	52.3	14.2	45.8	11.5
Furzedown	48.6	19.1	31.2	38.8	14.5	14.5	50.7	14.1	40.0	15.5
Lavender	41.4	12.5	45.5	57.4	5.0	3.2	75.3	5.3	47.0	9.1
Nine Elms	22.7	11.2	58.7	30.0	9.2	13.0	73.0	5.7	45.5	4.4
Northcote	61.5	8.3	29.9	59.9	3.6	3.2	74.2	5.4	42.9	11.9
Roehampton	28.5	43.3	25.5	33.9	12.6	18.7	40.2	16.9	46.3	14.1
St Mary's	38.1	15.7	41.6	44.3	8.4	7.5	67.6	7.7	39.4	12.6
Shaftesbury & Queenstown	29.5	37.2	32.0	44.4	15.5	10.9	56.7	13.5	43.5	13.5
South Balham	43.0	18.6	38.0	59.9	6.5	6.2	70.1	7.8	43.4	13.7
Southfields	58.7	6.9	33.0	59.3	3.2	5.7	69.9	6.4	37.1	13.3
Thamesfield	50.3	8.3	38.1	60.3	2.7	4.1	73.4	6.0	38.0	14.9
Tooting Bec	45.8	15.3	37.8	42.5	8.7	14.3	61.0	11.6	43.8	14.1
Tooting Broadway	36.7	15.8	45.8	39.4	10.1	15.5	57.4	12.3	44.6	11.4
Trinity	49.9	10.6	38.2	60.3	5.1	4.6	71.0	6.8	40.1	14.1
Wandle	45.6	17.6	35.0	55.7	9.6	10.1	63.5	9.3	41.7	10.9
Wandsworth Common	52.4	16.8	29.1	59.6	6.1	6.9	62.8	9.0	39.2	11.9
Wandsworth Town	39.5	19.2	38.7	52.4	8.7	7.5	66.8	8.4	41.6	10.8
West Hill	40.7	23.8	34.4	37.8	9.6	16.9	53.8	12.8	38.8	15.3
West Putney	49.4	19.9	29.2	49.0	6.2	9.0	59.0	11.2	36.3	18.3

A Labour clean sweep won't happen in a council election: **Northcote, Thamesfield** and **Wandsworth Common** wards at the very least are safe enough. There was still a "Wandsworth factor" in 2022 of Tories doing better than in national elections. That's why Wandsworth was so close. It may still be present in 2026, though as Tory rule fades into history so will this electoral boon.

Third, there are marginal seats held by both sides, not just Labour. It's plausible that Labour could gain the remaining eight Tory seats in the split wards, the Conservatives only just held on to **Southfields** and **Lavender** (the far better side of the old Shaftesbury ward for them).

The Conservatives won the new and massively undersized ward of **Nine Elms** last time by eight percentage points but, because it's so small, that was by only 67 votes with Labour and the Lib Dems splitting the non-Tory vote almost evenly.

To complicate things further, in **Nine Elms** one of the serving Conservatives has defected to Reform, though he is hardly the most dynamic councillor and Reform don't have any better prospects. The ward has added another thousand electors since 2022 so many of the voters this time are new.

Fourth, the Conservatives have lost their unique selling points (low tax and good services) and haven't found a potent motive to persuade voters to return to them. Labour hasn't

stuffed up badly or noticeably: they can't just expect chastened voters to return to them having tested out and been stung by a more left-wing alternative.

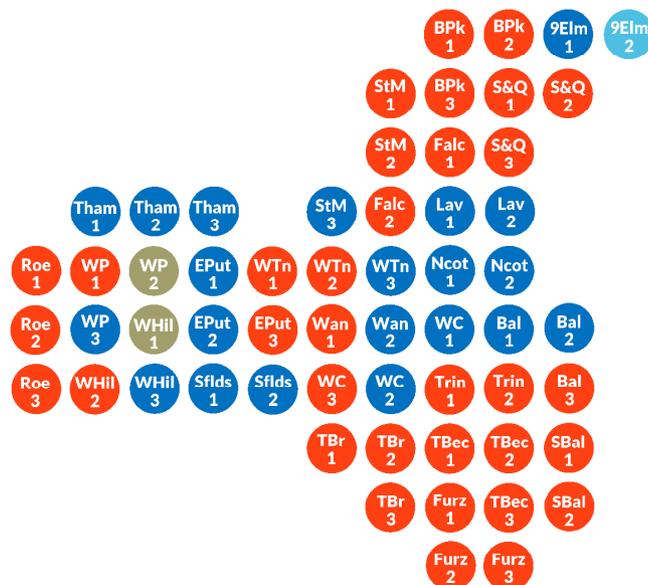
In the 1980s there was genuine Conservative municipal radicalism here: not just cutting tax, not just selling off council homes, but also privatising hi-viz council services that everyone experienced, brightening up council estates and revolutionising the council's communications.

Over the years, that zeal ground down to a blander technocracy of just trying to set the lowest Council Tax and stacking up as many private apartment blocks as possible: hardly inspiring and not keeping the stakes too high to risk a switch to Labour.

They have not yet rediscovered any radicalism, instead sputtering out occasional single-issue petition campaigns.

This is no substitute for a compelling message that resonates right across a big borough.

And of course, while Reform will not be competitive anywhere, a larger share of whatever vote it gets here will come from former Conservatives than Labour voters.



As this preview began: if the Tories lose more votes to Reform than Labour loses to apathy or parties to its left Labour holds Wandsworth.

If the other way round the Tories will be back after just four years. But even if they do win, there won't be another forty-plus year Conservative reign: those days are gone for good.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	O
May 22 council election result	22	35			1
Jul 22 by-election: Tooting Broadway - Lab hold	22	35			1
Jan 24 by-election: Tooting Broadway - Lab hold	22	35			1
May 24 by-election: West Putney - Con gain from Lab	23	34			1
Jul 25 suspension: Nick Austen (West Putney) Con to Ind	22	34			2
Aug 25 defection: Mark Justin (Nine Elms) Con to Ref	21	34		1	2

WESTMINSTER

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There is something of an expectation, based primarily on by-election results, that Labour - having won a majority in the City of Westminster for the first time ever in 2022 - is on track to lose.

They could well, but it is just as true that Labour has been unfortunate in the by-elections that occurred: one in ultra-marginal **West End** just as Sadiq Khan was proposing a contentious pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, and then the death of their only councillor in **Vincent Square** ward. Labour lost both, fuelling this impression of their imminent demise.

Had those two by-elections occurred in different wards Labour might have defended them successfully or not really been in with a shot anyway - as with the other two Westminster by-elections. Likewise, had other marginal boroughs held by-elections in key rather than safe wards speculation would be rife as to whether Labour could hold on in these places too. It's just the luck of the draw.

Westminster marginals

Lancaster Gate	2 Lab	0.2
Little Venice	1 Lab	0.6
Little Venice	2 Con	2.1
Lancaster Gate	1 Con	3.0
Vincent Square	3 Con	3.8
Hyde Park	3 Lab	4.5
Pimlico South	3 Lab	5.7
West End	2 Lab	7.3
St James's	3 Con	9.0

There are fifteen safe seats for Labour (though if their collapse in **Harrow Road** is repeated, there won't be anything like as many!): **Church Street, Harrow Road, Maida Vale, Queen's Park** and **Westbourne**. Labour also won **Bayswater**

by a huge amount in 2022 - but this was their first win and let's see if that big majority holds before adding the ward to their safe stack. For now, let's say there are fifteen seats Labour should be able to defend easily enough.

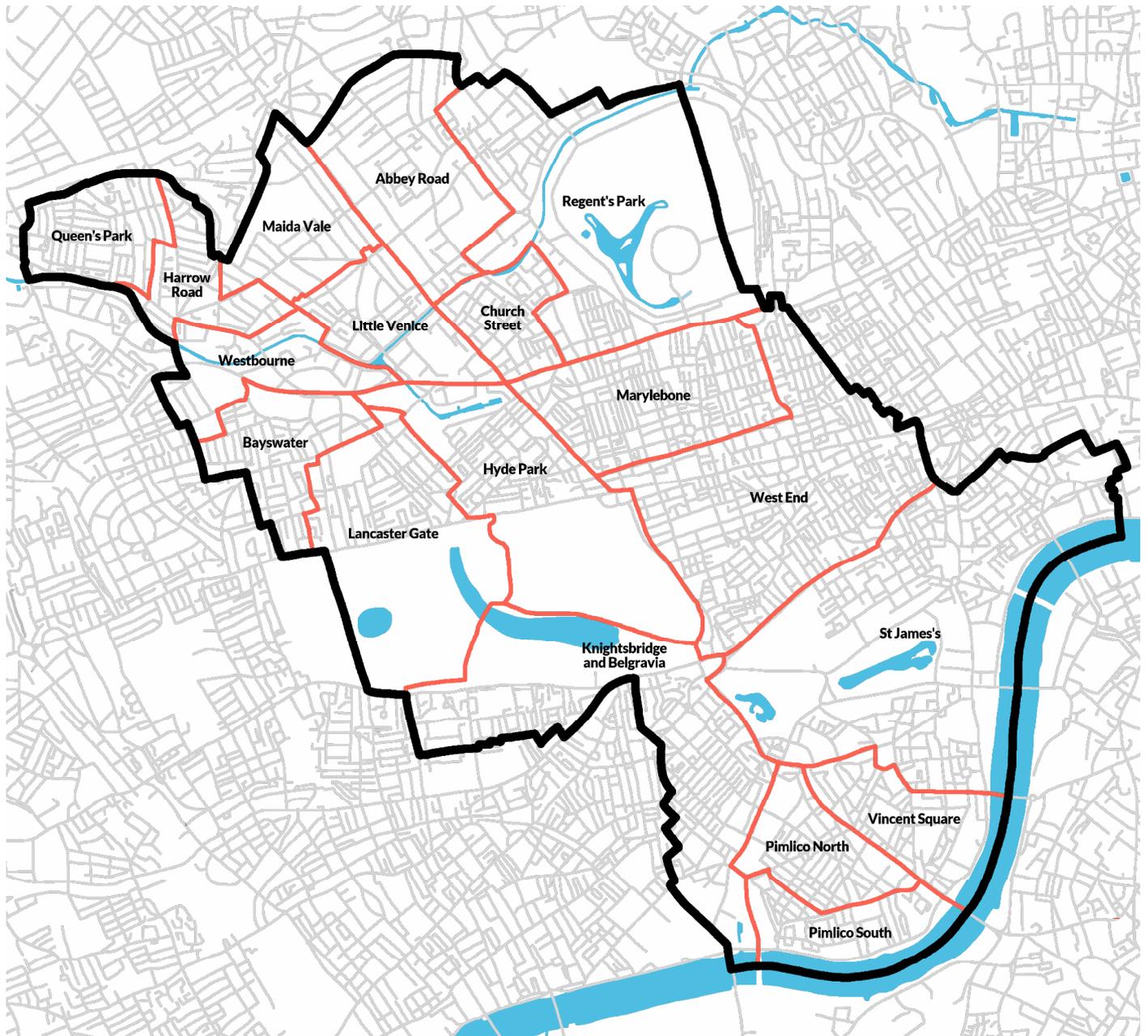
The Conservatives can rely on **Abbey Road, Knightsbridge & Belgravia, Marylebone, St James's** and probably **Regent's Park** and **Pimlico North**, though both of them aren't as safe as they once were. Those also total eighteen seats.

For perfect symmetry, that leaves eighteen marginal seats: **Hyde Park, Lancaster Gate, Little Venice, Pimlico South, Vincent Square** and **West End**. Labour won thirteen of these eighteen marginal seats in 2022 which is why they run Westminster. With those two by-election losses and a defection (also in West End, to the Tories) Labour now has ten of the eighteen.

But the Conservatives have also suffered defections: Laila Cunningham: the Tories' sole representative in **Lancaster Gate** ward, switched to Reform in spring 2025 and built something of a media profile as London's sole Reform councillor (at least until the Bromley Common by-election last July). She was joined in November 2025 by **Abbey Road's** Alan Mendoza - a second defector from the Conservatives.

The media profile of the Princess of Wales would be needed for Reform to stand a chance of winning **Lancaster Gate** (or **Abbey Road**). But Cunningham has been announced as Reform's candidate for mayor of London in 2028 and won't be defending her council seat. Onto bigger things.

Lancaster Gate is - largely - a very wealthy, diverse ward which also includes the Hallfield council estate, with plenty of EU voters who voted heavily to Remain in the 2016 referendum.



That said, there aren't any better wards for either of them to fight in this borough. Nor are there any worse ones: they all offer the same minimal prospect of a Reform win. But Reform could take enough Conservative votes in this newly competitive ward to give Labour the third **Lancaster Gate** seat, even with a swing away from the them. For what it's worth, the Britain Votes Now model has the Conservatives beating Labour by nine percent in Lancaster Gate.

But let's look to the other end of the political spectrum for a moment, because that calamitous near-thirty percentage point drop in the Labour vote in **Harrow Road** ward at the 2024 by-election may be a more significant issue than defections to Reform.

Turnout in the by-election was just 14.6%: Labour clearly didn't get their vote out: nobody did. But that doesn't mean it can be dismissed because a by-election should enable the

party that grips the ward so tightly (they polled nearly three quarters of the vote here in 2022) to actually give it some campaigning attention: to drive up support, not let it tank.

The second note is that, while Labour held on comfortably (they took 44%) the Greens won 21% and George Galloway's Workers Party 14%. So while it appears Labour won with a lot more than any other party, they were just nine percentage points ahead of these two parties widely seen as to the left of Labour in inner London.

Harrow Road is a council and housing association estate ward: of the four long-term Labour wards in Paddington and Marylebone, it is the most uniformly dominated by estates. It is also hugely ethnically diverse (so support for Gaza and immigration are issues) and incredibly deprived (so benefits and housing and generally expectations of a Labour government matter).

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Abbey Road	35.9	14.0	49.7	28.2	3.6	14.3	79.6	20.4	64.7	11.2
Bayswater	31.3	16.8	51.2	30.4	4.2	10.3	77.3	22.7	68.1	8.2
Church Street	13.9	58.1	25.9	17.3	11.0	48.6	45.8	54.2	37.0	25.2
Harrow Road	22.1	44.4	32.4	24.9	15.9	24.6	59.6	40.4	49.6	16.2
Hyde Park	28.1	15.5	54.8	20.5	5.5	25.5	75.5	24.5	60.4	10.2
Knightsbridge and Belgravia	35.6	22.0	41.1	31.4	5.1	13.8	72.6	27.4	55.9	9.5
Lancaster Gate	28.8	12.3	58.5	24.5	4.2	14.0	75.0	25.0	66.2	9.1
Little Venice	35.5	20.9	43.0	30.2	4.7	21.1	73.9	26.1	60.8	12.1
Maida Vale	29.6	27.3	42.4	29.5	6.1	21.1	70.3	29.7	58.9	12.3
Marylebone	30.5	8.7	60.2	27.8	2.3	12.6	82.9	17.1	70.2	7.7
Pimlico North	30.2	32.1	36.9	42.0	6.7	12.5	73.6	26.4	61.7	13.0
Pimlico South	20.7	44.0	34.3	36.0	7.8	19.7	61.9	38.1	50.8	16.1
Queen's Park	20.7	54.3	23.6	23.8	16.4	30.2	51.3	48.7	41.3	20.2
Regent's Park	35.6	12.1	51.5	26.9	4.4	13.8	78.4	21.6	66.2	10.0
St James's	22.4	28.3	48.7	34.9	4.6	9.9	74.6	25.4	59.3	10.4
Vincent Square	27.3	36.7	34.6	33.0	7.0	16.4	69.0	31.0	59.0	10.6
West End	22.8	24.2	52.0	26.8	4.6	12.9	75.2	24.8	61.3	9.9
Westbourne	18.1	54.6	24.9	19.5	15.1	36.9	54.7	45.3	43.4	21.3

It could well be that community independents backed by Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party, the Greens or Workers Party organise themselves to not oppose each other. And, even if Labour can't possibly lose Harrow Road - they only have in 1968 - it may well compel the party to spend time in their "safe" wards when they could be defending their marginals.

But forget the marginals for a moment: a Labour collapse of such scale would cost them safe-ish **Maida Vale** and **Bayswater** for starters.

Westminster's marginals are interesting in that there are different dynamics in each. **Vincent Square**, for example, is crudely a battle between the Millbank and Grosvenor council estates and exclusive Victoria mansion blocks in and around Westminster Cathedral, plus the villas of that square itself.

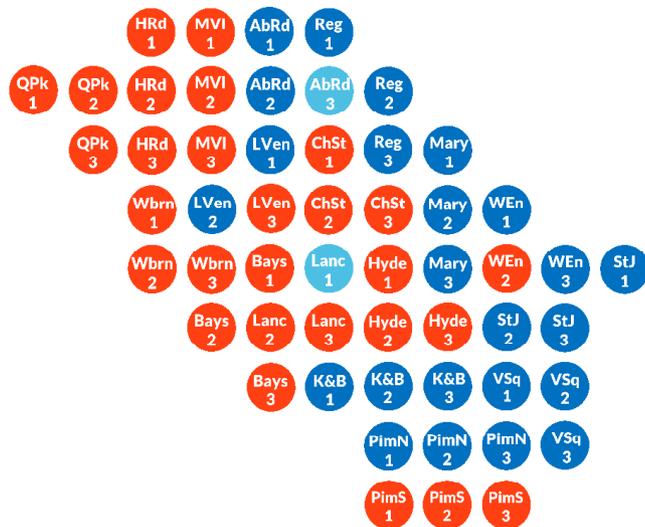
Hyde Park contains a lot of huge new private housing (Paddington Basin) and was influenced a lot last election by the Tory debacle over the Hyde Park mound: a hugely costly, artificial tourist attraction that rapidly became a humiliating white elephant. Its impact cannot be overstated: it destroyed the Conservative USP of prudent financial management won through decades of record low tax and efficient services.

West End has very little council housing and is polarised between strongly Tory but depopulated Mayfair, and very much more diverse, left-leaning Fitzrovia and Soho.

Little Venice is the identikit Right-to-Buy ward: one of those targeted by Dame Shirley Porter's Conservatives for their unlawful, gerrymandering, "designated sales" programme. That gerrymander was so successful that, even in 2022, Labour couldn't win all three seats. Yet they did in 1986 - pre-gerrymander. It is another incredibly polarised ward.

The Conservatives were very pleased with themselves in 2002 when they persuaded the boundary committee to move the Hallfield estate out of marginal **Bayswater** and into safely Tory **Lancaster Gate**. Now Bayswater looks safe for Labour and Hallfield is responsible for that party having two councillors in Lancaster Gate.

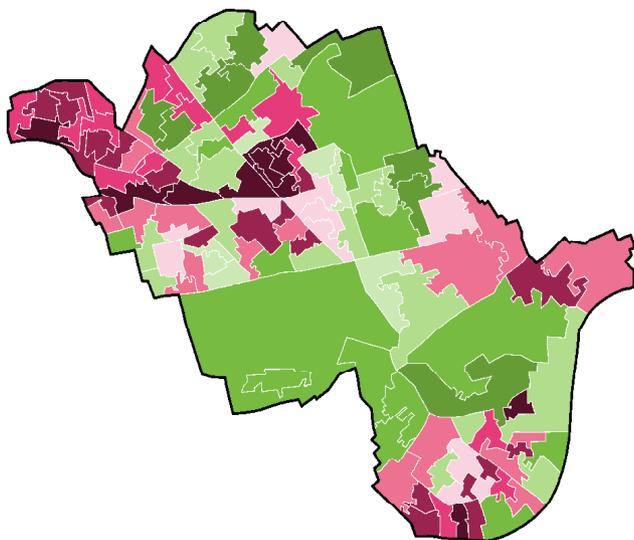
Guide to the 2026 council elections: London



Hallfield was another of the Porter designated sales estates but Lancaster Gate will be determined by how the ward's pro-EU wealthy feel about the Conservatives a decade on from the EU referendum. Is it actually possible that the presence of Reform might begin softening the Conservative Party, if only in comparison?

And **Pimlico South** - the old Churchill ward - didn't swing much in 2022, partly because it's a lot more difficult for Labour on these boundaries now the vast Dolphin Square private apartment complex is included. Dolphin Square isn't quite as hostile to Labour as it once was (that'd be impossible) but it's hardly a vat of Labour votes, while Churchill Gardens has a decent Conservative vote (again considerably diminished since the 1990s).

Of the marginals, the only one Labour might be favoured in right now is **Lancaster Gate**. **West End** is clearly at risk as the by-election and defection demonstrated; they have lost their foothold in **Vincent Square**; **Little Venice** is very difficult and **Hyde Park** looks no more like a comfortable Labour ward than **Regent's Park** does.



Westminster Index of Deprivation map

The 2022 boundary changes abolished the marginal Tachbrook ward which Labour may well have won. That change put Dolphin Square into **Pimlico South** (as well as the Peabody Tachbrook estate), but put the larger Lillington Gardens into **Pimlico North**, narrowing the gap between winning Tories and Labour there. The Tories were about 300 clear last time: a bit tight but probably ok in the current political climate.

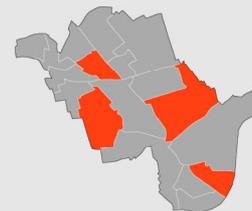
St James is the only other somewhat at risk ward: the huge ward that covers all the bits Westminster is famous for: Buckingham Palace, Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St James's Park, Whitehall and Trafalgar Square, stretching right the way to Aldwych, Blackfriars and theatre-land.

The Aldwych end is better for Labour but there are some very small estates around Victoria Street that give Labour a base to work from. Labour closed the gap there last time to just under 200 but Conservative support held up, only just shy of 50%, so it'll be very difficult for Labour to advance and they're more likely to fall back given they're less popular now.

Possible target wards

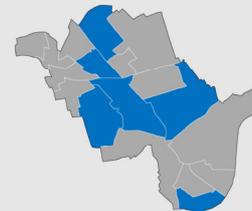
Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Lancaster Gate (1 Ref)
- ▶ Little Venice (2 Con)
- ▶ Vincent Square (3 Con)
- ▶ West End (2 Con)



Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Abbey Road (1 Ref - defec)
- ▶ Hyde Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lancaster Gate (2 Lab, 1 Ref - def)
- ▶ Little Venice (1 Lab)
- ▶ Pimlico South (3 Lab)
- ▶ West End (1 Lab)



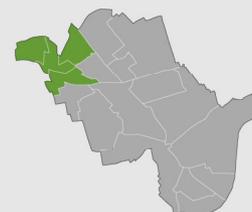
Lib Dem hopeful

- ▶ Marylebone (3 Con)



Green hopefuls

- ▶ Harrow Road (3 Lab)
- ▶ Maida Vale (3 Lab)
- ▶ Queen's Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Westbourne (3 Lab)



Westminster is another borough that will be hit hard by the government's so-called "Fair Funding" formula, which will switch millions in central grant funding to northern councils which Labour believes are more deprived. These changes won't hit the balance sheet until 2027 - coincidentally the year after the local elections (but perhaps we should just be

grateful Labour's permitting London vote at all rather than criticising this latest display of shameless electoral cynicism).

Westminster tussled with Wandsworth for years to set the lowest Council Tax: it usually set the lowest in terms of Band D tax but Wandsworth usually set the lowest average tax (because Westminster has more very expensive Band H homes). Electors have grown used to low Council Tax coupled to good services and given Labour cannot pass the buck onto anyone else - they run everything now - they'll have to take the blame when bills start soaring.

Because there are relatively few opportunities for them to advance, because nationally Labour is both in government and less popular than 2022, because Westminster is a borough Reform is less likely to register a big vote and because there is still a big intrinsic Conservative vote across swathes of the city, it's likely that the Tories can regain it.

But, as with Wandsworth, this is now a key marginal borough. Labour could cling on, but even if they can't they have every opportunity of winning it again in future.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	O
May 22 council election result	23	31			
Jul 24 by-election: Abbey Road - Con hold	23	31			
Sep 24 by-election: Harrow Road - Lab hold	23	31			
Sep 24 by-election: West End - Con gain from Lab	24	30			
Sep 24 by-election: Vincent Square - Con gain from Lab	25	29			
Apr 25 defection: Paul Fisher (West End) Lab to Con	26	28			
Jun 25 defection: Laila Cunningham (Lancaster Gate) Con to Ref	25	28		1	
Nov 25 defection: Alan Mendoza (Abbey Road) Con to Ref	24	28		2	