

GUIDE TO THE **2026** ELECTIONS LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

It was only four years ago that the London boroughs last elected their councillors. But that was a different world. It was four Prime Ministers ago! Boris Johnson was on his last legs as Prime Minister with Partygate scandals and the capital's anger over Brexit overwhelming his party. The Conservatives fell to their worst defeat since 1994 losing control of Wandsworth, Westminster and Barnet. But they received consolation prizes by gaining Harrow and the new mayoralty of Croydon.

The Conservatives are polling even worse than 2022 and now have a populist party to their right that threatens further losses in the remaining councils they hold. Bexley is most at risk but also perhaps Bromley and Hillingdon. But Reform is not a huge threat in most of London. The Conservative problem is that Reform could deprive them of enough votes to stall their recovery and even cost them more councillors than they've already lost.

The only consolation for the Conservatives is that Labour has fallen by even more, proportionally. There has been a swing from Labour to Conservatives of between four and six percent in London since 2022; enough to win back Wandsworth and Westminster and put Barnet on a knife-edge.

As Reform is a threat to Conservatives, an even bigger threat to Labour is the Green Party. They seem to be putting into play boroughs and wards that have been considered safe for Labour for decades.

The Greens' top target is Hackney: both the council and the elected mayoralty. They also expect big things in Lambeth and Lewisham, and to be represented on swathes of councils

even where they can't win power. We need to be somewhat cautious about the Green threat because the surge they enjoyed following the election of their new leader, Zack Polanski, is not reflected in all polls and has abated somewhat. The Greens had every opportunity to do well in London last time and they did not, mostly from lacking sufficient members to stand for election or campaign.

But the Green surge does appear real in terms of members and activists - and that is a massive boost they did not have in 2022. The ability to field candidates and canvass and leaflet and turn out voters on election day is a massive step up for them. The Labour-Green battleground is very much larger than the Conservative-Reform battleground in London. And that's aside from considering the impact on Labour councillors with Conservatives as their main opponent from having a big chunk of their vote go Green. How many Labour seats will the Greens gift the Conservatives?

One big factor in 2022 was large swings away from Labour in ethnically diverse wards across London - but especially West London. It was noticed in Harrow because council control switched, but not more widely because it occurred in mainly super-safe Labour wards. These are now a lot less safe and Labour is in deeper trouble with voters from minority ethnic backgrounds this year.

Labour's problem with Muslim voters since the Gaza conflict is well documented, but the party is tanking with every ethnic group - and that matters in multicultural London. Their loss of Harrow was a backlash by Hindu and Sikh voters, a very powerful bloc of votes in a corridor across west London running from Heathrow to Stanmore.

Labour lost Tower Hamlets to a Bangladeshi-focussed party in 2022 and is unlikely to get it back this year; and is in real difficulty in Newham and Redbridge and bits of Waltham Forest: all with huge Muslim populations.

It's exactly twenty years since Labour in London was last the recipient of a mid-term government backlash. The party bounced back in 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022. Labour has virtually nothing to gain in the capital and everything to lose.

Holding any of its three gains from 2022 would be a significant achievement and Reform, by eroding Tory support even a little, may help them achieve that. But in terms of gains, beyond an attempt at winning the Croydon mayoralty, they must brace for major losses - possibly on a scale that dwarves 2006. This will look even worse for Labour because 2006 followed a round of elections in 2002 that, while not disastrous, cost Labour a lot of seats. In other words they entered 2006 from a lower baseline than they do in 2022. It won't be pretty.

The battle for London can be characterised as a battle of who could care less: if the Tories lose fewer votes to Reform than Labour loses to not voting or to parties positioned to its left there will be substantial Labour losses. If the other way round, Starmer (if he's still there in May) may be able to spin a success story from pretty dismal results. He could well be helped by the minor consolation that several boroughs are more likely to fall to no overall control rather than swing to an opponent. That just looks a little less bad presentationally.

On the other hand, Labour may well lose the spin war for the exact same reason they won it in 2022. The totemic boroughs of Wandsworth, Westminster and Barnet tend to declare early on election night (or early the next morning). That will give the headline writers the narrative, even if as the rest of

the councils declare the next day things go bit differently. Two of the three boroughs Labour lost declared on Friday or, in the case of Croydon, days later.

Some notes on the previews that follow. Forecasting how an election will go is not easy at the best of times, and these are not they. I also don't make predictions: it's better to let the voters choose for themselves than to pre-empt their choices.

Because there are two parties expected to have explosive impacts in boroughs they didn't contest or barely contested last time, the 2022 results are far less of a guide than they'd typically be. In other words we have far less idea which wards are going to be competitive this year than we normally do.

As I did last year in the previews for those council elections, I provide a list of wards a particular party might hope to gain. I call these "hopefuls" rather than targets because I have no insight into where the parties are targeting. I've cast my net wide to include wards I don't necessarily believe they will win. Those with more acute local knowledge might scoff at some of those on the list. Fair enough. You're probably right but you might get a surprise! Who knows?!

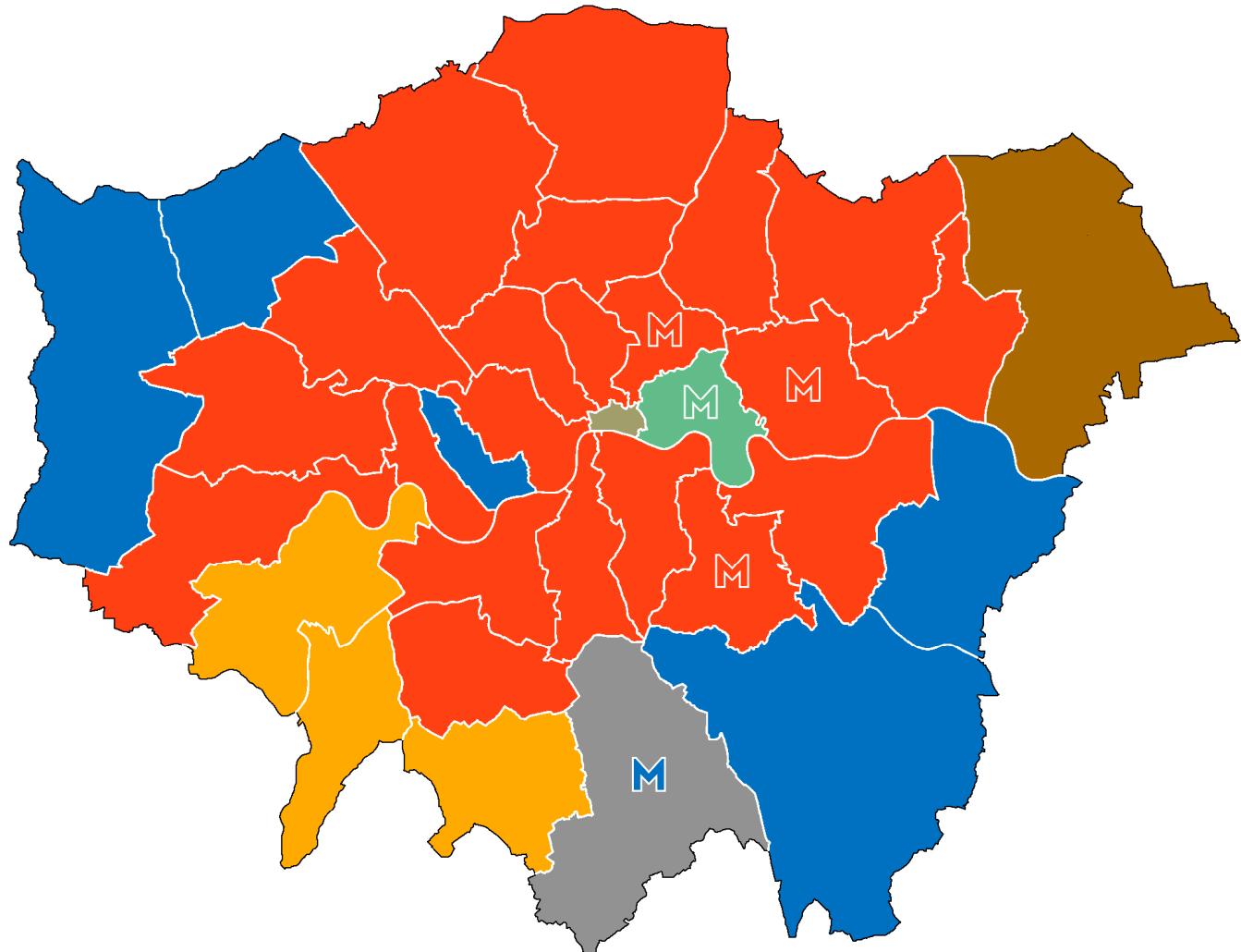
I've also included in party target lists wards they won in 2022 but have since suffered defections or a by-election loss.

Finally, I refer frequently to an Electoral Calculus MRP model that the site published in December. This was a general election MRP and it came up with questionable results in places. However, it does provide some measure of what is going on beneath the headline poll results within London boroughs and that is the sole reason I feature its output.

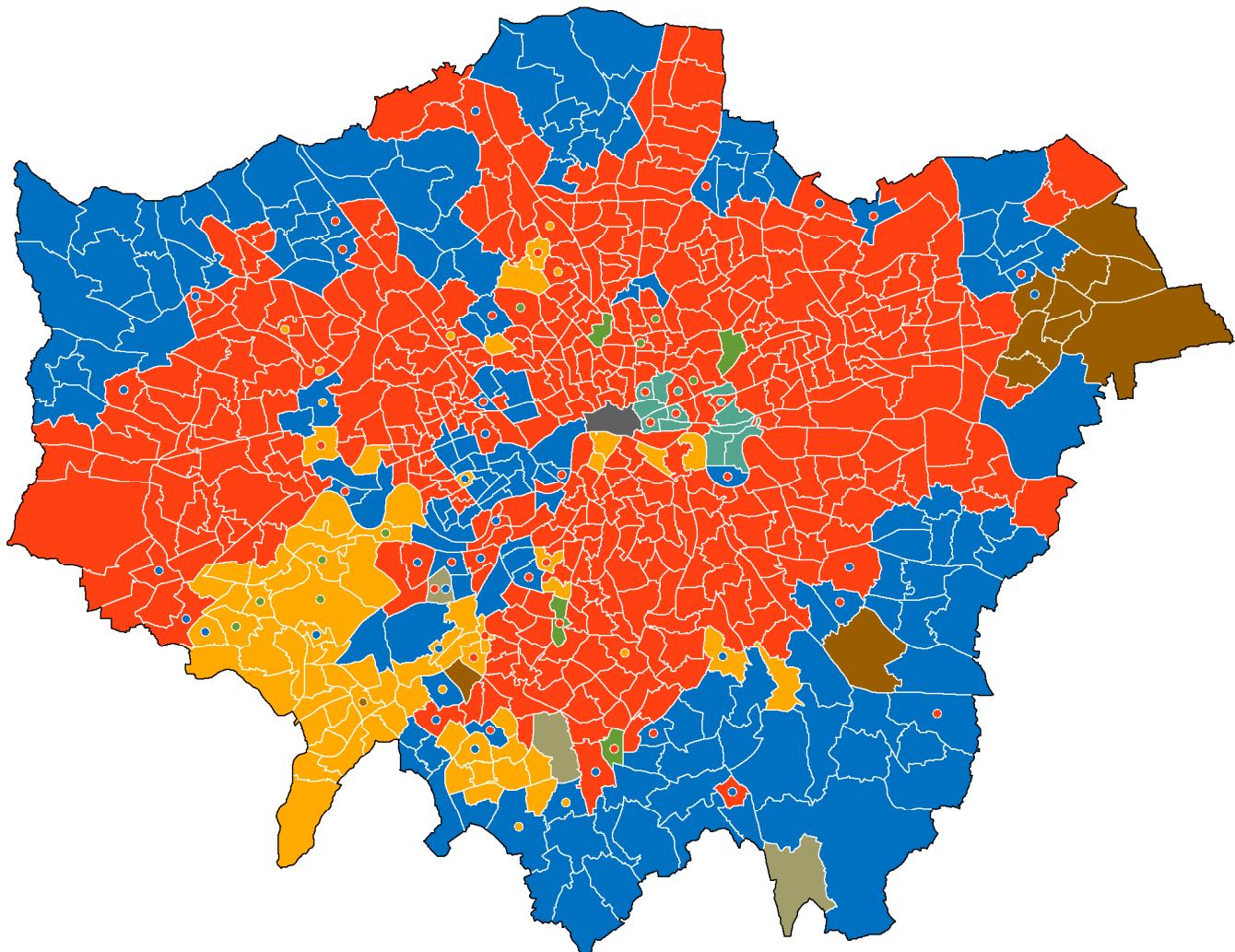
Anything could happen in these elections - and it probably will.

LONDON BOROUGHS MAP 2022

M = directly elected mayor (with the colour of the M denoting the party that won the position).



LONDON WARDS MAP 2022



SUMMARY OF THE 2022 LONDON BOROUGH ELECTIONS

Council	seats	votes	Maj								
Barking & Dagenham	0	26.4	51	69.0	0	1.1	0	1.3	0	2.3	*
Barnet	22	35.1	41	43.4	0	9.2	0	9.7	0	2.6	19
Bexley	33	47.4	12	41.2	0	6.9	0	1.8	0	2.7	21
Brent	5	23.7	49	53.1	3	13.3	0	8.7	0	1.2	41
Bromley	36	38.2	12	30.3	5	17.8	0	8.1	5	5.7	14
Camden	3	17.9	47	51.4	4	17.2	1	11.5	0	1.9	39
Croydon	33	37.5	34	32.3	1	13.4	2	12.8	0	4.1	
Ealing	5	22.1	59	46.1	6	15.0	0	14.0	0	2.7	48
Enfield	25	34.0	38	41.3	0	9.7	0	12.8	0	2.2	13
Greenwich	3	21.0	52	53.1	0	8.9	0	15.0	0	1.9	49
Hackney	5	11.1	50	53.5	0	8.4	2	23.1	0	3.8	43
Hammersmith & Fulham	10	26.7	40	54.4	0	14.3	0	4.1	0	0.5	40
Haringey	0	7.5	50	53.0	7	21.8	0	16.2	0	1.5	43
Harrow	31	42.8	24	37.6	0	9.2	0	7.4	0	3.0	7
Havering	23	30.0	9	20.6	0	1.1	0	3.7	23	44.6	
Hillingdon	30	46.1	23	39.6	0	3.4	0	8.6	0	2.3	7
Hounslow	10	27.5	52	48.0	0	8.4	0	14.3	0	1.8	42
Islington	0	11.2	48	52.7	0	12.6	3	22.5	0	1.0	45
Kensington & Chelsea	35	44.0	13	31.9	2	21.2	0	2.5	0	0.5	20
Kingston-upon-Thames	3	25.1	0	13.1	41	44.8	0	9.7	0	7.4	38
Lambeth	0	11.5	58	51.6	3	12.9	2	23.0	0	1.0	53
Lewisham	0	11.3	54	53.7	0	13.3	0	20.3	0	1.4	5
Merton	7	23.9	31	41.4	17	20.7	0	11.0	2	3.0	5
Newham	0	14.0	64	56.0	0	5.4	2	16.5	0	8.4	62
Redbridge	5	30.8	58	54.8	0	6.8	0	4.1	0	3.5	53
Richmond-upon-Thames	1	22.6	0	10.0	48	51.1	5	12.8	0	3.5	42
Southwark	0	9.7	52	51.9	11	19.9	0	16.7	0	1.7	41
Sutton	20	33.7	3	17.1	29	36.8	0	8.7	3	3.6	3
Tower Hamlets	1	7.9	19	34.5	0	10.2	1	10.0	24	37.3	3
Waltham Forest	14	18.8	46	50.3	0	8.4	0	15.1	0	7.3	32
Wandsworth	22	33.4	35	43.5	0	8.0	0	11.2	1	3.9	13
Westminster	23	38.6	31	46.4	0	12.6	0	2.1	0	0.3	8

Note: majorities are those won in 2022, not as of now

2026 marks twenty years since the BNP caused a minor earthquake by winning eleven council seats in Barking and Dagenham.

The BNP polled 43% in Parsloes, 42% in Alibon and Goresbrook, 41% in Valence and 39% in Mayesbrook. Inwards the BNP didn't contest, UKIP polled strongly, a whole decade ahead of the EU referendum. They polled 30% in Heath and River, and 29% in Becontree and Thames.

Much hand-wringing occurred trying to comprehend what had happened and why it happened. It was one of the earliest examples of the growing alienation of white working-class voters from their traditional party: Labour. The BNP lost all its seats in 2010 as the much higher general election turnout of Labour voters swamped their vote. Their vote held up but Labour's sky-rocketed.

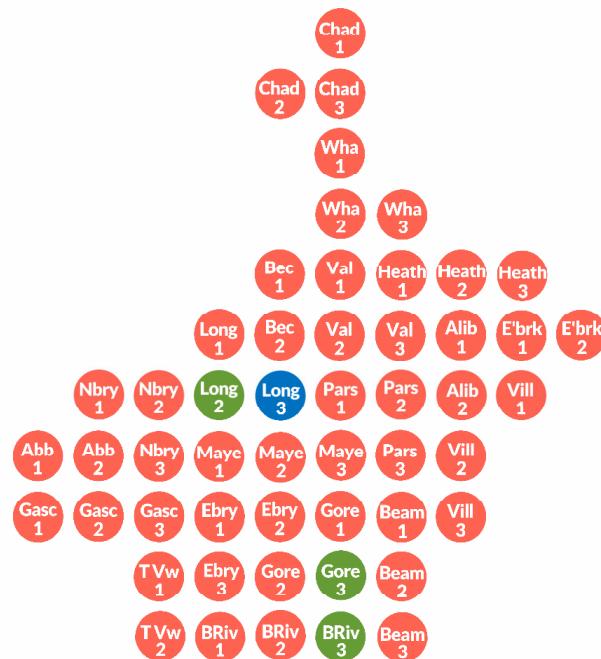
In 2014, the peak year for UKIP, there was again a huge nonconformist vote - just less noticed because, despite big votes, they won no seats. Broadly, the wards where UKIP polled strongly were those in which the BNP did well in 2006: **Alibon, Parsloes and Valence**, for example. But they also did well elsewhere: **Chadwell Heath, Eastbrook and Heath**.

The alienation that fuelled these substantial votes for parties regarded as far from the mainstream at the time was driven by very rapid demographic transformation of the outer East End. Insular, tight knit communities suddenly experienced a large influx of people seemingly very different, who often spoke a different language. This fostered discomfort - and it manifested in votes against the party they perceived had imposed this change on them with no mandate.

Barking and Dagenham is no longer an overwhelmingly white working class borough: it's no longer even majority white (45% white, 26% Asian, 21% Afro-Caribbean). These are the first London elections since 2006 with Labour in the midterm

of government, even if the BNP still existed, any repeat of that result would be highly unlikely. This is no longer the same borough.

But the ethnic mix is not evenly spread. The Becontree estate (Alibon, Becontree, Eastbrook, Goresbrook, Mayesbrook, Parsloes and Valence) and the Romford borders (Eastbrook, Heath and Village) remain substantially white British, especially in London terms.



Barking old and new - that is: the historic old town (**Abbey, Gascoigne, Northbury** and **Longbridge**), and the new, huge Thames- and Roding-side developments (**Barking Riverside, Beam, Thames View**), are overwhelmingly diverse with relatively small white populations.

It is unlikely Reform will be the main challenger in these wards. There is the potential of a serious Green challenge based on their showing in the July 2025 Thames View by-election (30% to Labour's 36%) and the defection to the Greens of one of the Barking Riverside Labour councillors. Of their three defectors, this is the one the Greens might successfully defend - though it's no slam-dunk.

By-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Ref	Grn
Heath	+6.2	-11.5	+2.1		+3.3
Mayesbrook	+2.1	-22.3	+6.0		+14.2
Northbury	-7.6	-12.1	+5.0	+10.4	+4.3
Village	+17.0	-27.8	+3.6		+6.6
Whalebone	-5.4	-14.5	+9.6		+10.3
Thames View	-11.4	-28.8		+21.3	+29.9

Italics show party that didn't contest the 2022 elections but did stand in the by-election so, strictly speaking, they're not increases: just the actual vote share won in the by-election

Barking and Dagenham retains characteristics that stand it apart from the bulk of London Labour boroughs to the west. Most starkly, it voted 62% Leave in a capital that voted 60% Remain in the 2016 EU referendum, though that margin would have been closer had the current demographic been present a decade ago.

But, in theory, those differences and that electoral history give Reform some prospects here, especially at the Dagenham end of the borough, around the edges of Romford.

Electoral Calculus is currently forecasting that, in a general election, Reform would poll most votes in every ward in the borough bar three. That's not as surprising as it may at first appear because general elections tend to attract a far broader range of contestants than local elections and, therefore, Reform needs a much lower share of the vote to be tipped a ward in a general election scenario than in "real life" as it were.

possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Barking Riverside (1 Grn - def)
- ▶ Goresbrook (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Longbridge (1 Con, 1 Grn - defs)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Alibon (2 Lab)
- ▶ Becontree (3 Lab)
- ▶ Chadwell Heath (3 Lab)
- ▶ Eastbrook and Rush Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ Goresbrook (3 Lab)
- ▶ Heath (3 Lab)
- ▶ Mayesbrook (3 Lab)
- ▶ Parsloes (3 Lab)
- ▶ Valence (3 Lab)
- ▶ Village (3 Lab)
- ▶ Whalebone (3 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Barking Riverside (3 Lab)
- ▶ Longbridge (3 Lab)
- ▶ Thames View (2 Lab)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Eastbrook and Rush Green (2 Lab)
- ▶ Longbridge (1 Lab, 1 Grn)
- ▶ Village (3 Lab)

The Conservatives are very weak in this borough: always have been, and were unable to find enough candidates to contest every seat last time. The other parties fared even worse: just twelve candidates fielded from all of them combined.

So, on the one hand, there is almost a deserted battlefield for Reform to occupy here. But this is also a problem for Reform because, if repeated this time, it means they are up against absolutely massive Labour vote piles. To win they need disaffected Labour voters who would never choose them splitting off towards the Greens, Lib Dems and independents.

Reform or anyone might win with 30% of the vote in a multi-party contest but 30% in a two-party fight equals a massive defeat. This happened to the Conservatives in 2022 despite winning a decent share of the vote.

So for Labour to be in real jeopardy in Barking and Dagenham it doesn't just need a big surge to another party: it requires a multi-party contest, ward by ward. That may happen given how poorly Labour is polling but we need to see actual candidates nominated, not just poll results. This has been the least competitive borough in London for decades, almost stuck in a time warp from an era when councillors were routinely elected unopposed.

Probably the best target for Reform is **Eastbrook & Rush Green** in the corner of the borough nearest Romford, which has been the top Tory hope for at least three elections. They should also have shots at **Alibon, Eastbury, Goresbrook, Heath, Mayesbrook, Parsloes, Village, Chadwell Heath and Whalebone** (though they failed to stand a candidate in the ward's 2025 by-election).

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Abbey	22.3	20.1	53.5	11.3	13.1	26.8	45.5	54.5	48.8	16.9
Alibon	46.9	27.2	24.5	38.9	17.6	16.8	30.2	69.8	31.2	24.3
Barking Riverside	36.0	39.0	20.9	19.3	32.0	25.4	40.6	59.4	43.7	16.0
Beam	48.0	21.3	29.7	29.8	24.7	19.3	29.4	70.6	31.3	23.5
Becontree	43.1	28.1	27.2	30.0	16.0	28.6	30.6	69.4	30.4	24.0
Chadwell Heath	49.2	30.2	19.9	32.4	15.5	23.6	36.3	63.7	32.1	23.1
Eastbrook and Rush Green	60.1	23.5	15.7	50.3	14.2	12.5	37.7	62.3	30.2	24.4
Eastbury	41.8	34.4	22.8	32.3	17.7	24.3	31.7	68.3	31.9	24.3
Gascoigne	23.9	42.5	26.7	16.9	24.7	34.3	36.9	63.1	40.3	18.9
Goresbrook	39.2	37.0	22.2	41.3	19.3	15.8	30.0	70.0	29.2	25.3
Heath	40.8	39.8	17.3	38.3	23.6	17.0	32.9	67.1	32.6	22.9
Longbridge	67.4	10.9	21.4	17.3	8.2	51.6	42.3	57.7	34.7	19.8
Mayesbrook	36.2	37.3	25.0	32.5	19.0	20.6	32.7	67.3	32.8	23.7
Northbury	27.3	28.7	40.1	12.5	20.7	39.1	33.0	67.0	37.5	21.0
Parsloes	43.6	35.7	20.0	40.7	17.5	16.6	30.3	69.7	29.0	24.8
Thames View	35.9	44.3	17.7	23.2	25.2	30.5	32.2	67.8	33.4	23.5
Valence	43.4	34.1	21.3	39.9	14.5	20.5	31.3	68.7	28.2	25.5

It is not necessarily just Reform Labour needs to be wary of. There are now organised pro-Gaza independents standing in Ilford - which merges seamlessly into Barking; and in East Ham, just across the river Roding.

Wards like **Longbridge**; once the only ward the Tories could win here (and once again with a Conservative councillor following a defection from Labour), now have sizeable Muslim populations. Voters this year may think having more councillors to challenge Labour and seek help from would better serve them, especially if they are uninspired by the monopoly party that has never lost an election here.

The Conservatives did pretty well in the [Dagenham] **Village** by-election in November 2024 (23% swing from Labour) but that was without Reform standing. It suggests that "old" Dagenham may suddenly be receptive to parties other than Labour.

The December Electoral Calculus General Election MRP had Labour in third place in Barking (Reform 34%, Green 24%, Labour 18%, Conservatives 11%) and fourth place in Dagenham and Rainham (Reform 45%, Green 17%, Conservatives 16%, Labour 15%).

These figures - anything remotely in the same ballpark as these figures - would not be survivable by Labour in a council election. People can vote radically differently in different types of elections. The MRP may be wrong. Most importantly, not all these parties will have the activists to enable them to contest every seat in May.

Barking and Dagenham is the borough Reform is most likely to win after Bexley. Havering would be - and there's not much in it - but the long established and deeply embedded Residents Associations there complicate Reform's path to power. If all three boroughs fall, that's one apiece gained from Conservatives, Labour and Residents. With the correct demographics Reform can beat anyone.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result		51			
Dec 22 defection: Lynda Rice (Longbridge) - Lab to Ind		50			1
Mar 23 by-election: Heath - Lab hold (Lab -11.5)		50			1
Sep 23 by-election: Mayesbrook - Lab hold (Lab -22.3)		50			1
Nov 24 by-election: Village - Lab hold (Lab -27.2)		50			1
Nov 24 by-election: Northbury - Lab hold (Lab -12.1)		50			1
Feb 25 by-election: Whalebone - Lab hold (Lab -14.5)		50			1
Jul 25 by-election: Thames View - Lab hold (Lab -28.8)		50			1
Sep 25 defection: Lynda Rice (Longbridge) Ind to Con	1	50			
Sep 25 defection: Victoria Hornby (Barking Riverside) - Lab to Grn	1	49		1	
Sep 25 defection: Moin Qadri (Goresbrook) - Lab to Grn	1	48		2	
Sep 25 defection: Faruk Choudhury (Longbridge) - Lab to Grn	1	47		3	

The first of Labour's three London gains in 2022 was Barnet and, of those three, it is the one they have the best chance of retaining.

That is not certain because there is plentiful evidence from by-elections (including Burnt Oak in this borough) that Labour is struggling to turn its vote out. But Conservative performance has been unimpressive here too: notably failing to win by-elections in the key wards of Barnet Vale and Whetstone.

This is because Reform is making a few waves in Barnet: not enough to win, but more than enough to pull enough former Tory voters away in the marginal seats. They've made a point, mostly to needle the Conservatives, of nominating former Tory councillors who've defected in two of the by-elections.

Two serving Tory councillors, one in Finchley Church End, one in Hendon have also defected. Whereas beyond London that might suggest wily individuals sensing which way the electoral winds are blowing and switching before being obliterated, here they're unlikely to survive.

The Conservatives did badly out of the ward boundary review that preceded the last elections. Those changes alone switched four seats from Tory to Labour - eight off their already not-overwhelming majority.

Massive new housing developments (approved by the Conservatives) created additional seats in safe Labour areas like Colindale and the dowdier Cricklewood end of Childs Hill where the IKEA superstore is. Tory seats in safe wards like Garden Suburb and Golders Green were abolished. New swing marginals were created like Barnet Vale.

Marginal seats in Barnet

councillor	ward	maj	%maj
● Richard Barnes	Barnet Vale	38	0.7
● Lachhya Gurung	Edgwarebury	42	1.1
● Nigel Young	Childs Hill	98	2.1
● Sarah Wardle	Edgwarebury	100	2.6
● Simon Radford	East Barnet	113	2.6
● Marianne Haylett	Barnet Vale	176	3.3
● Matthew Perlberg	Childs Hill	190	4.1
● David Longstaff	Barnet Vale	246	4.5
● Laithe Jajeh	Mill Hill	218	4.6
● Edith David	East Barnet	285	5.2
● Tony Vourou	Brunswick Park	275	5.5
● Philip Cohen	East Barnet	318	5.8
● Giulia Innocenti	Childs Hill	315	6.8
● Elliot Simberg	Mill Hill	344	7.3
● Liron Velleman	Whetstone	289	8.2
● Paul Lemon	Brunswick Park	435	8.7
● Giulia Monasterio	Brunswick Park	463	9.3
● Val Duschinsky	Mill Hill	445	9.4
● Richard Cornelius	Totteridge	540	12.1
● Caroline Stock	Totteridge	551	12.3
● Daniel Thomas	Finchley Church End	675	12.5
● Jennifer Grocock	Finchley Church End	690	12.8
● Paul Edwards	High Barnet	540	12.9
● Emma Whysall	High Barnet	547	13.0
● Alison Cornelius	Totteridge	606	13.6
● Ella Rose	Whetstone	562	15.9
● Eva Greenspan	Finchley Church End	892	16.5
● Rishi Chakraborty	West Hendon	734	19.1
● Shuey Gordon	Edgware	1,075	19.8
● Ernest Ambe	West Hendon	764	19.9

But the Conservatives didn't lose Barnet in 2022 because of the boundary changes: they lost because their national unpopularity cost them wards they should have won: the new Whetstone for example, or High Barnet, or Childs Hill shorn of its best Labour territory.

Labour ended up with twice as many councillors as the Conservatives and led by a clear eight percentage points in the popular vote. But Barnet remains a marginal borough. At the 2024 general election Labour won all three constituencies but Hendon has their smallest majority in the entire country: just fifteen votes.

Chipping Barnet fell to Labour for the first time but by just 2,914, while Finchley & Golders Green - the most polarised of the constituencies - has a 4,581 Labour majority.

Ward estimates suggest that very little changed between the local and general election, with the Tories holding the wards in which they won all the seats and Labour holding theirs plus the splits. The gap between the parties didn't change either and, given that 2024 was a poorer year for the Tories than 2022 nationally, that suggests a tiny swing back in Barnet. But nothing to write home about.

Ward	Housing			Religion		Ethnic	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Muslim	Jewish		ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Barnet Vale	63.6	8.0	27.6	6.4	7.1	48.6	63.6	36.4	50.4	12.4
Brunswick Park	70.6	9.5	18.7	11.4	3.7	38.3	56.5	43.5	44.8	15.2
Burnt Oak	37.6	33.2	27.7	19.7	1.1	23.1	35.0	65.0	35.2	23.4
Childs Hill	43.2	9.5	46.6	13.0	19.9	32.0	62.2	37.8	53.9	14.5
Colindale North	27.2	42.4	26.9	25.1	1.4	19.0	40.7	59.3	41.6	20.0
Colindale South	34.8	18.0	43.0	22.4	1.4	15.0	55.0	45.0	51.3	14.8
Cricklewood	35.2	23.5	39.7	27.5	2.5	21.2	44.3	55.7	41.1	20.5
East Barnet	62.6	9.3	27.6	8.5	4.7	49.9	55.2	44.8	44.0	15.2
East Finchley	47.6	23.1	28.4	9.6	8.1	42.8	66.0	34.0	56.5	12.6
Edgware	60.0	8.8	29.4	11.7	28.8	36.5	58.1	41.9	49.5	15.4
Edgwarebury	62.6	13.2	23.3	12.1	28.4	41.0	54.2	45.8	43.3	16.3
Finchley Church End	57.4	4.7	37.5	7.8	30.1	38.7	66.8	33.2	56.2	13.3
Friern Barnet	51.8	14.8	32.8	12.0	4.2	36.8	54.9	45.1	47.4	15.9
Garden Suburb	69.3	5.4	25.0	6.3	40.9	47.4	77.9	22.1	64.9	8.4
Golders Green	43.9	7.9	47.7	5.8	49.7	44.2	58.0	42.0	42.8	16.8
Hendon	42.6	9.8	47.2	9.4	32.6	35.6	51.9	48.1	46.8	15.6
High Barnet	67.1	10.4	21.7	6.4	7.0	56.5	68.3	31.7	52.1	13.4
Mill Hill	63.9	8.8	26.6	12.8	21.5	40.5	62.8	37.2	50.9	14.0
Totteridge and Woodside	66.5	9.2	23.3	9.3	18.8	38.4	72.9	27.1	59.6	10.7
Underhill	56.6	24.6	17.2	8.2	2.7	48.1	55.8	44.2	42.9	17.4
West Finchley	52.3	6.0	41.2	10.1	9.2	31.6	63.5	36.5	55.6	13.4
West Hendon	41.5	14.3	43.3	18.6	6.3	19.3	45.9	54.1	44.3	19.9
Whetstone	64.3	9.1	24.4	8.2	8.8	41.7	65.9	34.1	52.9	13.5
Woodhouse	50.2	10.6	37.5	12.3	4.7	34.1	55.8	44.2	47.6	17.6

There's everything to play for. The critical issue in 2026 across most Conservative-Labour London borough battle-grounds is whether Labour will lose more votes to abstention or parties to their left than the Tories lose to Reform. And here it seems there's very little in it.

That's why Labour may be slightly favoured to hold Barnet: in the battle of who could not care less, the Tories are ahead...or behind - whichever way you want to look at it.

And to complicate things further, what if one side of the borough is moving away from Labour while the other is still giving them the benefit of the doubt? What if the Tories fare better on the Hendon side than the Barnet side?

That would mean they could regain wards like **Childs Hill** and maybe pull off surprises in **Colindale South** and **West Hendon** while making insufficient headway in **East Barnet**, **High Barnet** or **Barnet Vale**. That would be a real problem for the Tories because there are far more marginals in the east - but it would explain, for example, why Labour could defend Whetstone comfortably enough in that ward's by-election.

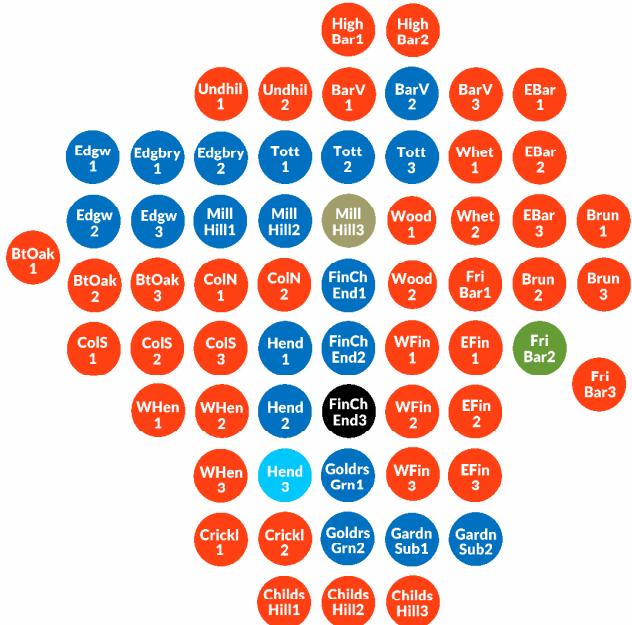
By-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Ref	Gru
Finchley Church End	+1.0	+4.4	-2.5		- 2.3
Barnet Vale	- 1.1	+3.6	+0.2		- 2.6
Golders Green	+4.2	+3.2	-19.2	+10.5	- 4.2
Whetstone	- 9.0	-16.2	+6.1	+20.5	- 5.7
Burnt Oak	- 1.8	-18.1	+3.9	+18.4	- 5.4
Hendon	+3.4	-12.9	-2.2	+30.2	- 2.8

Italics show party that didn't contest the 2022 elections but did stand in the by-election so, strictly speaking, they're not increases: just the actual vote share won in the by-election

There is one other spectre Labour had believed it had slain in 2022: and that is a renewed antagonism within the (huge) Jewish population here. Under Jeremy Corbyn it was widely perceived that anti-Semitism among some Labour members tipped several wards away from the party.

Today it is the government's over-dependence on its Muslim constituency, the backlash Jews have experienced over the



Gaza conflict and the perception of two-tier policing and dishonest spin about issues like the banning of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans from their match with Aston Villa in Birmingham.

All the wards with the really large Jewish populations are already Conservative held so the electoral impact is lesser in council elections, but **Childs Hill** and **West Hendon** may have enough Jewish electors to swing the result.

In contrast, the wards with the largest Muslim communities - which are growing - are Labour held. How much does that electoral reality for Labour affect their approach to the two communities?

Barnet still looks very much like a two-party fight. The Lib Dems briefly surged during those turbulent Corbyn years with defector Lucianna Berger winning second place in the 2019 general election in Finchley and Golders Green.

The Lib Dems failed to follow through in the 2022 council elections, getting fairly distant runners-up spots in **East Finchley**, **Finchley Church End** and **West Finchley**, but declining in wards they won relatively recently, like **Childs Hill**.

Hill and Mill Hill. The cause of their failure beyond those core Finchley wards was the decision by those who wanted the Tories out to align behind Labour. So it was Labour that ran the Tories quite close even in wards like **Mill Hill** and **Totteridge and Woodside** despite never challenging there before. Now Labour has ousted the Tories the momentum has faded and opportunities for others will emerge.

At the front of the queue is Reform. Where might they compete strongly? The demographic changes that shifted Chipping Barnet from a safe Conservative constituency to one Labour won fairly handily harm Reform just as much.

Had Reform been a national presence thirty years ago, it might have challenged somewhere like **High Barnet**, **Edgware** or **Whetstone**. I don't think these are likely Reform wards anymore: they simply contain too many voters who'd vote for almost anyone other than Nigel Farage.

Maybe Reform's best chance is the large ward in the middle of the borough: **Totteridge and Woodside**. Despite the near 10% swing to Labour in 2022 they were nowhere near winning. Travelling along Totteridge Common is like being in the country, though the ward's main population centres are next to Whetstone and North Finchley in the south east.

Two Conservative councillors defected to Reform: one in **Hendon** ward, the other in **Finchley Church End** (who's subsequently quit the council). These are definitely Reform possibilities though there was a by-election in Hendon ward in November 2025 and, while Reform won a strong 30% of the vote, the Conservatives held them off. **Finchley Church End** covers adjoining and pretty similar territory to Hendon but is a bit less Conservative.

Mill Hill might also be a potential target: somewhat more suburban than Hendon; more mixed than Hendon and somewhere that had a habit of not electing Conservatives when they were last very unpopular in the 1990s. Did Mill Hill vote Lib Dem because it's intrinsically liberal? I don't think so.

This is one of those areas that valued hard-working, visible pavement-politics councillors. Mill Hill also gained a chunk of the old marginal Hale in 2022, so there is quite a potent non-Conservative vote there.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Barnet Vale (1 Con)
- ▶ Edgwarebury (2 Con)
- ▶ Friern Barnet (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Mill Hill (3 Con)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Barnet Vale (2 Lab)
- ▶ Brunswick Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Childs Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Colindale South (3 Lab)
- ▶ East Barnet (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hendon (1 Ref - defec)
- ▶ High Barnet (2 Lab)
- ▶ Mill Hill (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ West Hendon (3 Lab)
- ▶ Whetstone (2 Lab)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Edgware (3 Con)
- ▶ Finchley Church End (2 Con, 1 vac)
- ▶ Hendon (2 Con)
- ▶ Mill Hill (2 Con, 1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Totteridge and Woodside (3 Con)
- ▶ Underhill (2 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Cricklewood (2 Lab)
- ▶ East Finchley (3 Lab)
- ▶ Friern Barnet (3 Lab)
- ▶ Woodhouse (2 Lab)

Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Childs Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Finchley Church End (2 Con, 1 vac)
- ▶ West Finchley (3 Lab)

Reform could try its luck in Labour wards too, though they will almost certainly come up short. The Labour vote in **Burnt Oak** - a big council estate that has always been one of their strongest wards in London - collapsed in a 2024 by-election and it all seemed to go to Reform. But even though Labour won less than 50% for the first time, and could fall further in May, they were still miles ahead there.

Colindale North might be a bit better: another safe Labour ward adjoining Burnt Oak and containing most of "old" Colindale but a few notches weaker. Colindale North now contains more public housing than Burnt Oak, though that's not as useful a measure of Labour strength as once it was.

Reform might have a shot at **Underhill** in the borough's north. This ward, the former home of Barnet FC football club, is fairly white, not especially affluent and evenly balanced between ABC1s and C2DEs. It's not the most accessible area so it hasn't had the influx of younger liberal professionals that has swung much of Chipping Barnet to Labour. If Reform is going to win a Labour ward in Barnet I'd tip **Underhill**.

That leaves the Greens. Their indifferent performance across the board in Barnet last time means that, if they win anything,

it'll be a surprise. As the demographic profile of their vote is almost the mirror of Reform's look at the wards closest to London predominantly Labour-held, with ethnically diverse populations: **Friern Barnet, East Finchley, and Cricklewood**. These are safe Labour wards but the spine has gone from their vote: it's now weak and could slide to the Greens.

The Greens could also entice enough voters from Labour in some marginals to throw the result to the Tories. Look to wards like **Brunswick Park, East Barnet, Barnet Vale, High Barnet** and **Whetstone** if this happens. The same is true of Reform regarding the Conservative vote but in a borough like Barnet (and especially its eastern side) the Greens should exert a greater pull than Respect can.

I began by stating that Barnet is the most likely of the three boroughs Labour gained in 2022 to stay faithful to the party. And it is. But that's not the same thing as saying Barnet definitely will stay with them. Maybe their comfortable majority will be resilient. The fact the Tories are struggling almost as much as Labour right now helps. But Labour's polling trough is so deep that they may not be able to cling on, even though they possibly could.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	G	R	O
May 22 council election result	22	41			
Jan 23 defection: Linda Lusingu (Friern Barnet) Lab to Ind	22	40			1
Feb 23 by-election: Golders Green - Con hold	22	40			1
Jul 24 by-election: Barnet Vale - Lab hold	22	40			1
Oct 24: defection: Laithe Jajeh (Mill Hill) Con to Ind	21	40			2
Feb 25 by-election: Burnt Oak - Lab hold	21	40			2
Feb 25 defection: Mark Shooter (Hendon) Con to Ref	20	40		1	2
Mar 25 by-election: Finchley Church End - Con hold	20	40		1	2
May 25 by-election: Whetstone - Lab hold	20	40		1	2
Jun 25 defection: Daniel Thomas (Finchley Church End) Con to Ref	19	40		2	2
Oct 25 by-election: Hendon - Con hold	19	40		2	2
Dec 25 vacancy: Daniel Thomas (Finchley Church End) resigned	19	40		1	2
Feb 25 defection: Linda Lusingu (Friern Barnet) Ind to Grn	19	40	1	1	1

Go to the Electoral Calculus website and, right now, it is forecasting that in a general election, Reform UK would win every ward in the Bexleyheath & Crayford constituency: the central chunk of Bexley borough; plus Belvedere in the north.

It's conceivable Electoral Calculus is wrong: Erith, Northumberland Heath and Northend and Slade Green could also fall to Reform: only very different Thamesmead East does not look like a ward that would consider that party of the populist right.

The London boroughs that are most promising for Reform: Bexley and Havering are the ones least like the rest of the city. Both are apart from London: Havering across the green corridor along the valley of the river Beam; Bexley by Oxleas Wood and Avery Hill.

Both share similarities with places that for the past couple of decades at least have heavily favoured the Tories, joined in the 2024 backlash against them by swinging to Labour as the best means of ousting them, then rapidly got buyers' remorse. Now they're giving serious consideration to Nigel Farage's Party - a party that culturally is far closer to their values than Labour has been for three decades at least.

There is a case to be made for the Conservatives to at least do better than expected. This is not a borough with a moribund Conservative organisation as Richmond, Sutton and Kingston were when the Liberals began organising there. Bexley has seen waves of threat to Conservative control from Lib Dems and Labour but were either been seen off or the Tories rebounded rapidly.

Labour won council majorities as recently as 2002, though their collapse among more affluent, white communities across the centre of the borough, coupled with boundary

changes that substantially shrank the council to just 45 seats, relegated the party to the industrialised Thames-side wards. In 2021, following the death of Conservative MP James Brokenshire, the party relatively easily defended Old Bexley and Sidcup, winning over half the vote while Reform (Richard Tice was their candidate) polled just 7%. Reform managed 22% at the 2024 General Election but were more than 7,500 votes behind the Conservatives.

Despite the real threat to their seats, no Bexley councillor has defected to Reform. That suggests a united group confident that their management of the council and their roots in their communities are strong. But it will be a huge achievement to turn back Reform in an election many voters will view as the best chance to kick the government rather than weigh up the merits of their local council's leadership.

So the working class nature of much of Bexley has been strong enough to elect Labour on occasion. But it also has a fondness for the "none of the above" option.

Despite not being a remotely liberal area, parts of Bexley have a history of electing centre party councillors - sixteen of them in 1994. Whatever was left of any fondness for the Lib Dems broke in 2016 when the party campaigned so noisily for Remain in the EU referendum. 63% of Bexley voted Leave.

For years, the neighbourhood of Welling was where the BNP had its headquarters which generated unwanted far-right activity and counter protests.

In 2014, UKIP won three council seats, in **Blackfen & Lamorbey, Colyers** (Barnehurst) and the East Wickham ward of **St Michael's**. Across the borough UKIP polled 22% but polled around 30% in wards like **Falconwood & Welling, Belvedere, Blendon & Penhill** and **Longlands** in Sidcup.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Barnehurst	73.2	15.0	10.6	71.1	9.0	3.4	43.6	56.4	28.4	18.5
Belvedere	56.5	16.1	26.6	47.3	17.4	4.6	40.2	59.8	33.4	20.1
Bexleyheath	78.8	6.7	13.3	70.3	5.0	3.2	48.9	51.1	31.1	17.8
Blackfen & Lamorbey	83.0	4.3	12.2	79.9	3.0	2.8	47.6	52.4	27.9	16.7
Blendon & Penhill	85.7	3.6	10.1	80.7	3.2	2.9	48.8	51.2	28.1	16.1
Crayford	61.8	20.9	15.2	70.5	8.6	4.0	44.0	56.0	29.4	18.7
Crook Log	77.0	6.1	16.0	67.3	4.2	3.4	51.1	48.9	33.3	17.0
East Wickham	74.9	11.8	12.5	62.2	6.3	4.3	44.3	55.7	29.9	20.5
Erith	45.9	27.8	19.9	46.0	22.8	6.0	42.0	58.0	35.7	18.5
Falconwood & Welling	79.2	4.9	14.9	62.9	6.6	4.4	46.0	54.0	31.2	17.4
Longlands	74.0	11.9	13.3	79.5	2.6	2.4	55.1	44.9	34.3	15.1
Northumberland Heath	70.2	16.3	12.7	66.9	10.0	3.2	40.4	59.6	26.8	20.3
St Mary's & St James	75.1	11.1	11.8	78.1	4.1	2.0	56.5	43.5	34.0	15.8
Sidcup	62.5	15.8	19.6	74.9	4.7	2.9	52.7	47.3	33.1	17.4
Slade Green & Northend	48.1	34.2	16.2	47.3	27.6	5.8	39.4	60.6	35.0	21.2
Thamesmead East	33.6	43.5	22.0	30.2	39.9	7.8	34.6	65.4	37.7	19.3
West Heath	83.8	6.3	9.0	68.2	6.6	3.0	46.0	54.0	29.0	18.2

So there is a broad and deep reservoir of support ready to vote Reform. Given that the party is polling twenty percentage points stronger today than UKIP managed in 2014, a Reform landslide might seem inevitable.

But if the Conservatives are a little bit more competitive, this record of fighting hard ward by ward for years, rather than just resting on their laurels and rarely contacting their constituents, could keep enough seats in their column.

Indeed, harking back to Electoral Calculus, in the autumn of 2025 the website was forecasting not just every ward in Bexleyheath and Crayford would vote Reform but all in Old Bexley and Sidcup would too. Today it's suggesting the Conservatives would outpoll Reform in all the wards in this constituency at a general election.

Forecasts like this need to be taken lightly. Their forecasts pertain to general not local elections. We are still probably more than three years from a general election. And there is a

greater difficulty in accurately polling local elections - which, again, Electoral Calculus isn't attempting to do.

But let's assume it's correct for a moment. It would mean 19 Conservatives would win, plus 9 Labour from Thamesmead East and Erith wards. That would leave 17 Reform councillors and a hung council. It would probably compel the two right-of-centre parties to come to some arrangement.

As for Labour, they have been hindered by three factors: a big reduction in the size of the council, very unhelpful boundary changes in 2018, and the growing void between the cultural values of the party and the residents of most of Bexley.

Bexley, except for the wards Labour holds, is not typical of London. You do not find wards that are 80% white British anywhere in the boroughs further to the centre, as **Blendon and Penhill** ward is.

Possible target wards

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Belvedere (3 Lab)
- ▶ Blackfen and Lamorbey (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Crayford (1 Ind - defection)
- ▶ Falconwood and Welling (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Northumberland Heath (2 Lab)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Barnehurst (2 Con)
- ▶ Crayford (3 Con)
- ▶ East Wickham (3 Con)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Barnehurst (2 Con)
- ▶ Belvedere (3 Lab)
- ▶ Bexleyheath (3 Con)
- ▶ Blackfen and Lamorbey (3 Con)
- ▶ Crayford (3 Con)
- ▶ Crook Log (3 Con)
- ▶ East Wickham (3 Con)
- ▶ Erith (3 Lab)
- ▶ Falconwood and Welling (3 Con)
- ▶ Northumberland Heath (2 Lab)
- ▶ Slade Green and Northend (2 Lab)
- ▶ West Heath (2 Con)

A far smaller proportion of Bexley residents hold degrees than is typical for London. But this doesn't denote relative poverty - it's simply that the borough is populated with more of those who left school at 16 or 18 and went to often quite

lucrative skilled manual work. There are lots of white van drivers in Bexley.

That's why the proportion of ABC1s: the statisticians' way of describing those in so-called "top" jobs: the engines of commerce and the professions, isn't especially high here either. If you have a skilled, high-paying job, you get bracketed as a C2 - even though you likely earn more than a lawyer, doctor or civil servant with similar years in their job.

In every Bexley ward, C2DEs outnumber ABC1s. That doesn't make Bexley poor or "deprived". In Islington - ranked as a borough with far worse deprivation than Bexley - the reverse is true, by a long way. Bexley has far more in common with Dartford and Gravesham and Medway than it does with Greenwich and Lewisham and Southwark.

The link between statistics measuring affluence and academic qualifications have lost a lot of salience as the metropolitan rich have swung to Labour while culturally the party has moved away less affluent, working class voters.

Of the Bexley wards Labour holds, only **Thamesmead East** is truly mid-term election disaster-proof. This is the Bexley side of the huge GLC estate built on reclaimed marshland. A council estate ward in a borough not known for vast quantities of council housing, with a black population larger than its white one - again anomalous.

Labour can then nearly always rely on **Erith** and **Slade Green and Northend**; and somewhat less dependable **Belvedere**.

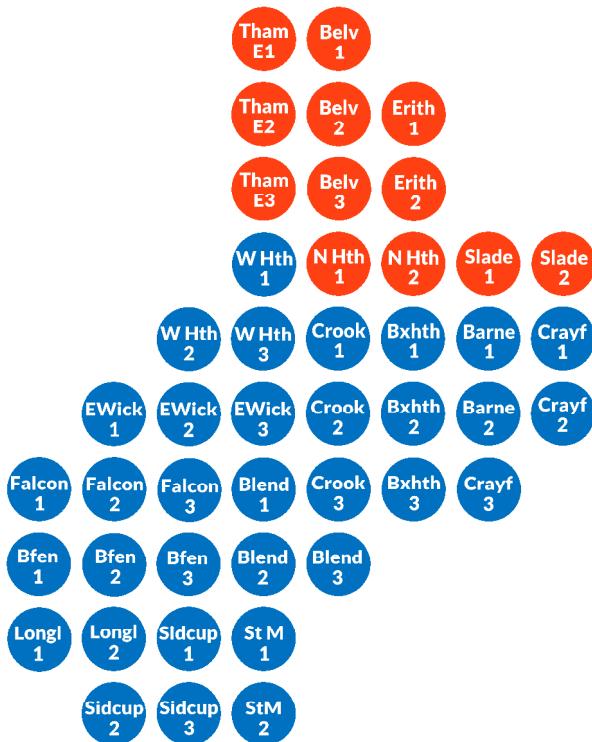
Northumberland Heath, their fifth ward, is marginal because it is the closest Labour-held division to the norm in Bexley.

It would be a little surprising if Labour held on here and they might also struggle in **Slade Green and Northend**, **Erith** and **Belvedere**.

Labour held a seat in **Belvedere** in an autumn 2024 by-election - before the government's rapid loss of popularity had kicked in, but even then the Labour vote was down

seventeen points and the combined Conservative-Reform vote was nearly 50%: significantly more than Labour won.

If, however, Labour was to defy the odds and make gains, where might these come from?



Labour was less than a hundred from winning here in 2022 and only didn't because the Tory vote rose almost as much as theirs. **Crayford** is far more likely to vote Reform than Labour this year.

Then, tucked south of Plumstead and across Shooters Hill from Woolwich is **East Wickham** which Labour missed out on by just 43 votes in 2022. East Wickham might prove slightly

more resilient to the allure of Reform than Crayford and thus give Labour a better chance of a gain, but if they do it'll almost certainly be with a vote much lower than they managed last time.

In the 2018 council boundary review the number of councillors was cut to just 45 - down from 63. Fewer councillors meant wards became a lot larger. And that in turn meant that Labour enclaves which contained enough votes to get their party elected in smaller wards were engulfed by surrounding Conservative neighbourhoods.

Labour used to be able, in pretty decent years, to win the old Cray Meadows ward in Sidcup. But that relatively small ward got amalgamated with St Mary's - the safest Tory ward in the borough - and this amalgam Labour cannot get close to.

There used to be a Lesnes Abbey ward on the borough border with Plumstead which was usually Labour. But the best Labour bits of Lesnes Abbey were moved to Belvedere and the rest became **West Heath** - similar to the old Bostall ward - which is fairly comfortably Conservative. Labour-leaning Colyers became Conservative-leaning Barnehurst.

But because beyond those aberrant northern wards most of the rest of Bexley is socially, economically and demographically very similar, if a party can break through in one ward it could well mean that a whole slate of adjoining wards move the same way at the same time.

So, beyond Crayford and East Wickham, Labour lost several wards by about similar amounts: **Barnehurst, Bexleyheath, Falconwood and Welling, Crook Log, West Heath and Blackfen and Lamorbey**. Labour isn't going to win these this year but the same reality serves Reform as well as Labour: if they get one they'll probably get a load.

And this is why Bexley is Reform's best target in London: the Conservatives will not be able to defend every one of their seats. When one gets breached, a whole lot will likely fall.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	O
May 22 council election result	33	12			
May 24 defection: Nigel Betts (Falconwood and Welling) Con to Ind	32	12			1
Jul 24 defection: Felix De Netimah (Crayford) Con to Ind	31	12			2
Oct 24 by-election: Belvedere Lab hold (Lab -15.6)	31	12			2
Feb 25 suspension: James Hunt (Blackfen and Lamorbey) Con to Ind	30	12			3

Brent began as a battle between fairly Labour Willesden and massively Conservative Wembley. You wouldn't know that looking at the 2022 results where just five Tories clung on against a phalanx of forty-two Labour councillors.

It's worth reflecting on how much Brent has swung to Labour through demographic change: Preston and Northwick Park wards gave the Tories 70% of the vote as recently as 1990, Kenton: 74%, Barnhill: 75%.

The Conservatives were also competitive in the borough's east: the old Brentwater, Brondesbury Park, Cricklewood, Gladstone and Mapesbury wards, for example.

There were also very safe Labour neighbourhoods, mostly running along the southern edge of the borough like Kilburn, Kensal Rise, Harlesden, Stonebridge and Alperton.

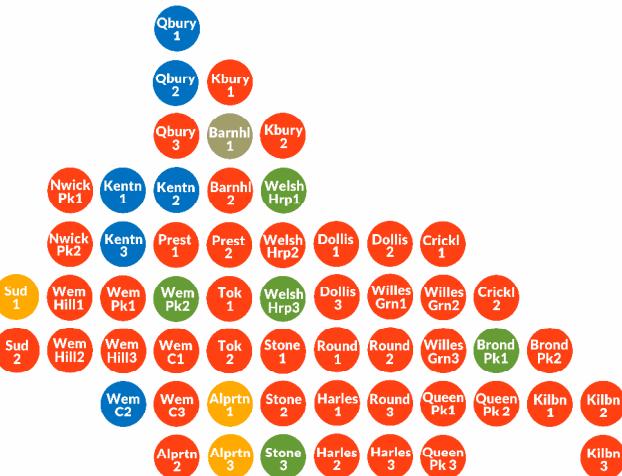
But the Conservative strength in Brent usually appeared greater than it was because this was one of Labour's "loony left" boroughs and voters who, elsewhere, would have been loyally Labour often turned out to keep Labour from power, or at least prevent their wins from becoming landslides.

Brent see-sawed politically. Labour lost its majority in 1982; regained it in 1986, lost it in 1990 (kept in power by the Lib Dems); then ousted in 1991. In 1994 the council remained hung and eventually the Conservatives cobbled together an administration only to lose it in 1996 when one of their councillors died. Labour returned in 1998 but lost again in 2006 following the Brent East by-election during the Iraq War backlash. Since 2014, however, Labour's majority has surged to record margins.

This frequent change in administration fuelled the sense of crisis and rapid changes of policy direction also did not help deliver stability for the borough's residents.

It wouldn't quite be accurate to say the political dynamics of Brent were unique within the firmament of councils run by the left. But unlike, say, Haringey or Hackney and to a lesser extent Lambeth, Brent was a genuinely competitive borough back in the day.

You might think that the threat of losing power might act as a moderating force. It did not - on either side. The Conservatives were as equally confrontational and determined to implement as aggressive an agenda that appealed to their voters as Labour was.



There were also the more complex issues of race in Brent - again, not completely different from other deprived urban London boroughs, but in their wider diversity here even more turbulent. So much of this was about identity and how Labour managed those tensions.

How, for example, the larger black community of Caribbean heritage interacted with the smaller African community, became crucial when in 1991 two African councillors quit

Labour and voted the Conservatives into power, partly in exchange for the sinecures of committee chairs but also, they alleged, because of bullying by Labour Caribbean councillors.

There was also a large and growing community of Asians - principally of Indian Hindu and Sikh origin, but also Ugandans; and a large established Irish community in Kilburn.

Much of the tabloid coverage of Labour's antics in Brent focussed on race rather than other totems (though posturing on nuclear-free zones and poor financial management leading to rate-capping existed here too) because this was the flavour of Labour radicalism here. Brent in the 1980s and early 1990s was still a mostly white borough that could be irritated by too great a focus on minority communities.

Brent council elected Britain's first black council leader: Merle Amory, in 1986. She was succeeded by Dorman Long. Brent South's Paul Boateng was one of the four ethnic minority Labour MPs - alongside Diane Abbott, Keith Vaz and Bernie Grant - elected for the first time in 1987. Brent has been led by Mohammed Butt for fourteen years. Ensuring that Brent's minority communities were represented within the town hall was central to Labour's mission - and they succeeded: this became the first council with a majority ethnic minority workforce.

But, as seen with those defectors who shunted Labour out of power in 1991: Nkechi Amalu-Johnson and Poline Nyaga, Labour's councillors have been somewhat volatile.

There was Latikaben Patel - Labour's deputy leader, who switched to the Conservatives in 1994 and won election for his new party in Tokyngton.

There was Bertha Joseph, who was retained the mayoralty of Brent after crossing the council chamber to the Tories.

In late 2025 Raja Rajan-Seelan in Wembley Central became another Labour defector to the Conservatives while five Labour councillors switched to the Greens (four after deselection).

Possible key wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Alperton (2 LD)
- ▶ Barnhill (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Brondesbury Park (1 Grn- defec)
- ▶ Kenton (3 Con)
- ▶ Queensbury (2 Con)
- ▶ Stonebridge (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Sudbury (1 LD)
- ▶ Welsh Harp (2 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Wembley Central (1 Con - defec)
- ▶ Wembley Park (1 Grn - defec)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Barnhill (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Kingsbury (2 Lab)
- ▶ Northwick Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Preston (2 Lab)
- ▶ Queensbury (1 Lab)
- ▶ Tokyngton (2 Lab)
- ▶ Welsh Harp (1 Lab, 2 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Wembley Central (2 Con)
- ▶ Wembley Hill (3 Lab)

Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Alperton (1 Lab)
- ▶ Sudbury (1 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Brondesbury Park (1 Lab)
- ▶ Cricklewood & Mapsebury (3 Lab)
- ▶ Harlesden & Kensal Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ Queen's Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Wembley Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Willesden Green (3 Lab)

Why there is quite such turbulence isn't obvious other than that it might be a consequence of Brent being an artificial borough concocted in a Whitehall fever dream and then imposed on residents who got no say in the amalgamation of some very different areas.

That the difference has diminished as the demographics of Brent have continued to change and Labour's leadership has become more staid and stable does not mean that Brent now works well as an administrative entity.

Earlier we looked at the political ping-pong Brent endured for almost a quarter of a century: from the early 1980s to 2010. The political realignment that caused that switch from chaos to one-party stability was the collapse of Brent's Tories.

In 1997 Labour ousted the Tory controversialist Sir Rhodes Boyson on a huge swing of 19%. Barry Gardiner, the seat's first Labour MP, has been in place ever since. While he won, Wembley's Conservative councillors stayed in place for a further decade before losing in 2006 and 2010.

The Lib Dems gained Brent East in that grim mid-term by-election caused by the death of former council leader, then MP, Paul Daisley. They won 27 council seats in 2006 off that by-election and Labour's even deeper unpopularity, mostly in the east of the borough but also in Tokyngton.

Lib Dem MP Sarah Teather then held the rejigged constituency of Brent Central before she stood down in 2015 and the Lib Dem vote collapsed by 35 percentage points.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Ethnic	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Hindu + Sikh	Muslim		ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Alperton	43.5	14.5	37.6	45.1	14.0	10.3	28.1	71.9	31.0	30.1
Barnhill	40.1	26.3	32.4	13.2	29.9	17.2	44.2	55.8	42.5	20.6
Brondesbury Park	41.6	21.1	36.1	4.9	19.5	10.6	63.5	36.5	51.1	16.3
Cricklewood & Mapsebury	32.6	20.8	45.1	2.6	23.1	11.8	50.6	49.4	46.6	19.6
Dollis Hill	39.8	19.9	38.6	6.3	35.6	17.1	35.3	64.7	32.8	26.7
Harlesden & Kensal Green	28.4	32.4	37.6	3.3	19.7	25.3	42.8	57.2	38.2	22.6
Kenton	57.5	13.6	28.0	31.8	13.7	6.5	48.3	51.7	43.2	20.8
Kilburn	24.1	40.9	33.4	2.1	22.1	21.7	56.9	43.1	49.2	16.7
Kingsbury	49.9	16.6	30.1	14.4	23.8	11.3	41.6	58.4	39.3	20.3
Northwick Park	61.9	11.7	25.6	26.6	20.2	9.1	51.5	48.5	45.9	16.3
Preston	45.5	15.0	37.5	21.2	21.5	9.8	39.5	60.5	40.9	20.3
Queens Park	43.6	21.6	34.1	3.1	8.7	11.6	67.0	33.0	55.9	12.9
Queensbury	53.6	11.3	32.7	30.1	15.9	7.5	38.8	61.2	37.7	24.0
Roundwood	22.5	41.6	32.0	4.0	27.8	29.2	35.0	65.0	33.3	24.1
Stonebridge	17.7	55.9	22.7	4.9	36.2	38.7	36.2	63.8	33.1	23.8
Sudbury	44.9	13.2	39.7	30.7	19.9	11.7	34.1	65.9	38.3	22.5
Tokyngton	59.0	8.0	32.0	22.5	18.2	17.2	31.0	69.0	30.8	26.3
Welsh Harp	46.1	17.2	34.9	13.3	23.8	14.0	34.8	65.2	33.9	24.9
Wembley Central	41.5	16.3	40.7	47.1	13.5	8.7	28.7	71.3	30.4	30.0
Wembley Hill	38.0	13.8	46.0	19.7	17.3	11.3	33.6	66.4	36.1	22.8
Wembley Park	14.2	18.5	61.7	13.4	14.9	12.2	66.9	33.1	56.1	6.0
Willesden Green	31.9	22.5	43.9	4.5	21.4	12.3	47.7	52.3	43.6	20.0

But the Lib Dems could not bed down in Brent the way they managed in Bermondsey for decades. Labour got serious running this borough and the impact of "white flight" (long term white residents moved out to more homogenous more spacious areas beyond the capital) made once unreachable wards for Labour winnable.

Labour regained control of Brent in 2010 with a workable majority of 17, taking nine seats off the Tories and ten off the Lib Dems. In 2014, that majority surged to 49 and in 2018 57: no Lib Dems and just three Tories in Kenton that year.

In 2022, following boundary changes, there was a little swing away from Labour: Tories won two seats in **Queensbury** and the Lib Dems won back seats in **Alperton** and **Sudbury**. Huge housing development in Wembley, especially around the national stadium, created new two new seats there as the council was reduced by six councillors.

The Conservatives have high hopes of winning a larger group of councillors in Wembley. First, they will want the third seat in **Queensbury**.

They will then look to take one of the "new" Wembley wards: **Wembley Hill**, which they (rather surprisingly) only lost by 91 votes in its first outing.

Wembley Park looks very safe for Labour on the 2022 numbers but it had a tiny electorate back then and it probably isn't that secure. This may also be a Green target because of the demographic profile of the sorts who are attracted to this type of housing and this type of neighbourhood.

The same factor: a lot of new electors not here in 2022, is true of **Wembley Hill** too though to a lesser extent because it contains more "old" Wembley. But 2022 may not have been a "normal" result there either.

Then things become a lot harder. **Northwick Park** and **Preston** probably represent the tip of Tory expectations, at least in one go: both require a swing of just over 10%.

But if Labour's fortunes really do crater there are there are four wards with broadly similar majorities: **Kingsbury**, **Welsh**

Harp, **Brondesbury Park** and **Barnhill**, which all fall on swings of 13% or less. That'd be a massive surprise with the Conservatives polling so poorly nationally. But they're not quite out of the question, especially if the "Stammore" factor that turned demographically very similar wards in next door Harrow Tory in 2022 replicates here.

The Lib Dems have every expectation, following their thumping by-election win in **Alperton**, that they can take the third seat there plus the seat they don't hold in neighbouring **Sudbury**. But these five seats nowadays represent the sum total of their hopes. But they might try to put **Queen's Park** back into play: an affluent, liberal, middle-class suburb.

The remaining wards are - or at least should be - very safe for Labour. In most of them the Green Party was a very distant runner-up. There is potential for affluent and cosmopolitan **Queen's Park** to spring a surprise - voters there have turned to the Lib Dems when they want to kick Labour and during the years Sarah Teather was Lib Dem MP **Queen's Park** was one of the stronger wards for her party. But with such particular disillusion with Labour on the left of politics, surprises can be sprung.

Brent is another multicultural borough where Reform is unlikely to have much traction anywhere: winning a single seat here would be quite a surprise. The ward with (by far) the highest white population (38%) is Queen's Park, and that's not remotely the sort of white voter who'll turn to Nigel Farage to fix whatever problems they perceive Brent has.

Which leaves the Greens with their relatively new cohort of five councillors. How they do depends on the three types of area they could, in theory, prosper in. If they do well in all three there could be a big Green contingent on Brent council after May 7th.

The first is those new build wards: principally **Wembley Hill**, **Wembley Park**, **Wembley Central** and then parts of **Stonebridge**, **Tokyngton** and **Alperton**. These areas are part of the vast Park Royal regeneration zone, which spans Brent, Ealing and the Old Oak area in the north of Hammersmith - where the HS2 terminus is being constructed.

Park Royal is not an idyllic neighbourhood: its history is as a light industrial and warehousing zone through which runs the Grand Union Canal and the river Brent. Some argue that the Manhattan-style housing that's gradually replacing it isn't all that much better, but it's coming anyway: thousands of garish new high rise private apartment blocks close to tube hubs.

The occupants of these blocks are one of the demographics - younger progressive but transient professionals - who may switch heavily to the Green Party in May.

Another group Greens are expected to pick up a hefty sack of votes from are older, more established, affluent professionals of the sort who live in **Queen's Park**, for example. While this may be a Lib Dem target, it wouldn't be shocking to see it go Green either. This type of voter is present, to a lesser extent, in **Cricklewood & Mapesbury** and **Brondesbury Park**.

Kilburn ward straddles all three Green target demographics. There are terraced streets that have gentrified. There is the regeneration zone of South Kilburn where a run-down council estate is being "regenerated". And there is the third group the Greens might do well with: the principally black neighbourhoods in the south of the borough, including those left in the South Kilburn estate blocks yet to be demolished.

Brent's African and Caribbean community is mainly concentrated in four neighbouring wards: **Harlesden and Kensal Green** (25%), **Kilburn** (22%), **Roundwood** (28%) and **Stonebridge** (39%). These all look phenomenally secure for Labour based on the 2022 results, but those results are almost meaningless in 2026. Labour will still be favoured but perhaps one or two could split?

The Greens are working wards similarly ethnically diverse in Hackney and Lewisham and, though their membership in Brent hasn't grown quite as spectacularly, if they can win there, they can win here. If Labour loses **Stonebridge** though there aren't going to be many (any?) of their councillors left.

Brent doesn't appear on too many electoral seismographs. Maybe that's because Labour has become so dominant, because it's now seen as broadly competent, or because their traditional opponents, the Conservatives, are in as big a mess. But it's worth keeping an eye on. Labour's majority is broad and fairly deep in some wards, but nowhere near as deep as in Lewisham or Lambeth: and they're seen as under threat.

Labour should hold Brent: in any other year it wouldn't be in question - but this year could produce another of those electoral revolts for which the borough used to be renowned.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	5	49	3		
Jul 24 by-election: Queen's Park - Lab hold (Lab -11.9)	5	49	3		
Feb 24 by-election: Alperton - LD hold (Lab -19.3)	5	49	3		
Jun 25 suspension: Kathleen Fraser (Barnhill) Lab to Ind	5	48	3		1
Oct 25 defection: Raja Rajan-Seelan (Wembley Central) Lab to Con	6	47	3		1
Dec 25 defection: Tony Ethampemi (Stonebridge) Lab to Grn	6	46	3	1	1
Dec 25 defection: Harbi Farah (Welsh Harp) Lab to Grn	6	45	3	2	1
Dec 25 defection: Erica Gbajumo (Brondesbury Park) Lab to Grn	6	44	3	3	1
Dec 25 defection: Mary Mitchell (Welsh Harp) Lab to Grn	6	43	3	4	1
Dec 25 defection: Iman Moghaddam (Wembley Park) Lab to Grn	6	42	3	5	1

Reform UK has its sights set on Bromley but, on its ladder of winnability, Bromley is the fourth rung up - and there's a bit of a gap between the lower three - Bexley, Barking and Dagenham, and Havering - and this one.

That's because Bromley is a much larger, and somewhat more diverse borough than certainly Bexley. It does not have the uniformity of neighbourhoods that means if one ward falls, a whole stack of them goes with it.

There are certainly several wards that Reform is favoured to win - it's just not obvious that they can win enough across the borough. They may not even emerge as the largest party - it's just about conceivable that the Conservatives could keep that status which they've never lost in Bromley. But it's poised on a knife-edge and it depends not just on the fortunes of the two right of centre parties but also Labour, the Lib Dems and the four independents/residents elected in 2022.

Bromley is geographically London's largest borough by a fair bit, stretching from Crystal Palace - which feels like suburban inner London - through Beckenham and Hayes and out past Orpington to the rolling fields of the Kentish borderland. **Darwin** ward alone (12.6 sq m) could easily accommodate the entire square mileage of the city of Westminster (8.29 sq m), for example. Nearly all of the borough is historically strongly Conservative, with Labour only competitive in Penge, Mottingham and the two Cray wards tucked beneath Sidcup.

The Conservatives have only lost a majority in Bromley once: the 1998-2002 term when the Liberal Democrats made big gains across the borough and there were enough Labour councillors to form a coalition to lock the Tories out for four years. But typically the Conservatives have swept the bulk of the borough with one or two Labour enclaves and one or two Lib Dem footholds.

Bromley has not been immune to the demographic changes that have pushed Labour's power into the suburbs because the inner end of the borough has decent public transport into central London and some of its housing remains comparatively affordable. You get more bang for your buck in Bromley than in Fulham or Camden Town. Younger, Labour-voting professionals have moved outwards and brought their political preference with them.

That's a way of saying that while Reform has a decent shot at winning lots of seats here, it isn't a viable victor everywhere. As the demographics have changed, more wards have become competitive. Across Bromley there are different electoral trends playing out.

There are three-way marginals like **Bromley Town** and **Beckenham Town and Copers Cope**.

There are wards the Lib Dems used to have a lock on, then swung heavily to Labour but where there is now a Green challenge: principally **Crystal Palace and Annerley** but maybe also **Penge and Cator** if Labour is really getting kicked.

There are four independents and residents' association councillors - three in **Chislehurst**, two elected in **Biggin Hill** but one's joined the Conservatives: these have been two-way battles with the Conservatives but both are Reform targets.

There are three working class, white, wards which Labour used to hold but where they have faded: **Mottingham** and then **St Mary Cray** and **St Paul's Cray**. These used to be three party battlegrounds between Labour, Liberals and Conservatives. Then they became three party battlegrounds between Labour, UKIP and Conservatives. This year they will be three party battlegrounds with Reform.

What these two sets of battlegrounds, separated by several miles, have in common is they all have high amounts of what statisticians call "deprivation" which is just a way of saying a high level of joblessness, fewer opportunities, poorer health outcomes and households more dependent on benefits. The two Crays also have the highest numbers of people identifying as part of the traveller community in London - mostly of Irish origin but some Roma too.

There is the newly created **Plaistow** ward along the southern edge of Lewisham, which has swung heavily to Labour, but which the Conservatives may have a chance of gaining this year. This is precisely the sort of area I was referring to earlier: Inner London adjacent but attracting young professionals looking either for more affordable homes or homes larger and in more leafy, spacious areas than they have been able to afford toward the centre.

There are the suburban Beckenham wards the Conservatives have a weakening grip on: **Kelsey and Eden Park, Shortlands and Park Langley** and **Hayes and Coney Hall**. I say maybe because, while Labour has been closing the gap in these three wards, now the party is in government and its popularity has slumped they are probably beyond its grasp. That is also why **Plaistow** is in play: the Conservatives only lost by 124 votes there last time and the gap between the two parties in London has narrowed by far more than that since.

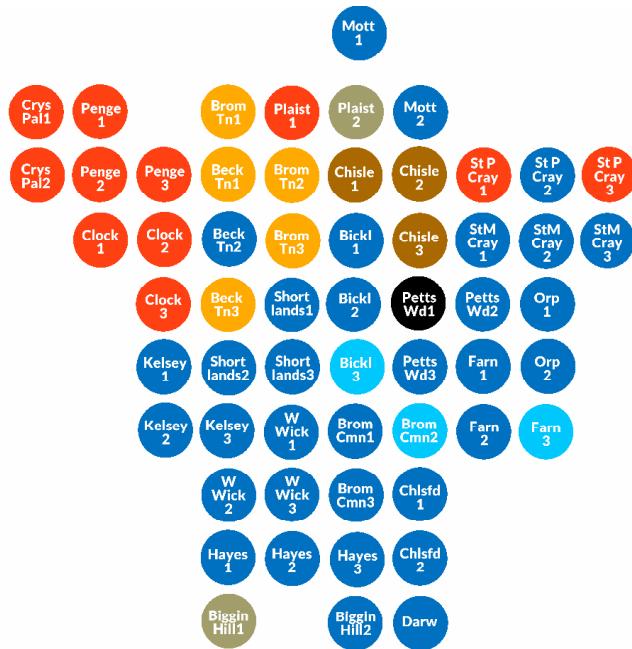
Finally, there is that biggest set of wards: the Reform targets, covering the most outlying suburban and semi-rural wards. These include **Bickley and Sundridge, Biggin Hill, Bromley Common and Holwood, Chelsfield, Chislehurst, Darwin, Farnborough and Crofton, Hayes and Coney Hall, Mottingham, Orpington, Petts Wood and Knoll and West Wickham**. Of these, the wards that are the Conservatives' strongest are Bickley and Sundridge, Darwin (the ward where Nigel Farage lives) and Petts Wood and Knoll.

Reform already has two councillors in this set: one won in a by-election (the party's first by-election win in London) at Bromley Common and Holwood, and a defector in Bickley and Sundridge.

Several of these wards arguably have an electorate too affluent to switch on a large enough scale for Reform to win. Theoretically, at least, Reform might take enough votes in wards like Orpington - once held for a twenty-year stretch by the Liberals - to allow the Lib Dems back in. They were 600 votes short there in 2022 which is quite a lot, especially for a two-councillor ward, but if the right of centre vote is roughly equally divided it could happen.

There could also, of course, be a genuine Conservative to Lib Dem swing - but the latter's strength was from a different era when the Alliance and its successors were seen as a non-ideological protest vote. That party is now viewed differently which is why it's so much weaker than it was in the 1980s.

It seems likely that, given that the vast majority of seats that are vulnerable to Reform are Conservative-held, that the only way the Tories have the least chance of hanging onto a majority is by gaining seats held by others. There are six potential pickup opportunities for the Conservatives.



Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Beckenham Town & Copers Cope	56.3	8.7	33.5	58.7	6.7	3.4	66.9	33.1	54.0	10.0
Bickley and Sundridge	75.3	7.8	16.5	67.4	4.3	2.9	68.1	31.9	48.9	11.2
Biggin Hill	86.6	4.7	8.2	89.4	1.9	0.6	47.6	52.4	26.6	16.4
Bromley Common and Holwood	69.7	14.1	15.5	68.8	5.5	3.3	58.5	41.5	38.5	15.3
Bromley Town	56.2	9.3	32.8	54.3	6.3	4.4	65.2	34.8	52.5	10.1
Chelsfield	83.3	5.8	10.6	71.8	2.7	1.7	63.0	37.0	42.4	13.4
Chislehurst	77.1	7.2	15.0	73.0	3.3	3.6	67.9	32.1	45.4	13.2
Clock House	65.8	11.7	21.3	61.4	8.9	3.6	64.6	35.4	51.1	11.3
Crystal Palace and Anerley	36.3	29.4	32.4	44.0	18.1	5.8	60.3	39.7	51.6	14.3
Darwin	83.4	5.1	11.0	85.2	1.3	1.2	55.9	44.1	31.1	17.9
Farnborough and Crofton	82.4	8.4	9.0	75.1	2.8	2.1	60.9	39.1	39.6	13.6
Hayes and Coney Hall	87.2	3.8	8.6	79.8	2.3	1.9	59.0	41.0	38.2	12.1
Kelsey and Eden Park	77.4	9.1	12.9	67.9	5.4	3.4	61.4	38.6	42.7	13.3
Mottingham	54.7	27.7	16.5	61.2	9.5	4.1	47.8	52.2	34.9	19.2
Orpington	71.7	15.4	12.0	66.9	6.4	3.5	54.7	45.3	38.7	15.4
Penge and Cator	46.7	28.0	23.9	49.9	15.5	6.7	59.6	40.4	49.7	13.8
Petts Wood and Knoll	84.1	3.6	11.9	72.9	2.3	1.8	65.8	34.2	45.7	11.1
Plaistow	65.1	16.1	18.1	56.4	10.6	4.3	57.4	42.6	44.0	14.5
Shortlands and Park Langley	71.5	6.2	21.9	64.1	4.6	3.3	67.1	32.9	51.2	9.5
St Mary Cray	64.1	21.2	13.0	68.2	8.2	3.0	47.3	52.7	31.6	19.5
St Paul's Cray	53.9	33.1	11.7	66.4	9.5	3.3	41.8	58.2	29.1	21.3
West Wickham	84.3	4.7	10.5	75.4	3.3	2.4	61.6	38.4	39.9	12.3

The easiest is **Plaistow** given how close it was last time, even though the demographic trend is working against the party here. There are two seats available here.

Their next opportunities are those twin town centre wards: **Beckenham Town and Copers Cope**, and **Bromley Town**, where there are five Lib Dem seats (all three in Bromley, two out in Beckenham). The Lib Dems have proven better able to fend off Reform elsewhere in the country since the right-wing populist party began its surge at the start of last year.

Lib Dems present this as proof they are an antidote to Reform: that voters should back them as the only party able to keep the populists out. But they're often confusing cause

and effect in this argument: areas that are sympathetic to electing Liberal Democrats are far less likely to be areas sympathetic to electing Reform than previously Labour or Conservative ones.

Both Beckenham and Bromley town centres also lie along the boundary with inner London and so, aside from having a history of Liberal Democrat campaigning they're also commuter dormitories: the parts young professionals have been moving to. So these are not likely Reform prospects.

There will probably be enough Tory to Reform switchers to prevent the former improving in these wards - but might they just be susceptible to a "stick with nurse for fear of worse"

argument: that re-electing Conservative councillors is the only way to block a Reform majority.

Harder still, because unlike those two town centre wards the Reform threat here is real and probably strong enough to win are the two wards held by **Chislehurst** Matters (CM) and **Biggin Hill** Independents. Both wards cover distinct neighbourhoods which urban sprawl hasn't enveloped. They have a stronger identity which might keep them out of Reform's hands.

Independents won **Biggin Hill** in 2018 and held it in 2022, though the Conservatives were close behind both times. But the end may be nigh: one is now a Tory councillor, the other is retiring. Chislehurst Matters organised just before the 2022 election so this is the end of what they hope will be their first term. They scored a big win last time, gaining majorities of over a thousand, and in a ward that traditionally was one of the safest for the Conservatives.

Reform had a pretty strong record of overwhelming independents and residents groups at the 2025 county council elections: they seem to fish in the same pond of voters and Reform's message that the country needs radical change appears more potent than the "we're local" argument.

The Conservatives will hope that a radically splintered vote in both these wards enables them to win almost by accident on a vote share much lower than they achieved in 2022.

There are also the two Cray wards - in reality only **St Paul's Cray** because **St Mary Cray** (just) went Conservative last time. Labour won two of the three **St Paul's Cray** seats in 2022 which was a little surprising as these types of neighbourhoods, less common in London, have drifted from the party. That's despite them resembling what would once have been solid Labour areas measured on economic terms.

But politics is more about cultural values in these outlying wards with lots of public housing: the same sort of swing away from Labour has occurred in similar neighbourhoods like New Addington, Crayford and Harold Hill.

Possible key wards

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Beckenham Town & Copers Cope (2 LD)
- ▶ Bickley and Sundridge (1 Ref - defec)
- ▶ Biggin Hill (1 Ind)
- ▶ Bromley Common & Holwood (1 Ref)
- ▶ Bromley Town (3 LD)
- ▶ Chislehurst (3 Res)
- ▶ Farnborough and Crofton (1 Ref - defec)
- ▶ Plaistow (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ St Paul's Cray (2 Lab)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Kelsey and Eden Park (3 Con)
- ▶ Mottingham (2 Con)
- ▶ Plaistow (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ St Mary Cray (3 Con)
- ▶ St Paul's Cray (1 Con)

Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Beckenham Town & Copers Cope (1 Con)
- ▶ Chelsfield (2 Con)
- ▶ Orpington (2 Con)

Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Biggin Hill (1 Con, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Bromley Common and Holwood (2 Con)
- ▶ Chelsfield (2 Con)
- ▶ Chislehurst (3 Res)
- ▶ Darwin (1 Con)
- ▶ Farnborough and Crofton (3 Con)
- ▶ Hayes and Coney Hall (3 Con)
- ▶ Mottingham (2 Con)
- ▶ Orpington (2 Con)
- ▶ St Mary Cray (3 Con)
- ▶ St Paul's Cray (2 Lab, 1 Con)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Crystal Palace and Annerley (2 Lab)
- ▶ Penge and Cator (3 Lab)

The last time Labour won a seat in **St Paul's Cray** was 1998 and back then they were fighting the Lib Dems. In 2022 Labour won with less than 40% of the vote: this year's winners will perhaps need even less.

Both Cray wards are a demographic dream for Reform so, again, the only way the Conservatives - or Labour - can hope to emerge with councillors is via some bizarre fluke. But far more likely is that they will be provide some of the larger Reform majorities in Bromley.

Let's take a look at the dozen seats Labour won last time - now down to eleven after a Plaistow councillor moved to independent. In three they won thumping majorities: **Clock House, Crystal Palace and Annerley** and **Penge and Cator**. The Conservatives represented **Clock House** until 2018 but Labour absolutely thumped them in 2022, finishing almost 2,500 ahead with two-thirds of the vote. In just four years **Clock House** swung from being Labour's most marginal Bromley ward to its safest.

After years of being the best Liberal ward in Bromley, **Crystal Palace and Annerley** switched to Labour in 2014 and, as with Clock House, they have built up a healthy lead. Were this any election other than a mid-term where Labour is plumbing historic lows, Crystal Palace and Annerley would be safe for them. But in 2022 Lib Dems gained a seat on the Croydon side of this divided neighbourhood (Crystal Palace and Upper Norwood ward) while the Greens polled 20% on the Bromley side. The Greens would need around a 20% swing to defeat Labour in Bromley's Crystal Palace ward.

During the last few years of the Conservative government that party could pull off "spectaculars" - election wins coming from nowhere on huge swings in wards that had nearly always been faithfully Tory. Now, Zack Polanski's only path to embedding the Greens as a serious force in the country is to do the same thing in Labour strongholds - especially the more affluent, higher turnout, more engaged communities that self-identify as progressive. Such a community is **Crystal Palace and Annerley**.

Finally, in this set, there's **Penge and Cator**, the one ward in Bromley that has more or less consistently elected Labour councillors throughout the borough's history. Like Crystal Palace, the Greens came second here last time and have a similarly sized Labour majority to overturn.

Penge, though, is a different neighbourhood to Crystal Palace: it's often described as much dowdier, more working-class, much less of a progressive nirvana. There's a Gail's Bakery - that ultimate status symbol of middle class utopia - in Crystal Palace (albeit the Croydon side). There's no Gail's in Penge: not likely to be, even though Penge has gentrified. While a Labour loss in Penge is harder to envisage than one in Crystal Palace, it's not totally beyond possibility: there have been surges against Labour in this ward before. So Labour could be down to just Clock House but should win more.

This preview began by placing Bromley fourth on the list of Reform targets. That's because the borough is more politically diverse than the three above it in the list. The pool of Reform winnables is proportionally shallower.

But that's not the same as saying Reform can't win Bromley: it'll just be harder for them. There are more wards Reform can win than that they can't. They are very unlikely to sweep all the seats they could potentially win. Some of them are, even after 2022, still safely Conservative. In some, Reform aren't facing Conservative incumbents. Some just won't break in Reform's favour.

The Conservative majority has been whittled down to nine already through by-elections and defections, having been thirteen immediately after the 2022 elections. It's almost baked-in that the Conservatives will lose five seats - probably quite a few more than five - and that's their majority erased. Can they pick others up to offset those losses? If they can win the largest group of councillors, even if short of a majority, there's a chance they'll stay in power.

Bromley has become a multi-party democracy with six parties or descriptions now represented on the council: a big change from only three elections ago. It's likely that trend will be

reversed in May: a sizeable Reform bloc; a sizeable Conservative bloc and a very few others.

One last thing to consider. The Electoral Calculus general election MRP conducted in December produced some interesting results for the three Bromley constituencies.

In Beckenham Labour was on 28%, Reform on 21%, Conservatives on 18%, Greens on 17% and Lib Dems on 13%.

In Bromley and Biggin Hill, Reform led - but only just - with 32.8%. The Conservatives were on 32.6%, Labour on 14% and the others all got less than 10%.

But in Orpington, where most of the Reform target wards lie, the Conservatives were leading with 43%, Reform on 34% and all the others again below 10%.

These three constituency results taken together suggest both that the Conservatives are holding onto a lot of support in Reform target wards and that Labour is robust in its Beckenham strongholds. But, of course, this was a general election MRP: not for the council elections. And voting patterns can differ radically between the two quite different sets of elections.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	O
May 22 council election result	36	12	5		5
Dec 23 by-election: Hayes and Coney Hall - Con hold	36	12	5		5
May 24 by-election: Shortlands and Park Langley - Con hold	36	12	5		5
Jul 25 by-election: Bromley Common and Holwood - Ref gain from Con	35	12	5	1	5
Oct 25 defection: Christopher Marlowe (Farnborough and Crofton) Con to Ref	34	12	5	2	5
Nov 25 defection: Alisa Igoe (Plaistow) Lab to Ind	34	11	5	2	6
Nov 25 defection: Sophie Dunbar (Biggin Hill) Ind to Con	35	11	5	2	5
Dec 25 defection: Kira Gabbert (Bickley and Sundridge) Con to Ref	34	11	5	3	5
Dec 25 vacancy: Keith Onslow (Petts Wood and Knoll) Con, deceased	33	11	5	3	5

Camden could well prove to be the only genuine four-way election fight in London. It's four and it might be five depending on whether independents make a serious push, but it almost certainly won't be six because Camden isn't a borough going to give serious consideration to Reform UK: the demographics are utterly wrong for that party.

The last time Labour lost Camden - in 2006 - Labour polled 29.5%, winning eighteen seats, the Lib Dems 27.3% winning twenty seats, the Conservatives 26.8% and fourteen seats, and two Greens won in Highgate and 11.5% borough-wide.

The percentages will be different this time around: Tories possibly a lot lower, Greens higher, and with Reform making a small impact in votes but no impact in seats - but essentially this year's election has exactly the same ingredients as the one twenty years ago.

To many in Labour, Camden is what Westminster used to be to the Conservatives: a flagship borough. It covers similar central London territory - though, of course, large parts of Camden are much less affluent and much more diverse. But the two boroughs split many of London's crown jewels.

Westminster has Hyde Park, Regent's Park, St James's Park, Green Park and Kensington Gardens. Camden has Hampstead Heath, Primrose Hill and Parliament Hill.

Westminster has Little Venice, but the canals continue onwards through bohemian Camden Town and beyond.

Westminster has Soho; Camden has Camden Town market.

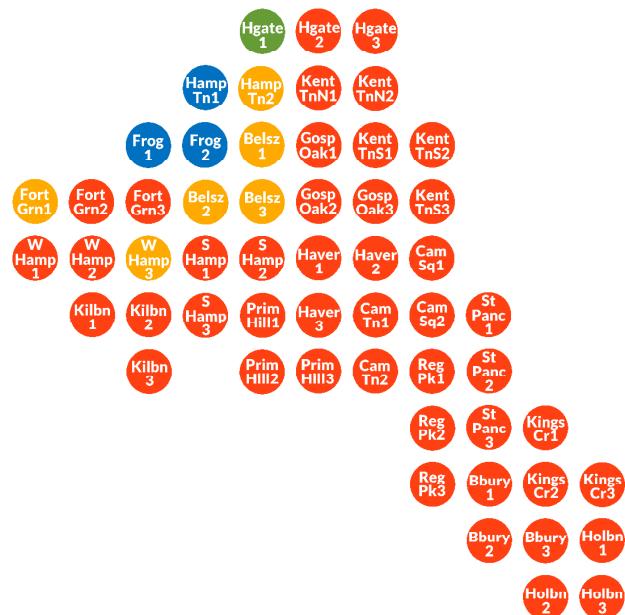
Westminster has Paddington and Victoria stations, Camden has Euston, King's Cross and St Pancras.

Westminster has the heart of government; Camden has the heart of academia with Senate House and much of the University of London campus.

Camden also shares with the City of London the heart of the legal system: Lincoln's Inn and Grays Inn. And while Westminster has the biggest art galleries Camden has both the British Museum and the British Library.

But perhaps the greatest source of pride to Labour is the quality of the council housing built in Camden. This is not a borough of high-rise Brutalist tower blocks in the main - the Ampthill estate near Euston station being the exception.

There's the Alexandra & Ainsworth estate with its V-shaped ziggurats rising from a central pedestrian boulevard; the Brunswick Centre by Russell Square, Highgate New Town, Branch Hill, Maiden Lane and Gospel Oak. All modernist but attractive and well-designed, human-scale - based on streets not in the sky but on the ground where they belong.



So Camden is a jewel in Labour's London crown and it would grieve the party sorely to lose it. The 2022 result and even the two by-election losses Labour has suffered since, still don't give the appearance of risk. They have a commanding majority of 35 seats. Yet the council leader, Richard Olszewski, has switched wards this year - from marginal **Fortune Green** where his majority was only 139 over the Lib Dems to what he hopes will be safe-enough **Bloomsbury**.

As 2006 showed, when Camden goes awry for Labour, it goes awry all over the place - there will be different challengers in different parts of the borough. Its best chance of keeping control in Camden is that Greens and Lib Dems divide their vote equally so Labour can come through the middle, and that the Conservatives will be kept down by Reform.

That could happen. But Labour's troubles at the moment - epitomised by the fact that our hugely unpopular Prime Minister is MP for half of this borough - suggest it's unlikely. How better to send a message to Labour by kicking them in his own back yard?

While there won't be in Camden the sort of pact the Lib Dems and Greens drew up in Richmond: the larger party "gifting" the other a few seats in return for a clear run everywhere - nor does there need to be here - an understanding; an entente, would be mutually beneficial.

There are clearly wards like **Fortune Green** and **West Hampstead, Hampstead Town** and **Belsize** where the Lib Dems are favourites to beat both Labour and the Conservatives. There are other wards: most obviously Highgate but running down the spine of the borough alongside Islington, like **Kentish Town North** and **Kentish Town South**, or **King's Cross** where the Greens will be the principal challenger. The Conservatives have something of a chance in **Primrose Hill** and **South Hampstead**; and they will have a big fight with the Lib Dems for **Hampstead Town** and **Belsize**, which they'll probably lose.

In 2006 the Conservatives won **Gospel Oak** and a seat in **Bloomsbury**. These Labour-held wards may fall again but if so they won't be to the Conservatives.

The December 2025 Electoral Calculus MRP model had Holborn and St Pancras: the Prime Minister's constituency, voting 33% Green, 26% Labour, 18% Reform, 7% Conservative and 6% Lib Dem in a general election.

The Greens were also ahead in the other Camden constituency: Hampstead and Highgate. Its Labour MP, Tulip Siddique, has troubles of her own having been at best embarrassed by and at worst benefited from the alleged corruption of her aunt Sheikh Hasina, the deposed prime minister of Bangladesh. There the Greens were on 28%, Labour 27%, Reform 17%, Tories 13% and Lib Dems 12%.

For comparison, Labour polled 52% in Camden in 2022. They polled over 60% in nine wards and over 70% in **Camden Square** and **St Pancras and Somers Town**. Yet look how Labour's vote tanked in the Camden Square by-election: a 29% drop. And that occurred not long after the general election when many voters were still giving Labour the benefit of the doubt.

So Labour's best chance is for their opposition to divide its vote evenly. In 2022 there were lots of Camden wards where that happened: Labour far ahead and everyone else scrabbling around for crumbs. If the votes Labour loses spray around all over the place evenly, it'd be possible in a few wards for their vote to collapse by thirty - maybe even forty - percentage points and still cling on.

In **Camden Square**, for example, if Labour's vote dropped forty points they'd be on 36%. Allocate thirty points of that forty point drop to the Greens (who didn't stand here last time) and ten to the Lib Dems, taking them to 23%, and you can see how Labour wins despite losing more than half its vote. And that's assuming the Conservatives or another new entrant don't take their own chunks out of Labour.

Labour loses its majority if seventeen seats fall from its grip. They will have already written off the two Labour seats in **Highgate**, the two in **West Hampstead** and the two in **Fortune Green**. Where to find the next eleven?

Possible key wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Fortune Green (1 LD)
- ▶ Hampstead Town (1 Con, 1 LD)
- ▶ West Hampstead (1 LD)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Belsize (3 LD)
- ▶ Hampstead Town (1 LD)
- ▶ Primrose Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ South Hampstead (3 Lab)

Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Bloomsbury (2 Lab)
- ▶ Fortune Green (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hampstead Town (1 Con)
- ▶ West Hampstead (2 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Camden Square (2 Lab)
- ▶ Camden Town (2 Lab)
- ▶ Gospel Oak (3 Lab)
- ▶ Haverstock (3 Lab)
- ▶ Highgate (2 Lab)
- ▶ Kentish Town North (2 Lab)
- ▶ Kentish Town South (3 Lab)
- ▶ King's Cross (3 Lab)
- ▶ Primrose Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Regent's Park (3 Lab)

▶ St Pancras and Somers Town (3 Lab)

The Conservatives cannot be relied on to win the six seats available in **Primrose Hill** and **South Hampstead** - they may just be too weak in Camden these days. They almost gained South Hampstead in that ward's 2023 by-election but more because Labour's vote slumped than their vote climbed: they barely surpassed 30%. In an election where votes splinter that might be enough for them to win - or another party could overtake both of the top two from further back.

The Tories do still have some strength left in these affluent wards along the St John's Wood boundary with Westminster. Whether they go Conservative, Lib Dem or Green, let's chalk another five seats off. Six more to find.

The Greens will fancy their chances in both Kentish Town wards where there are five seats. They could also surge in **Camden Town** and **Haverstock**, and then in the part-regenerated but still gritty **King's Cross** and **St Pancras and Somers Town**: usually the core of Labour's vote in this constituency. **Regent's Park** is another - a very different ward from the Westminster version of the same name. These are all wards with a lot of council housing and ethnic diversity.

Camden by-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Grn
Hampstead Town	-11.8	-14.9	+20.1	+4.6
South Hampstead	+4.5	-18.9	+7.8	+11.9
Highgate	-1.4	-17.3	-1.7	+20.4
Frognal	+2.3	-1.2	+3.4	-4.6
Camden Square	-5.7	-28.9	+7.7	-5.3
Kentish Town South	-2.8	-13.9	-1.8	+2.7
Kilburn	+4.7	-16.7	-5.5	+17.5
West Hampstead	-6.1	-24.9	+16.9	+7.0

Italics show the shares for parties that didn't contest the 2022 elections but did stand in the by-election

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Belsize	40.7	8.9	49.9	36.2	1.9	4.4	84.3	15.7	75.5	5.6
Bloomsbury	23.4	32.8	42.5	29.3	5.2	12.2	72.3	27.7	47.9	8.5
Camden Square	25.3	40.8	33.1	38.5	11.6	18.4	67.0	33.0	54.4	12.5
Camden Town	23.4	37.9	37.6	34.4	10.2	17.4	67.9	32.1	54.3	12.5
Fortune Green	38.4	17.7	42.9	36.5	6.3	12.7	72.7	27.3	64.5	10.4
Frognal	47.7	8.8	42.5	35.9	2.9	7.4	82.9	17.1	70.1	7.7
Gospel Oak	29.4	46.7	22.9	41.0	8.7	15.9	68.2	31.8	54.7	14.3
Hampstead Town	52.7	8.8	37.9	46.3	1.9	3.3	86.7	13.3	75.7	5.4
Haverstock	24.6	46.8	27.7	36.5	11.3	21.6	63.4	36.6	49.9	15.6
Highgate	46.7	33.2	19.1	55.7	6.2	7.9	74.5	25.5	61.6	10.2
Holborn and Covent Garden	18.8	45.6	34.5	31.2	8.0	20.6	66.7	33.3	54.3	13.0
Kentish Town North	34.8	29.9	34.3	49.6	6.3	8.5	74.4	25.6	63.4	9.8
Kentish Town South	30.5	38.7	29.4	40.7	10.2	15.3	69.7	30.3	54.6	13.1
Kilburn	19.4	42.0	37.2	26.4	13.7	27.0	58.4	41.6	47.5	18.4
King's Cross	18.1	45.9	33.3	23.7	9.5	23.7	63.2	36.8	49.0	12.3
Primrose Hill	36.8	27.5	35.2	36.8	6.6	12.6	76.7	23.3	63.1	10.5
Regent's Park	18.2	51.4	29.6	28.8	11.2	26.3	59.4	40.6	44.9	15.5
St Pancras and Somers Town	12.0	63.7	22.9	26.3	13.9	31.8	48.9	51.1	38.9	18.5
South Hampstead	30.9	21.2	46.4	31.6	6.0	13.2	78.0	22.0	68.3	8.9
West Hampstead	29.0	22.7	47.4	34.9	6.9	11.8	75.8	24.2	65.3	9.4

How will a refined, liberal, academic ward like **Bloomsbury** respond to Labour's loud yet unfruitful attempts to reduce immigration? Bloomsbury rallied to the liberal Conservatism of David Cameron but had been repelled by the party since. Labour took over two-thirds of the vote in Bloomsbury last time and this is the new berth into which the council leader hopes he'll be able to dock. But it wouldn't be hugely shocking if Labour is so unpopular with the Bloomsbury Set that they elect Lib Dem or Green councillors this time.

Zack Polanski's Greens will be hoping for some form of power in all three inner north London boroughs of Hackney, Islington and Camden. They may win outright in Hackney but have to settle for some form of power sharing in Islington and Camden: opposition to Labour in these two is more diffuse.

Would Keir Starmer be able to survive as PM if Labour lose Camden? He won Holborn and St Pancras with a majority of over 30,000 in 2017. If he did depart the premiership voluntarily or otherwise, he probably wouldn't contest his seat at the next general election. That would be testament to the velocity of our politics - that an MP newly elected in 2015 could become Prime Minister after just 9 years and be done after 14. Perhaps one lesson to learn is that a few more years' experience before reaching the top is a good idea?

It's very difficult to locate a Camden ward Labour would be a nailed-on certainty to hold. Maybe **Kilburn**? Maybe **Holborn and Covent Garden**? Maybe **Gospel Oak**? It's not credible that Labour will be wiped off the council: it's just not possible to say which seats they'll hold. And that's remarkable.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	3	47	4	1	
Jul 22 by-election: Hampstead Town - LD gain from Lab	3	46	5	1	
Jun 23 by-election: South Hampstead - Lab hold	3	46	5	1	
Nov 23 by-election: Highgate - Grn hold	3	46	5	1	
May 24 by-election: Frognal - Con hold	3	46	5	1	
Sep 24 by-election: Camden Square - Lab hold	3	46	5	1	
Sep 24 by-election: Kentish Town South - Lab hold	3	46	5	1	
Sep 24 by-election: Kilburn - Lab hold	3	46	5	1	
Aug 25 by-election: West Hampstead - LD gain from Lab	3	45	6	1	

CROYDON



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The 2026 local elections are unusual insofar as it's far easier to make a case for both main parties losing seats than either gaining them.

The 2022 contest - which saw Croydon's first election for a directly elected mayor - produced a split verdict. The Conservative leader, Jason Perry, edged the mayoralty by less than 600 votes in the second round after Labour had endured a turgid four years in power.

But the Tories failed to win a council majority: they and Labour won 34 seats apiece with 2 Greens winning in the central Fairfield ward, and 1 Lib Dem in Upper Norwood.

Four years on, the Conservatives have made absolutely no progress fixing the systemic problems rotting this council from the inside out: the finances are in a worse state because interest rates on the colossal debt are adding to the pile quicker than asset fire-sales can clear it. And Council Tax has increased by massive amounts on the Tories' watch even if Labour created much of the financial black hole.

Perry is a mediocre mayor, not best placed to work with a Labour government to get a deal that sets Croydon on a stable footing. And, with government commissioners taking all the major financial decisions, he is little more than a figurehead (as will be whoever wins in 2026): getting the flak but having insufficient say. The government has turned Croydon: the largest of London's boroughs, into a quango coated in a veneer of democratic accountability.

It is far from apparent, though, that four years has been sufficient for voters to let Labour off the hook for their rampant incompetence. So, again, it's easy to make a case why voters don't want either of them. But they'll end up with one, regardless.

The government's reversal of using first past the post for mayoral elections won't take effect for May's election. The Supplementary Vote (SV) system was introduced by Labour to boost the chances of a so-called progressive candidate winning - and it's why they're bringing it back. But there is now likely to be a sizeable Reform vote that might have transferred to the Conservatives in the second round under SV. Reform is likely not strong enough to finish in the top two. But don't rule it out entirely given the lack of trust in either "legacy" party.

Perry led by just over 2,000 in the first round last time but by 589 after second preferences had been added on, so by that measure, FPTP might seem to benefit the Conservatives. But this depends entirely on how big a hit the Tories take from Reform. And whether there is significantly lower turnout in the Labour north compared to the Tory and Reform south of the borough.

On the council side of the ledger both parties face challenges. The Conservatives won three of the four seats in the outlying New Addington council estate last time: **New Addington North** and **New Addington South**. All four are certain to fall to Reform. And it's by no means clear that New Addington is the only part of the borough where Reform is a threat.

Even though these southern wards have vast Conservative majorities, they date from a pre-Reform era. It isn't all that hard to imagine Reform snatching seats here and there.

Old Coulsdon, for example, has something of a Lib Dem tradition but is no more liberal an area than its neighbours: this Lib Dem vote stems more from pavement politics slogging it out, year after year. A sizeable non-Tory vote has built up but if the area has little intrinsic loyalty to

the liberal tradition, why wouldn't it collapse to a party far more in keeping with the political outlook of the Surrey gin and tonic golfing belt?

Selsdon Vale and Forestdale isn't safe: its predecessor: Heathfield, once a Tory fortress, looked pretty shaky in its final election back in 2014 (Croydon had boundary changes in 2018 rather than 2022).

There are two wards the Tories split with Labour: the long-term marginal **Waddon** and 2-councillor **Addiscombe East**.

Waddon is the ward of Labour mayoral candidate Rowenna Davis and is the sort of outlying, cottage-garden estate where Reform may reap quite a vote. But it may come evenly from both parties there.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Addiscombe East	61.5	11.3	26.2	41.0	17.1	8.4	53.0	47.0	43.8	14.6
Addiscombe West	42.1	16.1	39.7	31.7	17.6	10.3	53.2	46.8	46.2	15.3
Bensham Manor	51.2	13.0	34.0	13.8	30.9	17.4	38.1	61.9	37.0	19.2
Broad Green	36.9	26.7	33.5	15.6	24.2	17.1	35.3	64.7	34.4	21.0
Coulsdon Town	76.8	8.3	12.3	58.2	9.0	6.0	61.3	38.7	45.5	11.6
Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood	54.7	17.6	25.9	43.8	18.2	6.7	61.6	38.4	51.9	12.1
Fairfield	22.5	16.7	57.7	23.9	20.6	10.6	56.5	43.5	52.8	12.7
Kenley	77.2	10.4	10.9	61.5	7.8	5.5	61.4	38.6	43.7	11.3
New Addington North	29.6	60.6	9.1	45.4	28.6	9.0	28.4	71.6	24.4	27.0
New Addington South	48.9	39.6	10.2	58.5	19.0	5.3	33.4	66.6	25.2	26.2
Norbury and Pollards Hill	52.8	15.5	30.3	19.8	21.4	18.2	44.1	55.9	41.0	18.1
Norbury Park	65.8	13.9	19.5	22.9	19.2	21.4	50.6	49.4	42.1	17.2
Old Coulsdon	78.9	13.9	6.3	71.0	6.3	2.7	54.1	45.9	35.7	15.7
Park Hill and Whitgift	53.2	8.9	37.6	29.0	10.8	12.0	66.1	33.9	57.6	11.0
Purley and Woodcote	66.7	11.3	19.8	47.6	9.9	8.7	64.3	35.7	49.2	12.4
Purley Oaks and Riddlesdown	69.9	8.5	20.0	48.5	11.0	7.8	59.3	40.7	48.0	10.6
Sanderstead	83.9	5.5	10.1	65.2	5.4	4.7	62.0	38.0	43.7	11.9
Selhurst	33.8	29.7	34.3	20.6	30.5	13.4	38.5	61.5	35.3	19.8
Selsdon and Addington Village	77.5	11.4	10.4	53.9	11.9	7.6	50.9	49.1	37.1	15.2
Selsdon Vale and Forestdale	76.0	6.1	17.0	65.8	8.6	5.4	48.9	51.1	34.5	14.1
Shirley North	70.9	18.0	10.7	49.8	15.5	7.0	48.3	51.7	34.5	17.5
Shirley South	71.2	20.2	8.2	49.3	17.1	9.3	49.9	50.1	36.3	16.2
South Croydon	50.9	11.5	36.0	41.7	14.7	7.3	55.8	44.2	48.2	12.1
South Norwood	41.7	22.7	34.5	28.5	30.7	9.1	48.5	51.5	42.8	16.6
Thornton Heath	50.8	18.7	29.0	21.3	35.1	11.9	42.1	57.9	37.9	17.8
Waddon	44.6	25.2	28.1	31.6	21.3	10.4	45.6	54.4	39.9	17.1
West Thornton	45.4	20.0	32.6	11.4	26.9	21.9	35.5	64.5	35.6	20.0
Woodside	50.5	20.6	26.9	31.4	29.6	8.2	48.1	51.9	40.5	14.9

Addiscombe East: the edges of Shirley, is not really a Reform area and is still the fault-line in Croydon where Labour's advance has stalled, for now.

South Croydon - the old Croham - is teetering for the Conservatives and might fall this year, especially if Reform takes a chunk out of the Tory vote. The single-member **Park Hill & Whitgift**, and then **Shirley North** would also be potential Labour gains if a) they were still in opposition nationally and b) weren't plumbing the depths of public opinion and didn't have the millstone around their neck of the last time they were in charge locally.

Then there is the threat to Labour. The Greens want all three **Fairfield** seats. This one's incredibly hard to call because it is a very new ward: the town centre has seen vast tower blocks constructed in the past decade, then development got stalled by the pandemic shutdown. But the high rises continue to rise. A large share of the electorate in Fairfield won't have been here in 2022 making it difficult for its councillors to build a personal vote. But Labour unpopularity and Green activism here will probably tip all three seats to the latter.

The Lib Dems gained a seat - not in Old Coulsdon with its Conservative incumbents but in the northern, Labour-held ward of **Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood**. If they can win the other two seats, it's highly unlikely Labour can find a path to a majority on the council.

While the Greens are also trying their hand at **South Norwood** they could also knock the Lib Dems out in this ward. The other half of the Crystal Palace neighbourhood in Bromley borough is a Green target and already has a decent Green vote: it may rub off, and voters dithering between the two may just prefer the one with momentum and dynamism than the one fronted by a slapstick clown.

This time Labour has deselected a couple of its black councillors. Whether that will be a further disincentive for these significantly ethnically diverse neighbourhoods to turn out for the party or motivates new parties remains to be seen.

Possible key wards

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Addiscombe East (1 Lab)
- ▶ New Addington North (1 Lab)
- ▶ Norbury Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Waddon (2 Lab)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Addiscombe East (1 Con)
- ▶ Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood (1 LD)
- ▶ Fairfield (2 Grn)
- ▶ New Addington North (1 Con)
- ▶ New Addington South (2 Con)
- ▶ South Croydon (3 Con)
- ▶ Waddon (1 Con)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Kenley (2 Con)
- ▶ New Addington North (1 Con, 1 Lab)
- ▶ New Addington South (2 Con)
- ▶ Old Coulsdon (3 Con)
- ▶ Selsdon and Addington Village (3 Con)
- ▶ Selsdon Vale and Forestdale (2 Con)

Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood (2 Lab)
- ▶ Old Coulsdon (3 Con)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood (2 Lab, 1 LD)
- ▶ Fairfield (1 Lab)
- ▶ Norbury and Pollards Hill (2 Lab)
- ▶ Norbury Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ South Norwood (3 Lab)

The reason Labour lost the mayoral race was because voters in the ethnically diverse north of the borough swung away from the party in 2022. Labour's vote share plummeted 16 points in **Norbury & Pollards Hill**, 18 points in **West Thornton**, 19 in **Broad Green**, 23 in **Selhurst** and 25 points in **Bensham Manor** and **Thornton Heath**.

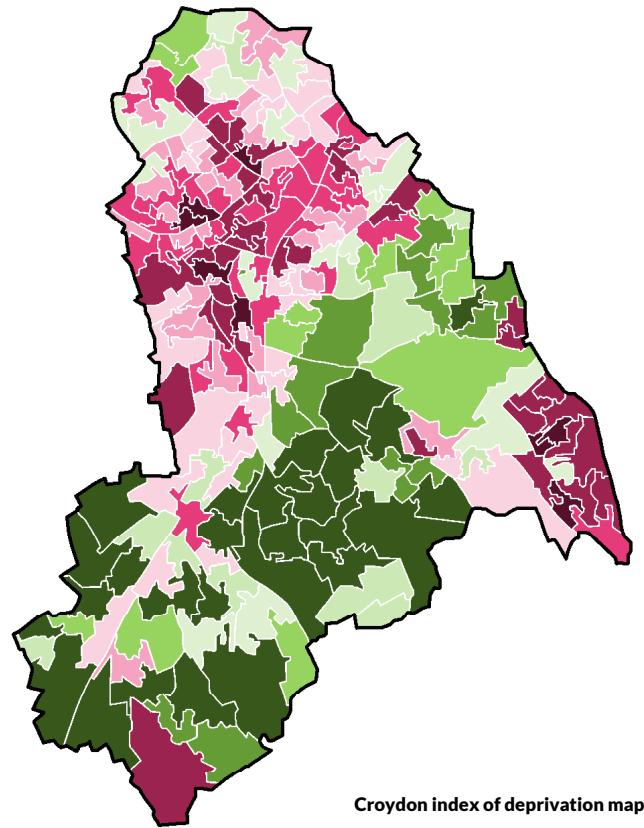
Those big drops in support did not benefit any one opponent: the spoils were shared around - so Labour still won these wards easily enough. But just because it went that way last time doesn't mean it must this time. The general election MRP model by Electoral Calculus has the Greens winning Croydon West and Streatham and Croydon North.

While a lot of Green strength in the latter will come on the Streatham side of the border, where might they be polling strongly enough in the west? It won't be **Waddon** but it could be **Norbury Park** and **Norbury and Pollards Hill** - and maybe even **Thornton Heath** too.

Thornton Heath has the largest African and Caribbean community in Croydon - over a third - and while they are the least hostile to Labour at present (for more see the Lambeth profile) they are even more favourable to the Greens.

So maybe this time the splintering of the anti-Labour vote in all directions won't actually benefit Labour this time, but just bring the party down to within striking distance.

There comes a point in the electoral system - and Labour is now below it - where its vote is so weak that perverse outcomes occur. Because the party is nationally as well as locally unpopular and because Labour always struggles to drive out its vote when in government, things might get dicey.



Croydon index of deprivation map

If a strong opponent (almost certainly not the Tories - not anymore, at least beyond **Norbury Park**) emerges, there could be a surprise or two in the north, just as Reform may spring a few surprises in the south.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	34	34	1	2	
Jul 22 by-election: South Croydon - Con hold	34	34	1	2	
Nov 22 by-election: Selsdon Vale and Forestdale - Con hold	34	34	1	2	
May 24 by-election: Park Hill and Whitgift - Con hold	34	34	1	2	
May 24 by-election: Woodside - Lab hold	34	34	1	2	

Why is it that Labour's better chances of retaining power in the crazy London elections of 2026 are found in boroughs that were traditionally battlegrounds?

Boroughs like Barnet and Wandsworth might not return to the Conservatives despite Labour's dreadful poll ratings. Boroughs like Hammersmith & Fulham and Ealing might be safe. This is not normal.

It's because politics is no longer determined by how many affluent, Conservative, wards versus deprived, Labour, wards there are. If that were the measure, "middle London" Ealing would be heading for a Conservative landslide.

Elections in London haven't been determined along economic lines for some years. The first examples of wealthy areas voting along cultural lines in the capital can be found way back to the 1970s. Today it is the poorer areas; the whiter - and more recently less white - working-class areas that have swung away from Labour while the party's hold on wealthier, more "progressive" enclaves is comparatively very strong. So it's little wonder that London has become their strongest area and they have a decent chance of retaining a borough like Ealing - a stereotype of middle class suburbia.

Labour goes into May with a thumping 46 seat majority: unprecedented for this borough. And, rather than looking confidently to make major gains, the Conservatives face the prospect of further losses - maybe a wipe out. It shouldn't quite play out because while Conservatives are likely to lose their remaining **Hanger Hill** seat **Ealing Broadway** is considerably more secure that way.

The Conservatives might lose that one seat to the Lib Dems while taking seats off Labour. Yet it's hard to find enough competitive wards to eradicate Labour's huge majority, let alone replace it with one for another party.

Consider what the Tories won the last time they took power in Ealing: Acton Central (North Acton), Elthorne (Hanwell Broadway), Hobbayne (North Hanwell), Northolt Mandeville, Greenford Broadway, Perivale, East Acton (to select just a few). These wards have Labour majorities exceeding 1,000.

Even the most marginal Labour-Conservative wards: **Pitshanger, Northfield** and **Walpole** have Labour majorities of up to around 700. The substantial effort it will take just to pick off the lowest hanging fruit is a measure of how bad things have got for the Conservatives.

Aside from **Ealing Common** which for years was another Conservative-Lib Dem marginal but switched to a Labour-Lib Dem fight last time, the Liberal Democrats just aren't positioned well in Labour wards.

Their highest vote share in 2022 was in **Pitshanger** (16%) and **Walpole** (18%): principally Conservative targets, so again their main purpose this time might be to block the Tories from regaining the most promising seats. There would need to be huge momentum behind the Liberal Democrats to break into these wards themselves which there isn't.

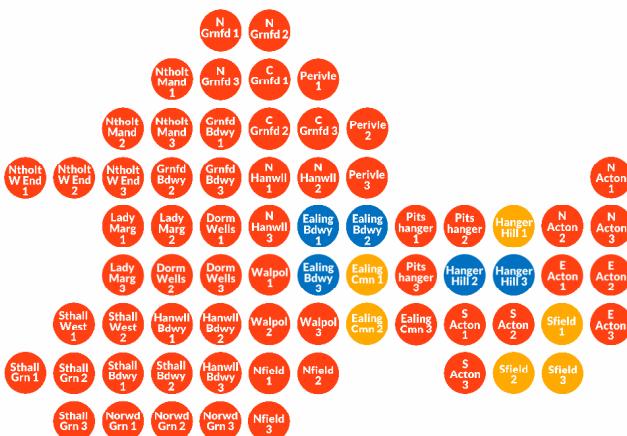
Beyond central Ealing itself where the party has basically won everything it's going to win, this borough is not especially liberal. The working-class majority of Acton isn't. Southall isn't. Greenford isn't. This is not Hampstead. It is not Richmond. There is no path to a Lib Dem majority: only to entrenching themselves as a not-really-opposing opposition to Labour.

So Labour is in a fairly strong position because it has been a borough designed to swing between Labour and the Conservatives. When one side of that swing is broken and hasn't been replaced Labour wins by landslide margins.

Since 1964, control of Ealing has switched eight times: 1968, 1971, 1978, 1986, 1990, 1994, 2006, 2010 - always from one party directly to the other; never to no overall control. That's because there has never been an especially strong third party and because clumps of wards are very similar: if one falls, a bunch fall.

If, for example, the vast Hindu and Sikh vote in **Southall Green** switched away from Labour, **Southall Broadway**, **Dormers Wells**, **Norwood Green**, **Lady Margaret** and **Southall West** would probably follow (unless there was some unique factor at play in that specific ward).

Likewise, there is very little difference - some, not that much - between **Central Greenford**, **North Greenford**, **Perivale** and **Northolt Mandeville**.



There are slight differences between **East Acton**, **North Acton** and **South Acton**, but they are essentially similar; as you might expect. Gentrified **Southfield**, which many regard as an adjunct to Chiswick rather than Acton, is the exception within this set.

Demographic change has affected the borough, especially its western side. Decades ago, the streets of Southall became a popular destination for families from the Indian sub-continent to flock to. This wasn't just an accident of Southall's

proximity to Heathrow. Had Southall been a town of high rise Brutalist council blocks, these immigrants would have gone elsewhere.

It was because Southall had long terraced streets in racks and grids - much better for building a community where neighbours know each other and congregate than blocks with only perhaps four flats to a floor, where space for getting together may not exist - and because Southall was affordable, that it became the centre of London's Indian community.

There are six core Southall wards: **Dormers Wells**, **Lady Margaret**, **Norwood Green**, **Southall Broadway**, **Southall Green** and **Southall West** - all now have populations of Indian sub-continent origin of above 60%: in the newly created ward of Southall West it's 75.2%. All these wards have been safely Labour since the 1970s. But will they stay that way?

One of the ways we now have to approach these unprecedented, unpredictable elections is almost to upend the 2022 results and interrogate whether the wards that gave Labour their biggest majorities last time might be among their more vulnerable this year.

Labour has never been so unpopular with ethnic minorities in polling history: negative 28 points among those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin; negative 33 among Indians. And Labour already lost a lot of support in these wards in 2022.

An 8% swing in **Lady Margaret**, 11% in **Southall Green**, 14% in **Southall Broadway**. That bloc of Southall wards are still Labour's safest - and their opponents will need bigger swings than that this year to oust them. But they are only safe as long as the residents within them turn out for them. If they stop - even worse if they turn out and vote for someone else - there's nothing "safe" about them.

The rest of Ealing beyond Southall used to be divided thus: Greenford and Northolt were heavily white working class areas that swung massively behind the Conservatives in the Thatcher era, then massively back to Labour during the Blair years - and more or less have stayed with Labour.

These are the key swing wards: when Ealing wants rid of Labour the bulk of them go Conservative. All twenty one seats here are Labour-held but go back to 2006 and twelve went Conservative, nine Labour. Rewind further to 1990 and sixteen were Conservative, three Labour, two Lib Dem. All these wards had fairly comfortable Labour majorities in 2022, but they're not earthquake-proof.

Central Ealing is traditionally the Conservative stronghold where once they could lock-down wards like **Ealing Broadway, Ealing Common, Hanger Hill, Pitshanger** and, more often than **Northfield** and occasionally **Walpole**. The Tories were usually not strong enough to win what is now **Hanwell Broadway** - the old Elthorne - but even here they could win the odd seat now and then.

But today, just **Ealing Broadway** and one seat in **Hanger Hill** have Conservative councillors. They are not too far behind in Northfield, and Walpole is a quite erratic ward: once thought to be comfortably Labour (it was represented by Hilary Benn for years) but switching to the Conservatives in the David Cameron years.

The thing to watch for in **Walpole** is whether its return to the Labour fold was a reassertion of business as usual or simply a reaction to an unpopular Conservative government. Given the Tories are less popular now than in 2022, this election may not provide a clear answer, but it's not a ward the Conservatives can give up on. **Hanwell Broadway** was the strongest Green ward in 2022, having not long before been one in which the Lib Dems won a seat.

To win control, the Conservatives need a 15% swing. They are nowhere close to that sort of number in London. Unless, of course, we do what I talked about above: upend the numbers. What if the Southall wards really turn on Labour?

The Electoral Calculus General Election MRP from December has Southall going to the Greens on a three-way split: Green 25%, Labour 24%, Reform 22%; Conservatives down on 12%.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Ealing Broadway (3 Con)
- ▶ Ealing Common (2 LD)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Central Greenford (3 Lab)
- ▶ Ealing Common (2 LD, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Hanger Hill (2 LD)
- ▶ North Hanwell (3 Lab)
- ▶ Northfield (3 Lab)
- ▶ Northolt Mandeville (3 Lab)
- ▶ Perivale (3 Lab)
- ▶ Pitshanger (3 Lab)
- ▶ Walpole (3 Lab)

Liberal Democrat hopefuls

- ▶ Ealing Common (3 Con)
- ▶ Hanger Hill (1 Con)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Ealing Common (2 LD, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Hanwell Broadway (3 Lab)
- ▶ Northfield (3 Lab)
- ▶ Norwood Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ South Acton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Southall West (2 Lab)
- ▶ Walpole (3 Lab)

Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Northolt Mandeville (3 Lab)
- ▶ Northolt West End (3 Lab)

That would give the Greens **Hanwell Broadway** easily and probably **Northfield**, being the more affluent south side of Boston Manor. It might also suggest a shot at **Southall West**: a ward created in 2022 and containing a lot of brand new apartment block housing (the so-called "Green Quarter") alongside Yeading Brook - not all of which is yet occupied.

There's also been a large amount of new housing development around Southall station in **Southall Green** ward; in fact alongside the rail tracks in **Norwood Green** ward too as warehousing districts are turned into new medium-rise housing estates. But this is a less significant

proportion of these wards than in **Southall West**. Still, it should be a boost to the Green Party if the sort of young first-time buyer professionals are a group that turns out heavily for them.

But then let's also consider that Reform share of 22% Electoral Calculus believes existed in Southall in December. Unlike the Green vote here, which has the potential to be concentrated strongly enough in one or two wards, Reform's support is likely evenly spread and less likely to net them seats. But where's it coming from?

Ward	Housing			Religion		Ethnic	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Muslim	Hindu & Sikh	White Brit	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Central Greenford	53.1	10.0	35.0	18.3	15.9	19.5	39.7	60.3	38.1	19.0
Dormers Wells	44.4	25.3	28.1	28.6	35.1	7.1	31.3	68.7	28.8	26.6
Ealing Broadway	38.2	10.8	49.0	8.6	5.9	33.7	70.4	29.6	65.6	9.4
Ealing Common	43.9	14.7	40.2	12.1	4.7	37.8	66.6	33.4	59.5	11.3
East Acton	33.1	24.2	40.3	25.5	2.3	24.5	51.3	48.7	47.8	15.8
Greenford Broadway	45.4	23.3	26.2	23.0	12.6	21.3	37.1	62.9	34.9	20.8
Hanger Hill	50.9	5.8	41.8	19.3	6.0	26.4	63.6	36.4	57.9	11.9
Hanwell Broadway	44.0	19.8	32.6	14.6	4.1	36.4	56.7	43.3	48.7	15.0
Lady Margaret	58.4	8.9	31.9	20.6	46.6	7.2	34.4	65.6	30.6	25.1
North Acton	35.0	17.4	45.1	17.9	3.0	27.0	54.3	45.7	46.0	14.1
North Greenford	58.3	11.9	29.0	18.5	19.5	16.7	40.7	59.3	39.3	18.9
North Hanwell	50.1	25.0	23.2	16.8	6.2	31.6	50.3	49.7	42.4	17.1
Northfield	63.7	6.9	28.8	6.7	4.2	46.3	68.4	31.6	60.5	9.5
Northolt Mandeville	47.9	23.5	26.7	18.3	13.7	22.5	37.1	62.9	35.4	21.2
Northolt West End	40.8	32.5	25.0	25.6	13.5	22.7	34.0	66.0	31.7	23.9
Norwood Green	38.3	30.8	25.0	24.6	35.7	10.9	42.3	57.7	34.4	24.0
Perivale	54.8	8.7	35.5	23.4	5.6	16.5	39.7	60.3	38.7	20.1
Pitshanger	50.2	21.3	27.0	17.8	14.8	34.8	61.9	38.1	52.9	12.6
South Acton	32.2	29.4	33.5	22.3	2.4	29.2	59.7	40.3	52.4	14.9
Southall Broadway	45.7	13.6	40.0	25.3	43.6	2.3	26.3	73.7	25.8	30.3
Southall Green	39.9	13.4	45.2	19.7	48.6	2.5	23.5	76.5	24.3	31.1
Southall West	40.5	20.6	34.9	30.2	45.0	2.7	26.5	73.5	24.3	30.1
Southfield	52.2	10.5	34.6	7.6	2.3	45.8	73.7	26.3	66.2	8.1
Walpole	51.4	12.2	35.3	10.1	5.2	43.3	68.7	31.3	60.4	10.7

If assumptions about Reform's vote: older, whiter, more working class are correct, they aren't getting close to 22% in Southall. The number of white residents left in Southall is minuscule: below 3% in the three named Southall wards and 7% in **Lady Margaret** and **Dormers Wells**. It's higher in **Norwood Green**, and considerably higher at the Hanwell end of the constituency so some may come from there; but these are more affluent middle-class neighbourhoods relatively disdainful of Reform's message.

That must mean that Reform is claiming a lot of the Indian vote in Southall that went Conservative in 2022 AND taking another - even larger chunk from Labour. It seems odd, perhaps, that a party which wants to curtail immigration might poll well in one of London's first immigrant neighbourhoods. But if now long-established communities are experiencing the same problems accessing good public services, and see new build estates going up in their area but which are out of their children's reach then is it so beyond belief that they might be attracted to Reform's message?

Nonetheless, Reform probably has better prospects in the north of the borough. The Electoral Calculus MRP has Reform winning Ealing North albeit on another incredibly divided result: Reform 28%, Labour 23%, Green 22% and Conservatives 14%. Again, the Greenford and Northolt end of the borough has changed massively from the days when right-winger Harry Greenway - an earlier incarnation of Nigel Farage, just less posh - won thumping majorities for the Conservatives. Ealing North was then the archetype of a Margaret Thatcher-loving working-class constituency.

Today it is much less white, though no more affluent than it was back then. Reform's best shot here - and this may seem an odd pick given it's the best Labour ward in this cluster - is **Northolt West End**. This is the whitest of the wards and, with its proximity to RAF Northolt air base (which is in Hillingdon), home to a few military families. It's a mix of inter-war suburbia (as is much of Greenford and Northolt) but with more council housing. Labour took over 62% here in 2022 but it's precisely the sort of area where the party will shed votes to the right; maybe less so the Greens.

There was little sign of a substantial Reform vote in the three Ealing by-elections that took place in October 2024: one in **Northolt Mandeville**, one in **South Acton** and one in **Hanger Hill**. This was before the Reform surge that began in early 2025 but still: 271 votes in Northolt (11%); 159 in Acton; just 98 in Hanger Hill. Clearly, Northolt Mandeville was their best area of these three but still not great back then.

Interestingly, despite Reform standing there, the Conservatives still managed to grow their vote by just over four points while Labour was down eleven. Labour still held Mandeville by just under 400. But it suggests either that the Tories did still lose votes to Reform but gained many more than it appears from Labour; or that both right-of-centre parties can take votes off Labour in these outlying wards.

Finally, let's look at the Ealing and Acton end of the borough. Electoral Calculus has Labour retaining - surprise, surprise - the most affluent of Ealing's three constituencies. But even here its support is very weak: Labour 24.9%, Green 24.8%, Reform 19%, Conservatives 14% and Lib Dems 12%. This constituency gained two of the safest Labour wards in next door Hammersmith and Fulham at the last general election: College Park and Old Oak and Wormholt. Excluding those two, Labour would have been behind in this constituency too - maybe by four percent or so.

If you count **Hanger Hill** as an Acton ward there are five: two pretty affluent (Hanger Hill and Southfield), one stable, working class (East Acton) and two pretty deprived, both undergoing vast "regeneration" (North Acton and South Acton). The redevelopment of **South Acton** - by which I principally mean the demolition and replacement of the huge South Acton council estate - is almost complete: a redevelopment that has taken about two decades.

That there is so much new housing here, interspersed with some interwar semis and some leafy avenues closer to **Ealing Common**, gives the Greens a real chance in a ward that has been rock-solid Labour since 1982. **South Acton** still has the highest proportion of council housing of any Ealing ward but it's below 30% now.

North Acton is somewhat different because a large part of it is the huge - literally square miles of it - warehousing and light industrial district of Park Royal, one of the major redevelopment zones in London.

The transformation of Park Royal - which is so big parts of it are in Brent and Hammersmith - is still in relatively early stages so right now it is one of those quite eerie areas where you find a few new residential towers in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by industrial units and major roads, and little else. The epicentre of what's been built so far is Victoria Road, near North Acton Central Line station: massive tower blocks visible for miles around because this isn't a corner of London that has any experience of high-rise buildings.

The Greens may therefore have a chance in **North Acton**, where Labour polled more weakly than **South Acton** last time: only 45%. In **South Acton**, the Greens were clearly second but further behind.

Can the Conservatives recover at all in **Hanger Hill**? The 2022 result suggests they could and should because they still held two seats even after a big swing to the Lib Dems. But the 2024 by-election says they can't.

In 2022, **Hanger Hill** was a three-way marginal with Labour on 24%, the Lib Dems on 31% and the Tories on 32%. Compare this result, incidentally with how the ward voted in

1990: Conservative 68%, Labour 22% and Lib Dem 10% as another example of how far the Tories have fallen across especially affluent London.

But in the by-election the Lib Dems were especially successful at persuading voters of a "progressive" lean to lend them their votes, and so surged by twenty-one percentage points, to defeat the Conservatives by more than 2:1. The Conservatives fell six points but the combined Labour and Green decline was more than nineteen.

A by-election is a snapshot, not a trend, and there was quite a lot of effort to encourage people to defeat Reform, less so the Conservatives: instilling almost a moral panic that Nigel Farage had the least chance of winning there. As we've already seen, Reform didn't even get one hundred votes. Hanger Hill will almost certainly return to being more competitive than in that by-election, but Conservative prospects here really aren't good.

It is that inherent Conservative weakness that could save Labour in Ealing. This borough is not a cast iron guaranteed Labour hold and being attacked by different parties in different wards could cost Labour its majority at a push. But Labour's vote is remarkably weak - and weak in places it never really has been before, so we could be looking at a radically different looking political map of this borough on May 8th.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	5	59	6		
Oct 24 by-election: Hanger Hill - LD gain from Con	4	59	7		
Oct 24 by-election: Northolt Mandeville - Lab hold	4	59	7		
Oct 24 by-election: South Acton - Lab hold	4	59	7		

In a city as large as London results never wholly move in one direction. In 2022, while Labour was gaining boroughs in which it had never won a majority, Enfield swung to the Conservatives. This was true in both seats (eight moved from Labour to Conservative) and votes (a 5% swing from Labour to Conservative).

Yes, Labour kept control with a 13 seat majority (down from 29) and it will still be fairly tough to dislodge enough seats to oust them from power, but it's not impossible. Not with both national and local unpopularity dragging Labour down.

The reasons for Labour's poor result four years ago are several. The group spent the four years up to 2022 seriously split, changed its leader immediately after the 2018 results and several councillors were suspended or resigned over the next four years. Ward boundary changes also benefited the Conservatives by recreating several smaller two-councillor wards where Tory-inclined areas that had been outvoted in larger Labour-supporting divisions could elect the councillors they wanted.

And Enfield was another of those boroughs where Labour lost support in ethnically diverse safe seats. Swings of 10% or higher in wards like Ponders End - just 16% white British; 7% in Haselbury - 18% white British. **Bowes** ward, south of the North Circular and not all that distinguishable from the Wood Green wards in Haringey where Conservative support has disappeared swung to the Tories by 17%. That one is 20% white British. Labour held them but they won't for much longer if they continue swinging away like that.

It isn't obvious at all that the problems that beset Labour in 2022 have been remedied; and Labour has added to them by winning the 2024 general election then losing half its support so rapidly. Enfield Conservatives are brash and visible with a strong social media presence, whatever good that will do them.

Enfield can be divided into three distinct parts.

There is Edmonton and the wall of wards running along the edge of the river Lea: reservoir country! Edmonton proper comprises **Lower Edmonton, Edmonton Green, Upper Edmonton, Haselbury** and **Jubilee** whereas **Ponders End, Brimsdown, Carterhatch, Bullsmoor** and **Enfield Lock** are the working class side of Enfield town. I'm also going to include **Southbury** in this set even though it's on the wrong side of the A10, partly because it will be isolated as we go through the other clusters but also because it is quite similar to the Lea-side Enfield wards.

The days when Enfield was a geographically separate town from Edmonton are long gone: there is now an unbroken urban sprawl up the side of the borough. The wards are not all that dissimilar: each has a large population of African and Caribbean origin: 30% in **Edmonton Green, Lower Edmonton** and **Ponders End** and 29% in **Upper Edmonton**.

Where these two areas differ a lot is in housing tenure. Edmonton has a lot of council housing; Enfield town (with the exception of Carterhatch: its council estate ward) does not. Council and housing association stock comprises 39% of Edmonton Green's properties, 33% of Upper Edmonton and 28% of Lower Edmonton. Carterhatch's figure is 34% but most of this is different to Edmonton's: cottage estate of houses or low rise tenements in Enfield; high rise blocks in central Edmonton. There is nothing anywhere else in Enfield borough like the three 27-storey Edmonton Green estate tower blocks just behind the shopping centre.

This eastern wall of wards are typically Labour's strongest, though some swung from the party in 2022 and will probably do so again. Because of those - in some cases quite large - swings against Labour last time, these wards don't look marginal but they are not quite invulnerable anymore either.

Enfield Lock has elected Conservative councillors in six past elections. In **Edmonton Green** two independents took 866 and 648 votes in 2022, causing Labour's vote to crash twenty percentage points. This is the last ward Labour should expect to lose but it is one third Muslim (the highest in Enfield) and the party's support is tanking with ethnic minority voters. It is also the ward of the current council leader Ergin Erbil which may motivate Labour's opponents to try harder.

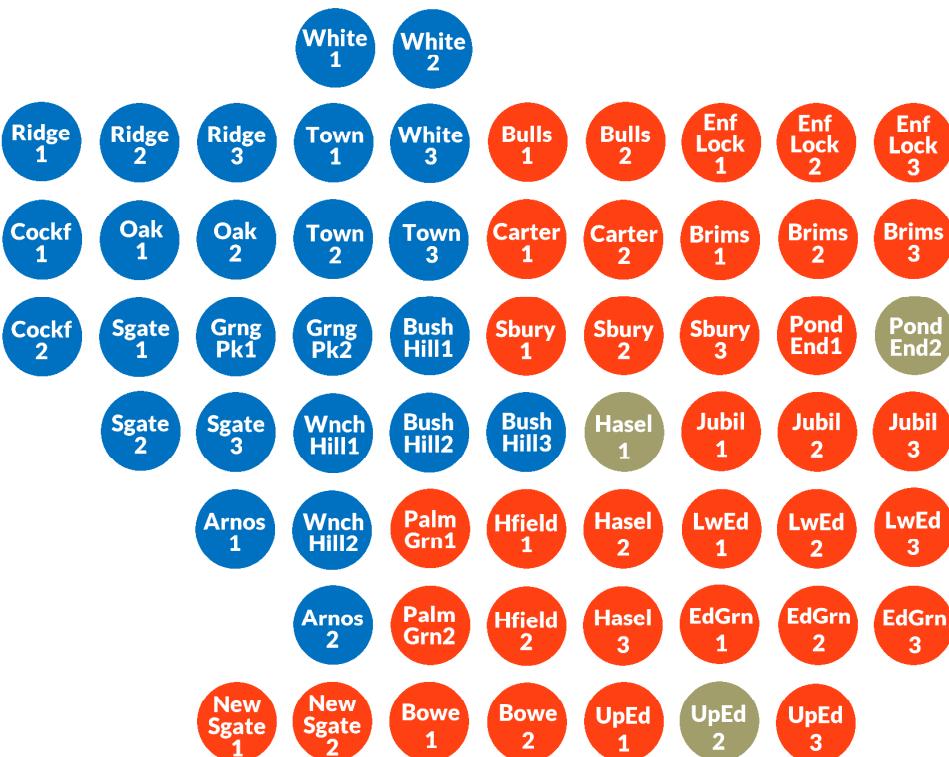
In a by-election in **Jubilee** ward in 2024 - the tipping point when support for Labour following the general election really deserted, there was a 12% swing to the Conservatives on top of the 2022 swing. The Tories only fell short by 162 votes: 32% to Labour's 39%. This was the by-election caused by former council leader Nesil Caliskan resigning after being elected MP for Barking.

This one matters because **Jubilee** would not have been on any list of Conservative targets after 2022 - it was way beyond the easiest seats they needed for a majority. If **Jubilee** is vulnerable, then so too are wards on that eastern side like **Ponders End, Brimsdown** and **Enfield Lock** - which all have very similar majorities.

Ponders End going Tory would be stunning and almost certainly won't happen: but watch it! In parliamentary boundary reviews the Conservatives and Labour often battled over where Ponders End should go, because it's typically so heavily for Labour that it matters. The Tories wanted it in Edmonton which they can't win any more; Labour wanted it in marginal Enfield North because it would literally change who won that constituency.

Southbury is also important because this one was near the top of the Tory targets list following 2022. Southbury is a bit on an incoherent ward with a northern suburban residential section and then a much more urban south interspersed between industrial estates; the two separated by Enfield playing fields.

Southbury notionally registered a huge swing from Labour in 2022: 10% - but this isn't quite accurate because most of what is now Carterhatch - that new safe Labour council estate ward - was part of Southbury in 2018. The removal of all that council housing makes Southbury much better territory for the Conservatives. They were about fourteen percentage points behind last time; just under 500 votes give or take. The Conservatives have to win this one if they are going to take power in Enfield again.



But perhaps this is one of the few wards Reform might do well in: it is fairly white: at least for London, and most of its housing is owner occupied but is far more affordable than the Conservative wards to the west. A strong Reform showing will almost certainly block a Conservative win.

Bullsmoor - mostly the old Turkey Street ward (and before that...Bullsmoor!) - is a neighbourhood that stretches across the borough and London boundary into Waltham Cross in Broxbourne district. This is one of many Enfield wards that was once safely Conservative but swung heavily to Labour.

The long-term deterioration in the Tory position shows in the ward swinging 7% towards them in 2022 and yet still getting nowhere close. They need another 12% swing this year to take this ward back for the first election since 2006.

Enfield is another deeply unequal borough. The eastern side contains the same extreme levels of deprivation found in Tottenham immediately south. You may say that this is hardly surprising: entrenched poverty does not respect boundaries. Yet it does. It does in Haringey where it halts at Hornsey. Here it does at the A10. There's a little seepage across the Cambridge Road but essentially if you live west of it you are significantly better off on a basket of measures than if you live on the Lea-side of it.

Here, thirty-three of the Lower Super Output Areas - a census measure that is meaningless other than that it divides the country into units containing the same number of people - are in the most deprived decile there is; and a further forty-one are in the second most deprived 10%. That's in the whole of England, not just of Enfield or London.

In contrast, if you live in a cluster of output areas centred on Enfield Golf Club in the centre-west of the borough, or in Cockfosters in the far west, you are in the least deprived 20% in England.

Although the link between affluence and Conservative votes has been breaking down for decades in London (just as its less true that voters in relative poverty vote wholesale for Labour

nowadays), it isn't surprising that nearly all the Tory seats on Enfield council lie in this group of very affluent output areas.

There are the three wards covering Enfield Town: **Town** itself, **Whitewebbs** and **Ridgeway**; and then a band of affluent wards just to the south: **Cockfosters**, **Southgate**, **Oakwood**, **Grange Park**, **Bush Hill Park** and **Winchmore Hill**. Enfield Southgate is now a Labour constituency - safe Labour while it's paired with a hefty chunk of Haringey - but Southgate and this central strip remain Conservative-leaning.

All currently have Conservative councillors and all bar **Southgate** and **Whitewebbs** should be secure, unless Reform makes far bigger inroads into the Tory vote than expected. The Tories failed to exceed 40% of the vote in **Southgate** ward in 2022 but Labour fell below 30% and so lost two seats.

If both main parties' support fell where did their votes go?

To the Greens who polled 24%, barely behind Labour. **Southgate** was, by some distance, the best Green ward last time. The only question about their ability to win here is whether their more viscerally left-wing positioning will resonate quite as well in these sort of affluent middle class wards. It probably won't will repel enough voters to rule out the Greens winning, while Labour-held wards might now be looking more promising, despite weaker 2022 Green votes.

Are any Enfield wards likely to vote Reform? The answer is yes - though they aren't quite in the same category as the party's top targets in a borough like Bexley. It's also not obvious which ones are Reform targets.

Are the geographically huge outer wards of **Whitewebbs** and **Ridgeway** winnable because they're the least typically London-like? Perhaps, but they are only so large because they divide up Enfield Chase and nobody lives there. They are in fact the outskirts of Enfield town: **Whitewebbs** the northern outskirts and Ridgeway the western parts. If they go Reform then so too is **Town** and probably **Grange Park** and **Oakwood**, though these are somewhat different wards in the orbit of Barnet which is very not Reform territory.

Of course, Reform could do that well: **Whitewebbs** in particular contains a Reform-friendly blend: almost 50% white, almost 60% home-owners, but nowhere near as affluent as, say, **Cockfosters**. It is also the most marginal of all the Tory-held wards: they won with just 37% last time, with Labour on 26, the Lib Dems on 21 and Greens on 7. You can infer from those figures what sort of vote share whoever wins this year is going to need when Reform enters the fray.

Wards like **Cockfosters**, **Oakwood** and **Grange Park** on the one hand have something of that retired golf club member caricature that might suggest the sort of Reform voter that has been with Nigel Farage since his days in UKIP; but honestly: they are perhaps too affluent to desert the Conservatives. Meanwhile **Southgate**, **Winchmore Hill** and **Bush Hill Park** are too London-like; populated by more young professional families looking for less expensive housing close to decent, quick public transport into the centre of town.

On paper, the profile of these inner suburban wards isn't that different from the wards I've just speculated could go Reform's way but then so are wards across the borough boundary in Barnet like Brunswick Park and Whetstone that decidedly will not. It depends on the political outlook of the white, home-owning residents.

If they are conservative leaning and older, Reform has a shot; if they are liberal leaning and younger, they do not. But then neither should the Conservatives and, while relatively competitive, they hold them. It's about the relative mix rather than saying a ward is full of gammons or woke trans-allies.

The third ward cluster is the one that has decided which party runs Enfield since Labour's breakthrough win in 1994. These are the inner suburban wards - wards including **Arnos Grove**, **New Southgate** (not much like old Southgate), **Bowes**, **Palmers Green** and **Highfield**. Most of these wards had either become very strongly Labour or been happily inching that way, election after election, until 2022.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Arnos Grove (2 Con)
- ▶ Haselbury (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Ponders End (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Southgate (3 Con)
- ▶ Whitewebbs (3 Con)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Bowes (2 Lab)
- ▶ Bullsmoor (2 Lab)
- ▶ Highfield (2 Lab)
- ▶ Jubilee (3 Lab)
- ▶ New Southgate (2 Lab)
- ▶ Palmers Green (2 Lab)
- ▶ Southbury (3 Lab)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Bullsmoor (2 Lab)
- ▶ Oakwood (2 Con)
- ▶ Ridgeway (2 Con)
- ▶ Southbury (3 Lab)
- ▶ Town (3 Con)
- ▶ Whitewebbs (3 Con)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Edmonton Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ Haselbury (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lower Edmonton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Southgate (3 Con)

Independent hopeful

- ▶ Edmonton Green (3 Lab)

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Arnos Grove	69.2	4.8	23.6	35.1	4.9	13.3	60.5	39.5	49.0	15.4
Bowes	49.1	13.8	35.9	19.8	10.9	19.8	39.3	60.7	34.5	25.1
Brimsdown	46.0	22.2	30.7	26.2	21.6	22.9	33.9	66.1	28.2	28.5
Bullsmoor	45.4	26.6	26.6	33.0	20.0	18.7	34.8	65.2	27.4	28.1
Bush Hill Park	77.0	3.9	18.8	44.2	7.3	11.6	54.9	45.1	40.2	17.7
Carterhatch	37.8	33.9	26.9	27.3	22.8	24.3	33.4	66.6	26.4	28.7
Cockfosters	66.7	10.7	21.0	42.0	4.8	11.0	62.8	37.2	44.7	18.1
Edmonton Green	26.5	39.1	31.9	16.0	29.8	31.3	31.2	68.8	27.6	29.9
Enfield Lock	39.9	24.4	32.0	25.8	26.3	18.8	37.4	62.6	30.8	25.7
Grange Park	72.4	3.1	24.2	49.6	5.0	8.0	63.6	36.4	47.4	14.1
Haselbury	45.6	18.2	35.5	17.8	22.5	25.0	32.6	67.4	28.4	27.6
Highfield	66.5	11.6	21.6	24.8	11.3	20.2	46.9	53.1	35.7	23.0
Jubilee	49.0	14.8	35.0	20.2	23.3	28.5	33.3	66.7	27.8	29.0
Lower Edmonton	35.7	28.0	34.9	16.7	29.7	26.3	30.4	69.6	27.9	28.5
New Southgate	48.7	13.3	36.7	32.1	9.2	12.6	50.4	49.6	46.1	17.6
Oakwood	68.9	6.6	22.9	37.2	5.7	11.3	60.0	40.0	46.7	14.7
Palmers Green	54.0	7.4	37.7	35.2	6.8	11.6	54.6	45.4	47.8	17.6
Ponders End	36.8	24.1	36.3	16.2	29.6	35.7	32.3	67.7	29.3	28.5
Ridgeway	67.4	8.3	23.9	54.6	6.1	7.6	59.3	40.7	43.7	15.3
Southbury	55.0	15.8	28.1	36.8	13.8	14.2	47.3	52.7	38.2	18.9
Southgate	59.1	7.4	32.9	35.2	4.8	12.2	56.9	43.1	46.7	17.0
Town	66.5	8.1	24.6	52.6	7.7	7.6	55.7	44.3	42.5	15.2
Upper Edmonton	33.8	31.7	33.0	14.8	28.6	29.9	32.5	67.5	29.5	28.6
Whitewebbs	59.8	19.4	19.5	54.8	9.9	9.0	50.9	49.1	36.8	18.6
Winchmore Hill	69.0	4.0	26.7	46.7	4.2	8.0	63.4	36.6	50.0	14.5

In 2022 the Conservatives easily regained **Arnos Grove** (the successor to Southgate Green), came within a whisker of winning **Highfield** (the eastern end of a heavily redrawn Palmers Green ward) and pulled off that massive 16% swing in **Bowes**, which hadn't voted Conservative since 1982.

It's still some way from doing so again, but it's at least visible as a target on the horizon and if the Greens, who didn't contest the ward last time, take a big chunk out of Labour's vote it could be interesting.

Labour comfortably won **Palmers Green**, shorn of its clearly much more Conservative east end that went into Highfield, but even with these favourable boundary changes there was a clear swing to the Tories last time.

Palmers Green was the sort of area that made Enfield Southgate such a safe seat for Michael Portillo up until 1997 and a very marginal but Labour-leaning marginal thereafter. Like Bowes, immediately to the south, it should these days be beyond the Tories' reach but it's just about conceivable that

some freak Tory gain could occur here if the Greens can make deep inroads into Labour's vote.

Enfield is at the furthest end of Conservative dreams for this year's London elections. If they gain it, they should have won back the three totemic boroughs they lost in 2022 and continued their recovery in ethnically diverse wards elsewhere in north and west London.

Four gains in what is now the Tories' weakest region in England by far would see off whatever threat remains to Kemi Badenoch's leadership. They might even steal the headlines from Reform.

But as the index of deprivation map shows, Enfield no longer looks like a borough the Conservatives should win and, more widely, it's also why they are struggling in London. It is not that stable communities have simply switched their vote: it is that there has been mass emigration from London of "old"

white Londoners and mass immigration of very different demographics in terms of age, race and employment.

There are weird contra flows throughout London: next door Waltham Forest, for example, is getting generally more affluent because it started off largely deprived and is gentrifying. Enfield, with a few exceptional neighbourhoods, was never a massively affluent borough - it's what sociologists might have described as lower middle class suburbia in the 1950s, but nor was it poor. It's slid as some of the wealth it had has migrated.

For a long time Enfield has been a two-party borough: just three non-Labour or Conservative councillors have ever been elected here. This might change in May but the borough will still be dominated by the two big parties. That the Conservatives have a shot: and they do, even if it's a long-shot, is a statement of the mess Labour has got itself in nationally and locally.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	O
May 22 council election result	25	38			
Apr 23 by-election: Bullsmoor - Lab hold	25	38			
Nov 23 by-election: Jubilee - Lab hold	25	38			
Feb 24 suspension: Thomas Fawns (Upper Edmonton) - Lab to Ind	25	37			1
Aug 25 defection: Mohammad Islam (Ponders End) - Lab to Ind	25	36			2
Sep 25 defection: Mustafa Cetinkaya (Haselbury) - Lab to Ind	25	35			3

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is the quintessential quiet, Labour-run London borough that has just got on providing services, not headlines for the tabloids.

Labour comfortably maintained control throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s when none of the borough's three constituencies were Labour-held (two went to the SDP, Eltham was Conservative) and, other than the 1968 Labour disaster, has always won handily.

Travel back to 1931 for the last time the Tories, standing as Municipal Reform, won a majority (of one seat) on Woolwich council; and 1922 for old Greenwich borough. Right now Labour has a 48-seat majority.

This is largely because the borough comprises masses of the four core groups that have comprised Labour's national coalition of voters since the 1970s.

There are the affluent liberals who live in old Greenwich and Blackheath: once one-nation Conservatives, now Labour. They populate wards like **Blackheath**, **Westcombe**, **Greenwich Park**, and **Eltham Park and Progress**.

There are the residents of the big council estates that dominate the Woolwich and Thamesmead skyline, in particular. **Charlton Village and Riverside**, **Eltham Page**, **Thamesmead Moorings** and **Woolwich Common** are the largest of these now that the notorious Ferrier estate has been demolished and replaced by **Kidbrooke Village**.

There are the working class and sometimes ethnically diverse neighbourhoods of Plumstead and **East Greenwich** and **Woolwich Dockyard** plus the western side of Eltham - which is a planned cottage garden council estate, nothing like the modernist high-rise council estates of Woolwich.

And nowadays there are the younger professionals living in newly built apartment blocks along the riverside, at Woolwich Arsenal, by Greenwich Creek, in Kidbrooke and down-river of the O2 Arena on the Greenwich Peninsula.

The last two or three elections have left the Conservatives representing nothing other than affluent, suburban Eltham - and they've been pushed to near extinction there.

The question is: can Labour keep that coalition together? It doesn't look too promising.

Reform and the Greens have ladders of electoral progress - each rung or borough getting harder to climb. The Green Party ladder looks like this:



Hackney and Lewisham their best shots, followed not too far behind by Lambeth. These three are boroughs the Greens shouldn't just do well in but have a real shot of winning a majority. The next cluster are boroughs where the Greens probably aren't favoured to win a majority of seats but may be the largest party and will almost certainly have a functional group of councillors. The darkest green Greens are those councils where it's very hard for them to win a majority but will expand their councillor groups.

The history of much of Greenwich - unsurprisingly, given its huge riparian boundary - is linked inextricably to the river and the navy.

Greenwich Creek, more or less the western boundary of the borough in Tudor times was an armoury for Henry VIII's soldiers, off to fight to keep Calais English. The first English power station to generate energy for public use stood at the mouth of the creek; and one of the largest builders of paddle steamers of the Victorian era was based there.

Only slightly further along there is the Cutty Sark, the domed entrance to the foot tunnel to the Isle of Dogs and historic Greenwich town. Even today it's still not all that difficult to imagine the characters of a Horatio Hornblower story rushing around preparing for their next battle with Napoleonic France or the Spanish Dons.

Beyond that is the Greenwich Naval Observatory and the Meridian. Then Greenwich Hospital, founded by Queen Mary as a retirement home for injured Royal Navy sailors.

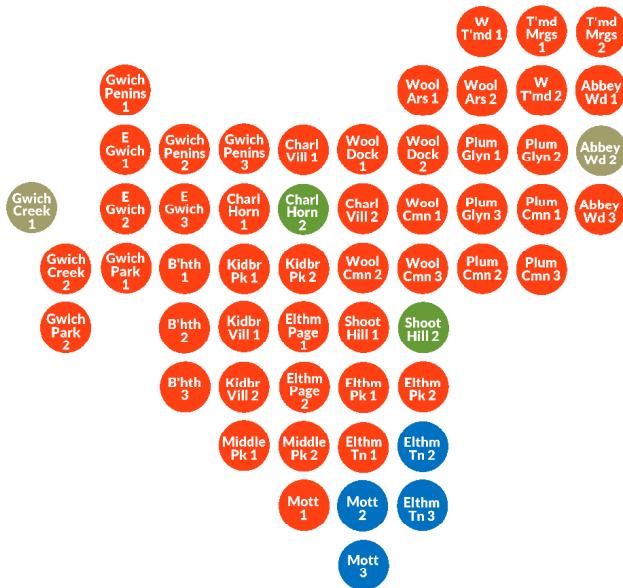
Then you are into the peninsula: the old Trafalgar ward, where executed pirates' bodies hung in cages near the foreshore to encourage their fellows to choose a new career. After the peninsula was drained it became the main manufacturing site and store for the Royal Ordnance - the producer of explosives, until residents petitioned the navy to move this deadly ammunition away. London's original NIMBYs? We look more at **Greenwich Peninsula** and **East Greenwich** wards later, as they both contain target seats.

Beyond the peninsula is Charlton with its football club and Jacobean mansion, plus the Thames Barrier, opened in 1984 - and then ever more naval-related history as we reach Woolwich. The ward covering Woolwich's riverside reverted to being called Dockyard in the last boundary review and that Thames frontage remains a mix of industrial sites and relatively new housing.

Then there is the Woolwich Ferry, transporting passengers to North Woolwich, which is now - as you might expect - part of

the north London borough of Newham but was once within Woolwich borough and constituency.

Next up is the Royal Arsenal: the original base of the football team now based in Highbury. The Arsenal employed upwards of 80,000 people around the time of the First World War - hence even the history of the area away from the Thames is still tethered to the river. These boroughs came into being because they were home to so many of those who helped forged England's naval history. The Arsenal has now been regenerated into an exclusive housing development.



We've still not reached the eastern end of the borough.

Thamesmead was, until the most recent spur of regeneration, the newest neighbourhood in Greenwich: marshland drained in the 1960s and developed into a massive outlying Brutalist council estate, replete with aerial walkways and built around a huge lake. Thamesmead is so large that it spans the borough boundary with Bexley.

The spur for this latest long-running regeneration of the borough was the questionable decision by John Major's

Conservative government and completed by its Labour successor to commemorate the year 2000 by building the Millennium Dome.

This was a much bigger undertaking than just building a few angled pylons and stretching a tarpaulin over it, which is what the Dome resembles. The industrial heritage of the peninsula had left it heavily contaminated and the costs of cleaning it up were higher than the land was worth as warehousing. The peninsula was industrial wasteland with a road to and from the Blackwall Tunnel tearing through the middle.

Getting the peninsula back into productive life was, in hindsight, a dry-run for the regeneration of Stratford for the Olympic games just over a decade later. It was about repurposing and reclaiming swathes of land that held so much potential now it was just across the Thames from the Canary Wharf financial district. The Dome provided a focal point around which to bring people to the area, and new neighbourhoods to meet London's surging housing need arose around it.

So much new housing has been built across the borough that, in the Greenwich ward boundary review prior to the last council elections, four essentially new wards were drawn to accommodate it: **Greenwich Creekside, Kidbrooke Village, Woolwich Arsenal and West Thamesmead**.

The population of **Greenwich Peninsula** was so large by that point that an entirely new ward: **East Greenwich**, was drawn entirely within its boundaries. East Greenwich, however, contains most of the established, older housing on the western side of the peninsula so, somewhat confusingly, the new ward within Greenwich Peninsula IS Greenwich Peninsula.

The whole eastern side of the peninsula south of the O2 Arena is now huge housing estates of towering riverside apartment blocks plus two brand new, conjoined parks: Southern Park and Ecology Park. There's also a new linear Central Park inland a bit, that feels a lot like Park Lane a swath of green in between lanes of traffic.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Abbey Wood (1 Ind, defec)
- ▶ Charlton Hornfair (1 Grn, defec)
- ▶ Eltham Town and Avery Hill (2 Con)
- ▶ Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham (2 Con)
- ▶ Greenwich Creekside (1 Ind, defec)
- ▶ Shooters Hill (1 Grn)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Blackheath Westcombe (3 Lab)
- ▶ Eltham Park and Progress (2 Lab)
- ▶ Eltham Town and Avery Hill (1 Lab)
- ▶ Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham (1 Lab)

Liberal Democrat hopeful

- ▶ West Thamesmead (2 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Charlton Hornfair (2 Lab)
- ▶ East Greenwich (3 Lab)
- ▶ Greenwich Creekside (2 Lab)
- ▶ Greenwich Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Kidbrooke Village & Sutcliffe (2 Lab)
- ▶ Shooters Hill (1 Lab)
- ▶ Woolwich Arsenal (2 Lab)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Charlton Hornfair (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Eltham Page (2 Lab)
- ▶ Eltham Park and Progress (2 Lab)
- ▶ Eltham Town & Avery Hill (2 Con, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Kidbrooke Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham (2 Con, 1 Lab)

Development here has more or less reached Bugsby's Reach on the edge of Charlton before it starts off again, creating an uncomfortable boundary between the new housing estates and the tracts of industrial estates to the east and the huge out-of-town superstore lots throughout the centre of the peninsula.

This all adds up to a weird landscape: futuristic high rises around the edge, a major road tearing through the middle, never-ending construction sites, the O2's vast, open car parks serving the and the remaining industrial, warehousing and superstore sites all pocketed off with that spiked aluminium fencing that is so alienating.

It's also far from obvious yet that all this gated off high-rise riverside housing is turning into a functional neighbourhood. Although the peninsula has the Jubilee Line extension running to North Greenwich, this is still a neighbourhood in the middle of nowhere. A house is not a home, the song goes, and the peninsula is not yet a community.

Where are the local shops, the pubs and public gyms and community centres and schools and GP surgeries? The peninsula still feels incredibly isolated and fragmented. Maybe it will change once the cranes and cement mixers have left for good.

Pretty much all the riverside has returned Labour councillors for decades. The exception was the ward that covered "old Greenwich": the former Vanbrugh ward and now **Greenwich Park**. But the last time the Conservatives won there was 1982. In 2002 the ward was merged with Greenwich West and any Tory hopes, if they still existed, vanished. **Greenwich Park** is essentially a re-creation of Vanbrugh, but by 2022 the party was down to just 12% with the Greens nipping at Labour's heels.

There was an even more promising ward for the Conservatives: today their only hope of representation in Greenwich, and that was Blackheath, now **Blackheath Westcombe**. This ward split its representation five successive times between 2002 and 2022 before Labour

could finally snatch its last seat last time. The Conservatives lost by a clear margin last time: 45% to 26% but this is still just within their range, unless their vote collapses to the Greens.

Slightly to the east of Blackheath, right in the centre of the borough, is Kidbrooke Park: a ward that is usually solid for Labour but can go haywire in years when the party is unpopular.

By-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Grn	Ref
Mottingham	+3.6	- 5.3	- 6.4	+3.5	+8.1
Eltham Town	+12.1	- 8.5	- 2.9	- 8.7	+9.3
Shooters Hill (1)	- 0.6	- 1.1	- 0.1	- 5.1	+9.9
West Thamesmead	- 6.0	- 16.3	+23.8	- 10.4	+8.9
Shooters Hill (2)	- 2.3	- 28.9	- 3.8	+19.2	+13.1

Italics show party that didn't contest the 2022 elections but stood in the by-election so, strictly speaking, they're not increases: just the actual vote share won in the by-election

Then we reach Eltham. This is where the remaining four Conservative councillors are dug in, both in wards that split with Labour in 2022. They will hope for a recovery in May, in part justified from two of the by-elections that occurred in these split wards: the mouthful that is **Mottingham**, **Coldharbour and New Eltham**, and the somewhat less cumbersome **Eltham Town and Avery Hill**. That ward, when it was Eltham South, was represented for four years by one Liz Truss from 2006 to 2010.

In Mottingham, just before the 2024 general election, there was a 4.5% swing, but in Eltham Town, which happened a few months after that election there was a swing of over 10% with the Conservatives gaining the seat.

A 10% swing replicated in May would, of course, return six Conservative councillors for these two wards plus their northern neighbour: Eltham Park and Progress. "Progress" refers to the Progress estate, which is another reference back to the riverside. It was built to house workers at the Royal Arsenal.

This is by some stretch the most affluent of the Eltham wards, so of course these days it votes Labour.

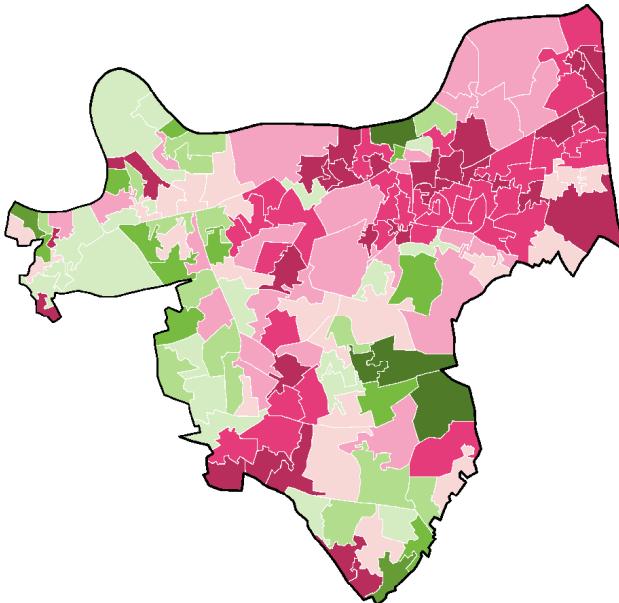
This ward, the old Eltham North, was solidly Conservative in 2014; Labour then gained one of its seats that year, two in 2018, and then the redrawn, smaller ward lost a councillor in 2022 and it was the Tory who was ousted. But the Conservatives were less than two hundred votes off the second Labour seat, and less than five hundred off the top: both would fall on a 10% swing. If the Conservatives can achieve it. But they face a real threat in Eltham from Reform UK. This is because Eltham is atypical of inner London.

While the borough of Greenwich voted to remain in the European Union in the 2016 referendum 56%-44, Eltham voted Leave by the same proportion as the UK: 52% to 48%. It was the only inner London constituency so to do.

The area is mostly very white, even today, and massively so by London standards: Eltham Park 71% white, Eltham Town 64%, Mottingham 62% and even Eltham Page - which is the old Eltham West: the council estate ward, is 54% white. Middle Park and Horn Park - which might also be called Eltham Palace, is 52%.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Abbey Wood	40.1	35.3	23.9	34.2	29.2	9.2	36.2	63.8	36.8	21.3
Blackheath Westcombe	51.9	20.9	25.6	59.9	5.9	3.5	73.5	26.5	62.9	10.1
Charlton Hornfair	43.1	35.8	19.8	43.6	16.8	7.2	53.9	46.1	47.8	16.4
Charlton Village and Riverside	36.0	42.5	20.6	40.6	18.6	11.7	48.5	51.5	42.4	18.2
East Greenwich	41.2	28.9	25.9	44.7	12.7	6.1	70.9	29.1	62.7	10.3
Eltham Page	42.2	42.2	12.8	53.8	12.1	7.8	41.4	58.6	32.9	24.6
Eltham Park and Progress	71.4	16.4	11.5	70.5	4.3	2.9	56.8	43.2	40.9	15.3
Eltham Town and Avery Hill	59.2	21.1	18.0	63.6	6.7	5.1	54.1	45.9	38.7	16.9
Greenwich Creekside	24.3	33.6	37.3	35.1	15.3	8.6	70.6	29.4	60.5	9.4
Greenwich Park	41.3	28.0	29.1	48.0	12.8	4.6	70.0	30.0	61.9	10.4
Greenwich Peninsula	34.0	20.7	39.5	28.1	12.4	8.4	72.6	27.4	67.8	7.0
Kidbrooke Park	52.0	28.5	18.9	43.1	15.4	8.1	53.5	46.5	41.7	18.4
Kidbrooke Village and Sutcliffe	37.3	20.0	36.1	39.4	12.7	6.7	68.4	31.6	59.0	12.0
Middle Park and Horn Park	47.0	39.9	12.1	51.5	14.9	6.8	43.7	56.3	34.4	22.7
Mottingham, C'harbour & New Elt	62.3	24.4	12.7	61.8	8.6	5.5	48.8	51.2	35.3	19.2
Plumstead and Glyndon	33.8	32.5	32.7	23.3	22.3	13.7	34.1	65.9	34.9	23.2
Plumstead Common	51.5	26.4	20.9	42.6	18.1	6.9	44.7	55.3	37.6	20.0
Shooters Hill	45.1	30.6	22.8	38.5	26.8	10.1	50.9	49.1	43.9	15.4
Thamesmead Moorings	28.0	46.7	22.5	28.6	40.1	9.1	35.4	64.6	39.6	19.5
West Thamesmead	29.8	25.0	40.4	24.4	32.8	12.2	43.0	57.0	41.1	15.9
Woolwich Arsenal	22.7	25.6	45.4	29.2	18.7	10.7	62.4	37.6	59.4	11.5
Woolwich Common	25.2	43.6	28.6	29.4	26.5	13.4	42.8	57.2	39.2	20.1
Woolwich Dockyard	20.5	55.3	22.6	27.2	30.5	15.2	39.3	60.7	38.7	21.5

Of this set only **Kidbrooke Village and Sutcliffe** ward - the new neighbourhood that replaced the former Ferrier estate - which is arguably beyond Eltham anyway, is more ethnically diverse - but still 43% white. London was 37% white British at the 2021 census.



Greenwich index of deprivation map

Contrast that with the eastern neighbourhood of Plumstead which is about 20% white across its three wards, or Greenwich Peninsula: 28% white.

So Eltham is a much whiter neighbourhood than the rest of Greenwich and while it is also more affluent - though not uniformly - than the borough, it is not super-rich. It is not Notting Hill or South Fulham or Wandsworth Common. It is also culturally conservative - reflected in that EU referendum vote but in other ways too, not least the fact it is still the only part of the borough still voting for the Tories.

The December 2025 Electoral Calculus MRP has Reform winning the cross-borough Eltham and Chislehurst constituency with 30% of the vote compared to Labour's 24% and the Conservatives' 19%, with the Greens on 15%

(Kidbrooke Village and Blackheath probably being the main source of their votes). Their ward predictor suggests that in a general election Reform will win **Eltham Town** and **Mottingham etc.**, with **Eltham Park and Progress** staying Labour.

That didn't happen in the two council by-elections there. In **Eltham Town** Reform polled just 9% to the Conservatives 49% and the picture was essentially the same in **Mottingham, Coldharbour and New Eltham**. These by-elections both pre-dated the Reform surge that's lasted over a year now but equally that's a big lead for the Conservatives and the party is well organised in this long-term marginal constituency.

But if Reform either succeeds in closing the gap or takes so much of the Conservative vote that Labour comes through the middle, that's the Tories off the council for the first time ever. Even in 1945, seven Municipal Reform councillors were elected in the two preceding boroughs.

Reform could also win, incidentally, Eltham Page: that traditionally incredibly safe Labour ward and maybe Middle Park and Horn Park: though those are probably the party's ceiling in this borough.

So let's return to the start: how well are the Greens likely to fare in Greenwich? Their top targets - ones that would establish their group but not get them close to a majority, are:

- East Greenwich (3 seats - 6.2% Labour majority)
- Greenwich Park (2 seats - 26.6% Labour majority)
- Shooters Hill: where the Greens gained a seat in June last year on a massive 24% swing

Labour won Shooters Hill by 59% to the Greens' 15% in 2022: it was one of their safest wards then (though this used to be a Labour-Conservative marginal). There are two seats there.

There were specific local issues that damaged Labour in that by-election: the sitting councillor resigned after being sanctioned by her group for trying to block the sell-off of a council-owned equestrian centre and linked bungalow.

An earlier by-election in the ward seven months earlier had resulted in an easy Labour hold: the party won with 58% of the vote. The difference seven months make.

Local issues clearly mingled with dissatisfaction with the government to make the subsequent by-election a debacle for Labour, but it was their impressive showing in Shooters Hill that gives Greens hope of a much wider breakthrough in Greenwich.

A 24% swing away from Labour in May would, of course, decimate the party's ranks. So let's continue a run-through of the wall of Labour wards the Greens have to surmount.

Woolwich Arsenal takes us beyond a 15% swing: the Greens need 15.5% to win there. Then up to 18.5% to win **Kidbrooke Park** and **Kidbrooke Village and Sutcliffe, Greenwich Peninsula** and **Greenwich Creekside**.

Everything beyond requires swings in excess of 20%. But those twelve seats plus the seven in the first tranche would take the Greens to nineteen.

Whereas last time the Greens polled evenly across the wards they contested, this time there could well be a much more uneven distribution of Green votes - which would help them.

They could surge, for example, in the wards that have seen a lot of new housing development, and maybe in wards with lots of council housing. If that happens keep an eye on **Charlton Village and Riverside, Woolwich Common** and **Woolwich Dockyard**, maybe **Abbey Wood** and **Thamesmead Moorings**. These wards were massively safe for Labour in 2022 though.

The Lib Dems also performed well in one of the "new" wards in a by-election in **West Thamesmead**. They achieved a 20% swing in the ward that includes the Belmarsh high security prison, though only its remand prisoners would have had the chance to vote. Labour still won though, which is another testament to just how safe so many of their wards are.

We could see another pincer movement against Labour. If the Greens win more than fifteen seats, the Lib Dems the two in West Thamesmead and the Tories or Reform ten or so in Eltham, Labour loses Greenwich. Just. It's that tight.

Labour will feel very hard done-by if that is the outcome of the election because of its record of just getting on and providing local services without (more or less) much fuss or ideological silliness. But it's just about conceivable.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	3	52			
Jun 24 by-election: Mottingham, Coldharbour and New Eltham - Con hold	3	52			
Oct 24 by-election: Eltham Town and Avery Hill - Con gain from Lab	4	51			
Nov 24 by-election: Shooters Hill - Lab hold	4	51			
Dec 24 by-election: West Thamesmead - Lab hold	4	51			
Mar 25 defection: Majella Anning (Greenwich Creekside) Lab to Ind	4	50			1
Jun 25 by-election: Shooters Hill - Grn gain from Lab	4	49		1	1
Sep 25 defection: Ann-Marie Cousins (Abbey Wood) Lab to Ind	4	48		1	2
Jan 26 defection: Lakshan Saldin (Charlton Hornfair) Ind to Grn	4	47		2	2

HACKNEY



The Greens' top target in London is Hackney. It was last time too, but then the party spectacularly failed to deliver. Yes, they won two council seats, and were runners-up in all but two wards. But there are no silver medals in politics.

The Greens' 23.1% was their highest borough-wide share in London but it ran up against a Labour share of 53.5% - and a thirty point lead produced another Labour landslide. Of course, there's a massive difference between the 2022 elections and those of 2026. Labour is in government and deeply unpopular. But that's been true before: Labour's hung on. Three things have changed.

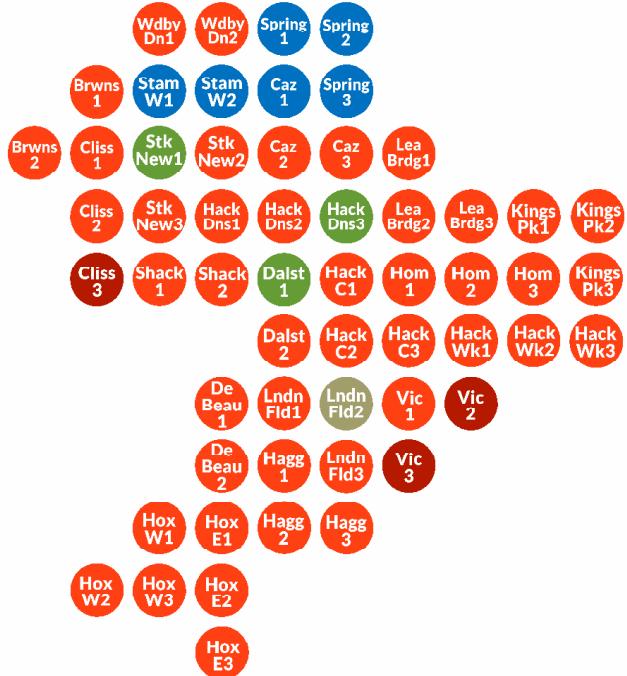
The first is the surge in the Green Party in the past year. Hackney Greens claim their membership surged from 650 to over 3,000 in 2025. The Green candidate in Hackney South and Shoreditch at the 2024 general election won 9,987 votes - their highest vote in London, and they weren't all that far behind that tally in Hackney North and Stoke Newington either (9,275).

They still lost by miles to Labour, but these were big swings to the Greens. 3,000+ members - and given the demographic profile of Green members probably younger and driven - enables a dramatically bigger campaign. No more one lonely activist having to deliver to thousands of homes, or canvass whole streets without a team to share the load and make things more fun. It's hard to build a campaign from almost nothing to a scale that may well match Labour's in 2026, but it's a good problem to have.

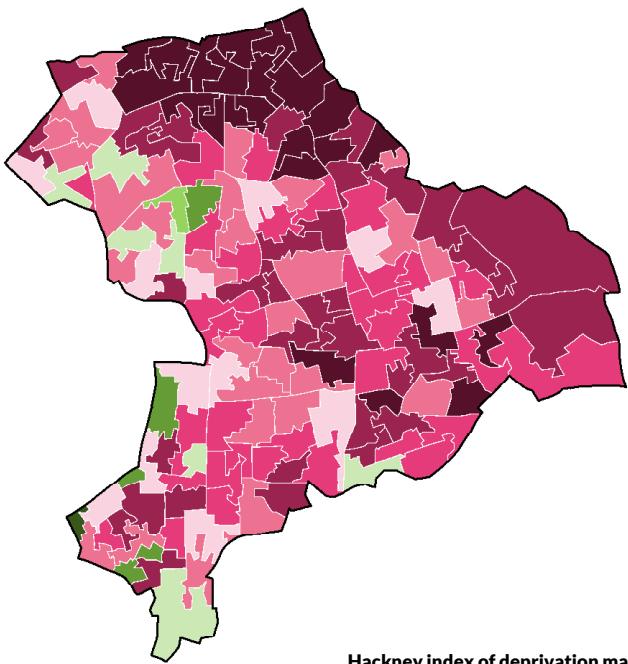
The second is that, while the point of the Starmer "project" (if it deserves such a grand title) was to wrest control of the upper party apparatus from Jeremy Corbyn's allies. But grassroots Labour remained somewhat to the left of the leadership, even when they were willing to stay silent to regain power nationally.

But they've had a taste of what a left-wing Labour leadership looks like now and they yearn for it. Many now see that embodied more authentically in the Greens than Labour. So whereas the left stayed unhappily loyal to Labour in the past when the party was far to their right, there now appears to have been a Rubicon crossed: a large proportion have switched allegiance.

The third is that Hackney is almost a victim of its own success. The borough is changing rapidly: it is gentrifying. There is a slight irony that while one of the Greens' most potent attacks on Labour - at least among council tenants and long-term residents being priced out - is gentrification, this demographic change is also generating Green votes and Green activists.



Gentrification is a double-whammy for the Greens: a stick to attack Labour and a reason their ranks are swelling.



Hackney index of deprivation map

But don't get too swept away with the narrative of "posh Hackney". For one thing, there are only four wards in the whole borough where the number of owner-occupiers exceeds the number of council tenants.

Like Lambeth, Hackney is a borough still dominated by huge council estates. In **Hackney Wick**, **Homerton** and **King's Park**, public housing still accounts for more than half the stock. But Hackney is more like Islington or Camden: with pockets of intense deprivation, rather than like Haringey where two-thirds of the borough experiences the worst deprivation. Very few neighbourhoods in Hackney are affluent.

Labour has had something of a challenging time electorally since 2022. They aren't anywhere close to the shenanigans of

the 1980s and 1990s, which turned Hackney into yet another of the tabloids' "loony left" boroughs.

But things feel like they're shunting back that way: self-indulgence, carelessness with their massive majority, poor candidate selection, too long in power. To read more of the mess Hackney Labour got itself into - and out of - search online for the David Walker and Rebecca Smithers *Guardian* report: "*Borough of Hate and Hit Squads*", 1999. There is also Luke Akehurst's report on his time as an advisor and then Hackney councillor during this period on Labour List: "*The Darkest Hour Comes Just Before Dawn*", 2017.

A vacancy arose immediately the results were declared when De Beauvoir Labour councillor Tom Dewey, who had been arrested for possessing pornographic images of children after his nomination had been accepted, resigned instantly.

By-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Grn
De Beauvoir (i)	+4.5	-16.9	-6.6	+27.7
Mayoral by-election	+0.2	-9.3	-2.0	+7.4
Cazenove (i)	+47.0	-14.6	-32.3	+2.2
De Beauvoir (ii)	+6.2	-11.0	-7.3	+23.5
Hoxton East & Shoreditch	+2.2	+8.6	-3.6	+6.6
Hoxton West	-5.2	+13.4	-5.7	+1.4
Cazenove (ii)	+28.0	-8.2	-31.9	+11.6
London Fields	+5.2	-8.9	-10.5	
Stoke Newington	-5.6	-14.8	-11.6	+18.0

Italics show party that didn't contest the 2022 elections but did stand in the by-election so, strictly speaking, they're not increases: just the actual vote share won in the by-election

That arrest had far bigger consequences for Labour than it first appeared because Dewey rented a room in Hackney elected mayor Phillip Glanville's house. Glanville was not implicated in Dewey's crime but his proximity to such a deeply unsavoury episode, and the way he handled it, forced his resignation as mayor a few weeks later.

Labour held De Beauvoir by 27 votes, and then the eventual mayoral by-election, though for the first time in Hackney's elections for mayor the Labour vote slipped below 50%.

The knock-on effects continued.

The new Labour mayor, Caroline Woodley, was councillor for **Cazenove**, one of three Stamford Hill wards - the centre of Hackney's significant Jewish community. A councillor cannot serve both as mayor and serve on the council, so another by-election occurred. Long-time Lib Dem (and, before that, Labour) councillor Ian Sharer had represented Cazenove until 2018 when it fell to Labour. This time he stood for the Conservatives and, on a 39.5% swing, won his old seat back.

This was a remarkable result coming at a time of massive Conservative government unpopularity: **Cazenove** or its predecessor ward Northwold, had never previously elected a Tory councillor - not even in 1968.

Hackney has these three strongly Jewish enclaves: **Springfield** - 35% Jewish, **Stamford Hill West** - 39% and **Cazenove** - 24% and nowadays these are the only wards the Conservatives have any chance of holding. But this is not the same sort of Jewish community as in, say, Hendon or Pinner: it is significantly more Orthodox and very much less affluent. Indeed, the Stamford Hill corner of the borough is the most deprived part of Hackney. Yet it largely votes Conservative.

On economic measures, if you still believe there is a link between deprivation and voting intention, Stamford Hill should be the strongest Labour part of the borough. Because it is culturally conservative, it is Labour's weakest. Even here though, remember that the Jewish community isn't anywhere close to a majority and other sources of support keep Labour in contention.

The **Cazenove** by-election was also fraught for Labour because their candidate, Laura Pascal, was suspended from the party post-nomination because of complaints received about allegedly "transphobic" comments. Labour actually ceased campaigning in the by-election, so the huge swing may have been partly down to that, but mostly Sharer's popularity within the community.

Possible key wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Cazenove (1 Con)
- ▶ Clissold (1 Ind Soc - defec)
- ▶ London Fields (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Stoke Newington (1 Grn)
- ▶ Victoria (2 Ind Soc - both defec)

Independent Socialist hopefuls

- ▶ Homerton (2 Lab)
- ▶ London Fields (1 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Brownswood (2 Lab)
- ▶ Clissold (3 Lab)
- ▶ Dalston (1 Lab)
- ▶ De Beauvoir (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hackney Central (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hackney Downs (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hackney Wick (3 Lab)
- ▶ Haggerston (3 Lab)
- ▶ Homerton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hoxton East and Shoreditch (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hoxton West (3 Lab)
- ▶ King's Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lea Bridge (3 Lab)
- ▶ London Fields (3 Lab)
- ▶ Shacklewell (2 Lab)
- ▶ Stoke Newington (3 Lab)
- ▶ Victoria (3 Lab)
- ▶ Woodberry Down (2 Lab)

Conservative hopeful

- ▶ Cazenove (2 Lab)

In a later **Cazenove** by-election that same year, Labour did campaign and held that seat, albeit despite another big swing to the Conservatives.

In September 2024 two further by-elections: one in **London Fields** in the centre of the borough, the other in **Stoke Newington** in the north-west, were held. These were both Labour seats and the party, appreciative of the Green threat, called the votes on the same day presumably to split their opponents' resources.

It didn't work: the Greens didn't even contest **London Fields** (an independent came second there) and poured everything they had into **Stoke Newington**. On a 16% swing, they gained this seat, giving Hackney its third Green councillor.

It is a measure of how high - perhaps unwisely high - expectations for the Greens have risen that were they to win all the seats in these three wards (**Stoke Newington, Dalston and Hackney Downs**), giving them eight councillors, that would be regarded as a major underachievement. But it is hard to see how they will not do much better this time.

Voters are weary of the Labour dramatics over their candidate choices; the government is deeply unpopular with exactly the sort of demographics that dominate Hackney, and the council isn't especially popular either. For example, there is still considerable resentment about the way Labour handed over masses of publicly owned council estate land to the Berkeley housing conglomerate to redevelop **Woodberry Downs** in the borough's north.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Brownswood	29.2	28.3	39.7	37.8	11.4	10.6	72.1	27.9	63.1	11.9
Cazenove	23.8	35.2	39.5	40.3	12.7	15.0	55.1	44.9	41.0	23.8
Clissold	36.8	32.2	29.0	43.5	12.7	9.2	72.4	27.6	61.6	11.9
Dalston	26.6	27.1	43.3	35.6	15.6	10.9	75.4	24.6	65.6	9.9
De Beauvoir	29.2	34.2	32.5	37.7	14.8	11.2	72.5	27.5	62.3	12.7
Hackney Central	21.7	48.0	28.1	29.5	23.2	14.3	63.1	36.9	52.7	16.0
Hackney Downs	27.8	40.3	30.0	30.9	21.1	17.6	63.4	36.6	53.9	15.2
Hackney Wick	21.3	52.0	23.5	33.5	25.0	13.5	58.1	41.9	46.3	18.0
Haggerston	16.9	47.8	30.7	29.2	20.5	15.7	66.5	33.5	55.1	15.9
Homerton	19.1	51.4	25.5	26.1	28.0	15.8	56.0	44.0	48.0	17.9
Hoxton East and Shoreditch	17.0	38.9	41.1	26.8	16.1	11.6	69.5	30.5	58.6	13.5
Hoxton West	18.5	43.9	33.5	26.0	16.6	12.2	66.8	33.2	56.7	14.2
King's Park	28.1	51.2	19.9	26.8	29.9	17.6	56.6	43.4	46.9	18.3
Lea Bridge	33.4	28.8	35.4	33.0	17.6	16.6	65.4	34.6	54.3	15.1
London Fields	25.5	41.7	29.2	35.5	17.3	13.4	69.1	30.9	56.6	15.4
Shacklewell	24.2	42.4	30.7	28.6	20.2	16.5	63.6	36.4	54.5	15.7
Springfield	21.3	39.8	36.0	40.6	14.6	10.6	48.1	51.9	29.8	30.4
Stamford Hill West	23.8	36.1	38.7	50.3	9.5	6.4	52.9	47.1	33.6	28.2
Stoke Newington	36.3	29.7	33.1	40.5	13.3	11.1	70.3	29.7	59.8	12.8
Victoria	23.7	47.4	26.8	37.0	20.2	11.4	65.8	34.2	53.7	15.7
Woodberry Down	14.9	45.7	35.3	26.1	20.0	15.7	61.0	39.0	47.9	19.4

You can still see on Google Maps block after block of boarded-up council housing awaiting demolition while, across the road, private, gated-off high-rise blocks have been built.

Labour argues that when a council has such vast stocks of housing in poor condition, partnering with these construction giants is the only way to meet local housing need. But Herbert Morrison, who was London County Councillor for - and mayor of - this borough, would be spinning in his grave at what Hackney has become.

And it is just one example of why so many are now looking for a more radical party than the one Labour has become.

Let's look at the Hackney battleground.

While the Greens are going flat out to win the mayoralty and a majority on the council, it is also easier to remove Labour from power here than in boroughs like Haringey because, if the Conservatives win the other two Cazenove seats, they'll hold eight. That's a decent landing zone for no overall control if not everything goes the Greens' way. The three Stamford Hill wards are, unsurprisingly, the three the Greens are weakest in and won't be expecting big things from.

The Greens need an 18% swing to win based on 2022 and slightly to remove Labour's majority. Most of Hackney's wards have similar majorities, albeit with different profiles.

Beyond winning the Labour seats in the split wards they already represent: **Dalston**, **Hackney Downs** and **Stoke Newington** (five seats available) there are only two other relatively close wards: **De Beauvoir** and **Clissold**.

De Beauvoir is only close based on the by-elections: Labour won by miles in 2022. But the by-elections are a reliable portent of how Hackney is swinging. The Greens polled 731 in the first by-election, where there was little enthusiasm for another poll so soon after the local elections, and then 1,197 in the higher turnout second, 2024, by-election held on the same day as the London mayoral vote. In both, the Greens

won over 40% but Labour won 42% and 47%. They wouldn't get anything like that share today.

De Beauvoir is a leafy, planned neighbourhood of townhouses north of the Regent's Canal at the Shoreditch end of the borough. It's not too challenging to imagine it with Green councillors.

Clissold is the western side of Stoke Newington. Much of it used to be part of North Defoe ward (Daniel Defoe, for whom that ward was named, lived there) and this was the first ward in London to elect Green councillors in 1994. **Clissold** has three seats, but one is now held by an Independent Socialist and the Greens aren't contesting her seat.

Sandwiched between Stoke Newington and Dalston - the ward represented by Zoe Garbett: the Greens' GLA member and Hackney mayor candidate, is **Shacklewell**, a 2-councillor ward. This is the next most vulnerable Labour ward where their second candidate has a majority of about 500 (though their first candidate won a lot more votes). If the Greens win both they'll be up to 13 - still miles away from a majority, but with potentially eight Conservatives the opposition would number 21. Labour loses power if others win 29.

But this is where things become haywire because, if the Greens are in with a chance of winning the next band of wards, Labour implodes. There is a massive chunk of Labour seats that all fall on a swing of between 14% and 18%. Those are big swings and, normally, they'd be way out of the question - but not this year.

In the south western corner, on top of De Beauvoir there are **Hoxton East and Shoreditch** (Moorfields), **Hoxton West** - the old Wenlock ward, **Haggerston** and **London Fields**. In the east there are **Victoria** - named after the park (and the queen), **Lea Bridge** and **King's Park**. Plus there is **Brownswood** up in the north by Woodberry Down: the third of the Stoke Newington wards.

In most of the wards the top Labour councillor finished quite a way ahead of their running mates so we could get quite a few split wards, but assuming they do fall, there'd be over thirty Green councillors returned.

Labour would be returned in **Woodberry Down, Hackney Wick, Hackney Central** and **Homerton** - but these wards are not so different from the ones that would have fallen. If they fall, they could all fall.

That's not really all that likely and it's quite surreal to contemplate Labour competing with the Conservatives over which will have the larger opposition group.

Three councillors have left Labour to become independent socialists: two in **Victoria** ward, one in **Clissold**. Over the last few months Independent Socialist parties have been applying to be registered with the Electoral Commission: they have been founded in Lambeth, Southwark and Hackney.

The Hackney Collective website says that the three are seeking re-election with their new party, and they're also planning to field two candidates in Homerton and one in London Fields. They also mention an agreement with the Greens not to fight each other, so there'll only be a maximum of 51 Green candidates in May.

It will be interesting to see if a Richmond-type situation replicates in Hackney where the Lib Dems did a deal with the Greens and voters were happy to go along with it, or whether the emerging Green brand works but the independents struggle.

Labour has been in charge of Hackney for almost a quarter of a century now, and "time for change" could be as powerful a message against Labour this year as it was against the Conservatives at the 2024 general election. This council is going to contain a wider variety of councillors than were elected in 2022.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	5	50		2	
Jul 22 by-election: De Beauvoir - Lab hold	5	50		2	
Nov 23 mayoral by-election - Lab hold	6	49		2	
Jan 24 by-election: Cazenove - Con gain from Lab	6	49		2	
May 24 by-election: De Beauvoir - Lab hold	6	49		2	
May 24 defection: Claudia Turbet-Delof (Victoria) Lab to Ind Soc	6	48		2	1
May 24 defection: Penny Wrout (Victoria) Lab to Ind Soc	6	47		2	2
May 24 defection: Fliss Premru (Clissold) Lab to Ind Soc	6	46		2	3
May 24 by-election: Hoxton East and Shoreditch - Lab hold	6	46		2	3
Jun 24 by-election: Hoxton West - Lab hold	6	46		2	3
Jul 24 by-election: Cazenove - Lab hold	6	46		2	3
Sep 24 by-election: London Fields - Lab hold	6	46		2	3
Sep 24 by-election: Stoke Newington - Green gain from Lab	6	45		3	3
Jan 26 defection: M. Can Ozsen, London Fields - Lab to Ind	6	44		3	4

Hammersmith & Fulham demonstrates the hole the Conservatives have fallen into London since they moved away from Cameron-style liberal Toryism in 2016.

This borough had been a key marginal council since 1978 which the Tories won decisively in 2006 and 2010 (they also narrowly out-polled Labour in 2002 but Labour kept control), installing a Wandsworth-imitating tax-cutting council - reputedly Cameron's favourite.

But the Conservatives lost - clearly but not by that much - in 2014 in what was a big shock; and then by much larger, expanding margins in 2018 and 2022. The Conservative task now is vast.

Labour wards in order of margin

Sands End	3 Lab	10.4
Walham Green	2 Lab	26.3
Brook Green	2 Lab	26.7
Ravenscourt	2Lab	30.5
Lillie	2 Lab	38.2
Avonmore	2 Lab	38.3
Fulham Reach	3 Lab	38.5
Grove	2 Lab	39.7
Coningham	3 Lab	40.5
Wendell Park	2 Lab	42.8
West Kensington	3 Lab	44.1
Wormholt	2 Lab	45.7
White City	3 Lab	47.1
Hammersmith Broadway	2 Lab	54.4
Shepherds Bush Green	2 Lab	55.2
Addison	2 Lab	55.5
College Park and Old Oak	3 Lab	57.6

Look at the ward listing opposite. Just one: **Sands End**, in the south-eastern corner of Fulham, can be called marginal - and even then quite far up that scale. The next closest is **Walham Green** and the Tories require a near 14% swing to win.

It's not even clear whether **Walham Green** can swing that much: it is one of the most polarised wards in the borough and the Tories would need to make big inroads into big estates to find enough votes to win. Labour may sputter on public housing estates these days, but that doesn't mean council and housing association tenants are switching en masse to the Conservatives.

Traditionally reliable Conservative wards: **Avonmore**, **Brook Green** and **Ravenscourt** have swung even further away from them and **Grove** (which would have elected Tory councillors had it existed in 2006 and 2010), requires a 20% swing.

In some ways, strangely, Hammersmith and Fulham may have become too wealthy for the Conservatives. What do I mean by that?

Until the Second World War, Fulham was a mix of undeveloped market gardens and farms, and row upon row of terraced streets with very little council housing. Mostly these were workers' cottages, plenty split into flats. Some, mostly in the south of Fulham were grander, and housed the more affluent citizens - but the post-war consensus produced Labour voters across the board: enough to win a majority on the council and the parliamentary seats.

Then, from the 1950s, politicians built large council estates: Clem Attlee Court, Sulivan Court, Field Road, the West Kensington estate, Walham Green Court, the Townmead estate, the Bulow estate, Lancaster Court, the Lytton estate and the Bayonne estate, all of which initially burnished Labour's plentiful vote in the streets. These complemented

older housing estates like the Lewis Trust in Fulham Broadway and Lisgar Terrace, and the Peabody in Lillie Road.

But in the late 1960s London property prices rose as house-building in the centre of the city slowed because there was little left to develop. This rise in property prices rippled out from the centre, forcing those who'd like to have bought in pricier neighbourhoods like Chelsea, but couldn't now afford to, to look further afield. Places like Fulham, parts of Putney and later Battersea.

Coupled with the deindustrialisation of Sands End especially, which had put most of the community that lived in the terraced streets out of jobs, there began rapid gentrification.

This began in places like the Peterborough estate in Sullivan ward (the largest part of which is now in Parson's Green and Sandford). Sullivan was comfortably Labour until 1978 when it swung to become a ward they could never win again.

So began a Conservative advance that eventually turfed Labour out of power on the council (just) in 1978 and turned Fulham into a Tory constituency in 1979. Increasingly, the battle became Labour estates versus Conservative streets.

Hammersmith developed somewhat differently. It had its affluent areas too: around Brook Green and Ravenscourt Park, on either side of the district. Through the middle ran a belt of poverty from the river north to Goldhawk. Even more impoverished was a strip that ran from the north, up by Harrow Road, down the Kensington side of the borough around Latimer Road. Shepherds Bush developed later: long roads of huge houses sub-divided into flats with little green space in-between. White City followed in the 1950s.

Hammersmith has its big council estates too, though - perhaps surprisingly given the affluent suburban image it has - Fulham has far more. There's the biggest of the lot in White City, two cottage garden estates in Old Oak and Wormholt, the Charecroft tower blocks along the south side of Shepherds Bush Green and on the Edward Woods Estate on the edge of Notting Hill.

In the south, Hammersmith Broadway has a blend of council and housing association estates: the Queen Caroline estate, Riverside Gardens and Aspen Gardens, Ashcroft Square, as well as the Guinness Trust and another Peabody estate.

But Labour's support in Hammersmith, historically, has come more from the streets than the estates - at least until Labour's support base in London widened dramatically in the last two decades. This has simply not been that affluent a place overall: Shepherds Bush especially. And it's more multicultural with big Irish and black communities. In this sense it's more like Tooting - or Fulham until the 1980s: Labour less reliant on estates and more reliant on a largely working class population throughout.

The apex of the growth in Conservative support was, in hindsight, the early 1990s. That was the point when Tory voters began replacing Tory voters rather than encroaching further into Labour's core.

Yet parts of Fulham kept getting more and more expensive - to the point when, like South Kensington or parts of Westminster, even big salaries were insufficient to secure a mortgage to move in. Buyers needed an inheritance or a big bonus on top.

A new type of resident appeared: super affluent, often from old Europe or wider afield. And this once again started shifting the political balance in Fulham.

Some were ineligible to vote in Britain, some just weren't interested in issues like slicing a few percent off council tax or to reduce the cost of residential parking permits. They were too wealthy, and too focussed on other matters, to worry about relatively trifling concerns that the Conservatives, especially, laboured on for years.

And this new, less partisan, more indifferent type of resident only really affected the Conservative side of the ledger, because they were replacing motivated, partisan Tory voters. Wards that Labour had been struggling in became more competitive.

Potential target wards

Labour hopefus

- ▶ Avonmore (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Ravenscourt (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Walham Green (1 Grn - defec)

Conservative hopefus

- ▶ Avonmore (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Brook Green (2 Lab)
- ▶ Fulham Reach (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lillie (2 Lab)
- ▶ Ravenscourt (1 Lab, 1 Grn)
- ▶ Sands End (3 Lab)
- ▶ Walham Green (1 Lab, 1 Grn)

Green hopefus

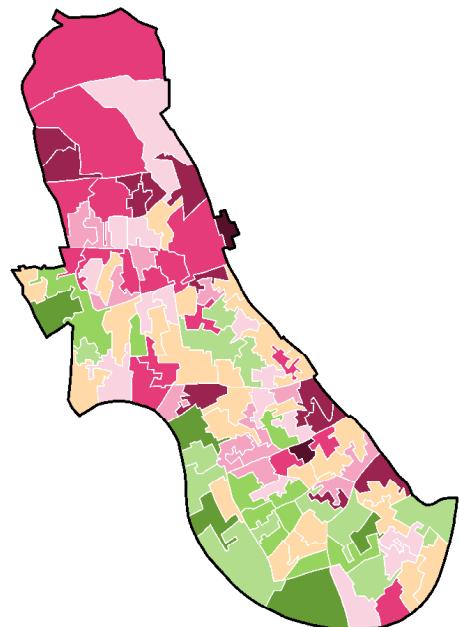
- ▶ Coningham (3 Lab)
- ▶ Ravenscourt (1 Lab)
- ▶ White City (3 Lab)

Lib Dem hopefus

- ▶ Munster (3 Con)
- ▶ Ravenscourt (1 Lab, 1 Grn)

Reform UK hopefus

- ▶ Wormholt (2 Lab)



Index of deprivation map for Hammersmith and Fulham

There are still plenty of staunch Conservative types around who'd never skip polling day or consider Labour, but their voting power is not what it was - and that's entirely aside from the support the Conservatives have shed over Brexit or their record in government.

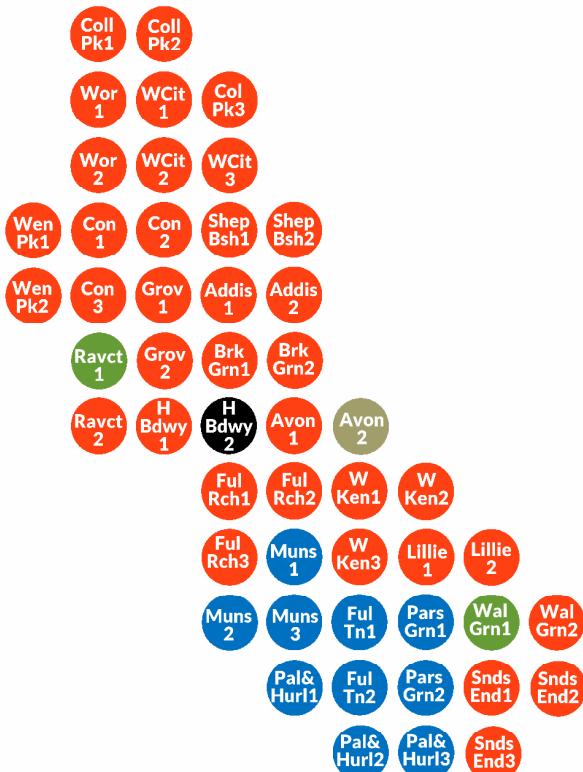
So Hammersmith and Fulham is one borough in which Labour's position appears strong. That doesn't mean they can take re-election entirely for granted.

In the three by-elections that have occurred since 2022, there have been big drops in the Labour vote - massive ones in the two Labour-held wards (**Hammersmith Broadway** and **Lillie**) and a smaller fall to third place in **Fulham Town**.

The council has had some high-profile controversies: the ongoing closure of Hammersmith Bridge being one and highly emotive Low Traffic Neighbourhood-style policies in Sands End (and Ravenscourt to a lesser extent) being

another. There have been some cases of over-zealous enforcement action taken against residents for an ever-lengthening list of relatively minor infringements.

The council has a relatively poor record on maintaining its housing stock which, in more competitive times, would have been absolutely fatal to Labour when they were dependent on votes from council tenants. The Housing Ombudsman issued a Special Report into serious housing maladministration in February 2024. And the council does not seem to be as on top of street cleaning and highway maintenance as it once prided itself on being.



But the Conservatives need to be the beneficiaries of nearly all the backlash against Labour to challenge for power. They always were in the past. This time, they don't look close to being so. Reform (more on them later) are taking too many -

not many, but too many - votes that the Tories need, even though there are no Reform prospects here.

In **Lillie**, which includes Fulham's largest council estate: Clem Attlee Court, plus a mass of streets east of North End Road, Labour's vote fell 23 percentage points but the Conservatives only rose 5.

In **Hammersmith Broadway** and **Fulham Town**, the Tory vote fell. And that may well be the long-term problem for Conservatives in this and similar boroughs: disillusioned Labour supporters are as likely to vote for parties perceived to be to their left as go to the Tories, even if they know that the only alternative to a Labour council here is Conservative.

But if Labour slumps by the sort of proportions seen in Lillie and Hammersmith Broadway - and especially if they can no longer turn out a once rock-solid vote on council estates, surprising upsets could happen.

In 2025, two Labour councillors defected to the Greens (one blocked from re-standing, the other seemingly more genuinely fed up).

The first represents **Ravenscourt** - a very affluent liberal riverside ward almost custom-made for a Green sortie and which has flirted with the Lib Dems. Even though Labour racked up a huge majority here last time it is a very "swing" ward which any of four parties could win on a very low vote share. In 2002, for example, it split 37% Labour, 36% Conservative and 27% Lib Dem. In 2006: 51% Conservative, 34% Labour and 15% Lib Dem.

The second, and their leader here, represents **Walham Green**. This ward is the opposite of Ravenscourt. Although the Greens won approximately the same share in both (while not campaigning in either) this is not a promising ward for the party comprising either big estates or extremely expensive streets off North End Road.

The Greens are, apparently, targeting - of all wards - **White City** this time, having tried their hand at Coningham in 2022.

This is likely to be a miscalculation: **White City** is the only Hammersmith and Fulham ward to have always voted Labour and it does not have many characteristics of the current Green demographic beyond the new BBC Television Centre redevelopment. But they came a clear, if distant, second in 2022 without doing any campaigning, which is presumably why they're testing it.

In fact **Coningham** might well be more promising this time round - its predecessor Askew was a three-way marginal (39% Labour, 35% Lib Dem and 27% Conservative) back in 2006, the last dreadful Labour mid-term London election.

Given the Greens are willing to wing it in what look like impregnable Labour wards, **College Park and Old Oak** with

its large Imperial College student population and lots of new high-rise housing for young professionals springing up, would also make more sense for them. But their best shot is surely **Ravenscourt**.

Reform will not win seats in Hammersmith & Fulham. The party did, however, come second in the **Hammersmith Broadway** by-election (winning 14%) and that ward is not their best prospect. Instead, Reform should look at **Wormholt** with its large garden-suburb estate, where the electorate is still relatively white, not especially affluent and relatively geographically isolated. There's enough diversity and affluence scattered throughout Wormholt that Reform can't win but this is the sort of area where they might poll respectably.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Addison	27.9	29.0	42.1	32.5	11.1	11.2	66.5	33.5	58.9	11.7
Avonmore	29.1	25.0	44.9	31.5	8.4	12.1	65.9	34.1	59.4	11.4
Brook Green	35.1	20.6	43.6	37.4	6.2	9.0	74.8	25.2	65.7	8.2
College Park and Old Oak	20.7	50.7	25.7	25.9	16.2	17.3	52.3	47.7	46.2	17.9
Coningham	26.2	35.9	36.3	35.8	14.4	13.4	61.6	38.4	53.5	13.8
Fulham Reach	33.5	29.1	36.6	40.5	8.5	6.8	70.2	29.8	57.9	10.9
Fulham Town	38.6	15.6	44.3	49.6	5.2	5.2	76.5	23.5	68.4	7.0
Grove	38.3	23.9	36.4	44.3	7.9	7.2	74.0	26.0	62.6	10.6
Hammersmith Broadway	24.6	38.0	35.9	33.0	12.0	13.5	62.8	37.2	53.0	13.9
Lillie	23.7	37.8	37.3	34.3	11.8	13.1	65.9	34.1	53.8	13.3
Munster	41.8	17.4	40.0	49.5	5.5	5.3	75.9	24.1	63.7	9.1
Palace and Hurlingham	50.2	17.1	31.9	51.7	5.1	6.3	75.4	24.6	62.4	9.1
Parsons Green and Sandford	48.9	16.1	34.4	48.1	4.1	6.5	79.3	20.7	66.4	7.7
Ravenscourt	35.4	25.0	37.4	41.1	8.4	9.8	72.7	27.3	61.6	9.9
Sands End	31.4	28.8	35.1	39.4	10.4	12.3	71.7	28.3	59.9	11.0
Shepherd's Bush Green	17.0	44.8	35.6	25.0	20.2	18.0	54.4	45.6	50.2	15.3
Walham Green	26.3	36.9	35.5	40.7	11.0	11.0	67.8	32.2	56.2	12.7
Wendell Park	43.2	24.4	28.5	43.4	10.8	11.7	68.7	31.3	60.2	10.4
West Kensington	22.7	32.6	43.5	33.5	12.4	13.6	62.4	37.6	55.3	12.6
White City	21.9	47.2	28.9	24.1	24.8	25.1	51.1	48.9	45.5	17.2
Wormholt	33.2	38.2	27.1	34.4	16.0	18.9	55.8	44.2	48.5	15.6

There are an extraordinary 18,500 European Union voters eligible to vote in Hammersmith and Fulham local elections. What impact does this huge population of nationals from EU countries already have on council elections? They are not an especially high turnout segment, being disinterested in the minutiae of English local government, and are a fairly mobile, high turnover bloc. But, because there are so many of them, turnout does not have to be high to have an impact.

Although the national polls make grim reading for both Labour and Conservative, they still represent a swing of between 4% and 7% from Labour in 2022. This is nowhere close to what the Tories need to win Hammersmith and Fulham but, equally, the London swing won't be evenly distributed. A Tory uplift is probably not coming in Newham or Lewisham. It is likely that it will be greater in areas that have a recent history of Conservative competitiveness and organisation.

So, even if the polls say otherwise, the Tories will hope for a big advance in Hammersmith and Fulham. Yet if they only gain three seats (Sands End) don't be surprised, and they may not even get those. But they should, given Labour is in government and their vote is not motivated to turn out - at least to support them.

So the Tories have two objectives. The first is to expand their group as much as they realistically can this year. The second is to put enough wards into play so they can challenge in 2030.

Doing much more than that will either confound the polls or be because Labour has lost so much support to other parties that the Conservatives win wards narrowly on low vote shares. But that seems pretty unlikely given the huge cushions Labour has in formerly marginal and Conservative-leaning wards. For those reasons, Hammersmith & Fulham is highly unlikely to feature on Labour's casualty list this year.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	10	40			
Mar 24 suspension: David Morton (Avonmore) - Lab to Ind	10	39			1
Feb 25 by-election: Hammersmith Broadway - Lab hold (Lab vote -19.3)	10	39			1
Feb 25 by-election: Lillie - Lab hold (Lab vote -23.1)	10	39			1
Jul 25 by-election: Fulham Town - Con hold (Con vote -2.6)	10	39			1
Jul 25 defection: Liz Collins (Ravenscourt) - Lab to Grn	10	38		1	1
Jul 25 defection: Trey Campbell-Simon (Walham Green) - Lab to Grn	10	37		2	1
Dec 25 vacancy: Patricia Quigley (Hammersmith Broadway) - Lab, resigned	10	36		2	1

HARINGEY

Just as there is a ladder of Reform hopes in the capital, there is also one - with more rungs on it - for the Greens. While none of the boroughs are going to be easy for the party to win, their best hopes are Hackney and Lewisham; then Lambeth.

Those are the three on which they have the best shot of winning a majority and/or the mayoralties.

Next is Islington - but there we can't yet know whether Jeremy Corbyn-backed "community independents" will impede the Greens' path to a majority.

Then we have a set of six boroughs on which the Greens will find it much harder to win a majority, but where they could win a hefty group of councillors. These are Camden, Greenwich, Waltham Forest, Newham, Southwark - and Haringey.

The thirty two London boroughs were created from twenty-nine municipal boroughs in the centre - the "London County Council" boroughs; ringed by 58 (59 if we count Chigwell) urban and rural districts within what is now Greater London. Plus the City of London.

Haringey was founded by the amalgamation of three urban districts in 1965: Hornsey in the west, Tottenham in the east, and Wood Green in the north.

Sometimes mergers were little more than geographic reality: the old councils had to be adjacent to each other so there were only so many ways to combine them.

Political calculations played their part. These were plans drawn up under a Conservative government and some mergers gave the Tories at least a chance - at that point in history - of winning. Was this a consideration with Haringey? Perhaps, though Hornsey was not as Conservative as Wood Green and Tottenham were Labour so this might have been one where Tory chances were sacrificed. How Hornsey might



have longed to go into Camden - but that was an inner London borough.



A third consideration was economic: combining affluent and poorer boroughs ensured the rates could adequately fund services. That mattered in Haringey and it would become a political factor because Hornsey, with its much higher rateable values, simply didn't have the electoral clout to outvote the east of the borough. Hornsey got saddled with the bill for services largely lavished on Tottenham.

This was, at its nub, where the battles over "loony left" councils - of which Haringey was one of the most prominent - emerged from. Left-wing councils wanted to raise rates to pay for spending greater than a Conservative government (and its voter base) would allow them to. The Tories objected both to how much Labour wanted to spend and what they wanted to spend (or waste, as they saw it) on.

This was the earliest manifestation of the cultural, identitarian politics of the left. In the 1980s, this was politics that was either ahead of its time or frivolous focussing on a fringe instead of providing good universal services.

Another reason the loony left gave Labour endless headaches was incendiary outbursts. Haringey council leader and later Tottenham MP Bernie Grant was an exemplar.

He became notorious in 1985 following the Broadwater Farm council estate riot provoked by the death of council tenant Cynthia Jarrett while her home was being raided by the police.

The day after PC Keith Blakelock was murdered during the riot, Grant was quoted as claiming that "The Police got a bloody good hiding." He was actually explaining to reporters that youths on the estate had told him that was their view of what they'd done.

But that deliberate misquotation defined him as one of the left's bogeymen and set Labour back across London and the country.

Council mergers in themselves could create "rotten" boroughs; not in its historic context of places devoid of electors returning MPs as sinecures, but in the sense of councils that simply didn't function well.

Haringey is arguably also the exemplar in this regard: it simply hasn't been well administered. Its leaders have made poor choices; its council estates rapidly became sinks of deprivation and lawlessness; it was not great at the services everyone sees and experiences: clean streets, cared for parks, well-maintained roads.

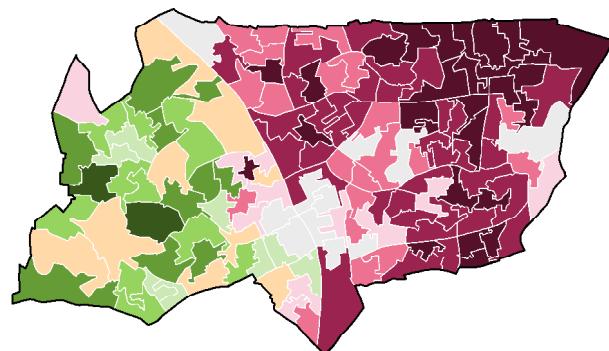
It failed horrifically in some very specific ways - the murder of 17-month-old Peter Connelly (Baby P) in 2007 being the worst example - with its Childrens Care Services found to be failing. Every decade, or more frequently, an example of Haringey failing seems to emerge. A lot of this is politics, but a lot is just down to forcing together two mismatched areas.

The deprivation map of Haringey highlights how different Hornsey is from the rest of the borough: the darker the green the more affluent; the deeper the purple shades the more deprived.

Haringey has undergone demographic change: the growth of a large ethnic minority majority in Tottenham, while the profile and political allegiances of the Hornsey side have also

changed. Add in all the political mayhem and, while Labour has - bar 1968 - always won, elections have been turbulent.

In the 1962 elections: the last of the urban district elections, Hornsey elected 7 Conservative and 6 Labour councillors; Tottenham: 11 Labour and 1 Conservative, and Wood Green 4 Labour and 2 Conservatives. That's a combined "Haringey" total of 21 Labour and 10 Tories.



That balance more or less transferred to the first Haringey elections of 1964: 41 Labour, 19 Conservatives. The borough swung strongly to the Tories in 1968 by a landslide 53 to 6 margin, but like all boroughs that had been Labour in 1964, Haringey returned to the fold in 1971 - and the party hasn't lost power since.

Initially, the electoral turbulence affected the Conservatives. Hornsey had a Conservative council and a Conservative MP (for much of the post-war period, Sir Hugh Rossi). Boundary changes in 1983 abolished the Labour Wood Green constituency and put all the old Wood Green district in with Hornsey - creating a much more marginal constituency.

Political allegiances were also changing in the wealthier parts of the constituency as a more socially liberal, progressive set replaced an older, solidly Tory, generation. This began the Conservative dive. 22 of their councillors were returned in 1982, 16 in 1986 and just 2 - from Highgate ward - in 1994.

At the 1992 general election Labour's Barbara Roche defeated Sir Hugh Rossi to become Hornsey and Wood Green's first Labour MP.

In 1994 Labour won every council seat in Haringey bar those two Conservatives in Highgate. In 1998 they almost repeated that feat, only losing **Muswell Hill**: another of the affluent neighbourhoods on the Hornsey side.

The winners in **Muswell Hill**, however, weren't Tories. The ward voted Liberal Democrat and one of the new councillors was Lynne Featherstone, heiress to the Ryness chain of high street electrical stores.

This result didn't bother Labour too much - a year earlier Barbara Roche's first defence of her parliamentary seat had given her a 20,000+ majority as part of Labour's 1997 landslide. Featherstone as the Lib Dem candidate came third. Featherstone stood again in 2001 - and again Roche easily won, but a 13% swing to the Lib Dems halved her majority.

In the 2002 local elections, the Lib Dems won another twelve seats, knocking the Tories off the council by winning Alexandra, Crouch End, Fortis Green, Highgate and Muswell Hill. And then the US-British response to the 9/11 terrorist atrocities outraged progressive, liberal sentiment, creating a perfect storm for Lib Dems who had voted against Britain's involvement in the military action.

In 2005, Hornsey and Wood Green, a Tory constituency barely a decade earlier, elected Lynne Featherstone. In the local elections of 2006, the Lib Dems won 27 seats on the 57 seat council. Labour's majority survived, slashed to 3 seats.

The Lib Dems lost because they couldn't crack Tottenham. All bar two of their seats were on the Hornsey side of the borough. Only Harringay ward on the Tottenham side elected a couple of Lib Dems.

Hornsey and Wood Green contained a majority of the council seats, but a party would need to hold all of them to take

power. Instead, Labour held five in Wood Green: three in **Woodside** and one apiece in **Bounds Green** and **Noel Park**.

In 2010, despite the outcry over the Baby P tragedy, Haringey stayed Labour. They even regaining four seats from the Lib Dems. Then the Lib Dems entered coalition government with the Conservatives - and Lib Dem support imploded. In 2014 the Lib Dems crashed to just nine seats. And, in 2015, Featherstone reaped the same progressive backlash that she had inflicted on Barbara Roche ten years earlier. Labour was back representing Hornsey and Wood Green.

Haringey then became the sharp end of the Corbynite takeover of the Labour Party. The "Momentum" group that was the vanguard of the left-wing drive to shore up Corbyn was especially strong in Haringey and was highly critical of the council's more moderate Labour leader, Claire Kober.

This criticism centred on the "Haringey Development Vehicle" or HDV: the council's public-private partnership to "regenerate" some of the borough's council estates.

Haringey's was one of the earlier iterations of the Labour-driven regeneration agenda - rebuilt council homes in exchange for allowing the private developers to add huge numbers of extra apartments they would sell off. Typically, (but not always) existing council tenants whose homes were demolished were given the option of a right of return to a brand new flat on the rebuilt estate or a move somewhere else; leaseholders were bought out.

For councils, this was a way to deal with ageing council blocks that were reaching the end of their lives, get some extra homes built to meet targets and expand the council tax base. But this didn't come cost free: there are big downsides that councils rarely admit to - and besides; there was no other way of funding extensive housing improvements.

The HDV was the hook upon which Momentum hung "moderate" Labour councillors who had supported these plans out to dry.

Potential key wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Alexandra Park (1 LD)
- ▶ Bounds Green (1 Soc All)
- ▶ Crouch End (1 LD)
- ▶ Fortis Green (1 LD, 1 Ind, 1 Soc All)
- ▶ Highgate (3 LD)
- ▶ Muswell Hill (1 LD)
- ▶ St Ann's (1 Grn)
- ▶ Stroud Green (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Woodside (1 Soc All - defec)

Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Alexandra Park (1 Lab)
- ▶ Crouch End (2 Lab)
- ▶ Fortis Green (1 Ind, 1 Soc All)
- ▶ Harringay (3 Lab)
- ▶ Muswell Hill (1 Lab)
- ▶ Stroud Green (2 Lab, 1 Ind)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Bounds Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ Harringay (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hermitage and Gardens (1 Lab)
- ▶ Noel Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ St Ann's (1 Lab)
- ▶ Seven Sisters (2 Lab)
- ▶ South Tottenham (3 Lab)
- ▶ Tottenham Central (3 Lab)
- ▶ Tottenham Hale (1 Lab)
- ▶ West Green (3 Lab)
- ▶ White Hart Lane (3 Lab)
- ▶ Woodside (3 Lab)

Conservative hopeful

- ▶ Highgate (3 LD)

Most of the pro-HDV councillors jumped before they were pushed, including Kober and cabinet member for housing Alan Strickland (MP for Newton Aycliffe since the 2024 general election).

Momentum had a majority of Labour councillors and Labour kept its majority on Haringey council, so Haringey became the first and only "Corbyn Council". This despite a small loss of seats to the Lib Dems in 2018. The slightly trimmed Labour majority looked like a minor repudiation of Labour but only because they lost seats in marginal Hornsey wards. Labour actually won a lot more votes, going from 48% to 57% borough-wide.

In 2022 the opposite happened: Labour's vote fell four percentage points yet they gained eight seats. This was again because the marginals in Hornsey behaved differently to the monumentally secure Tottenham wards. Yet still Labour won well over 50% borough-wide. That is why Haringey is so difficult a borough now for any party other than Labour to win: in ward after ward on the Tottenham side they stack up the votes to skyscraper heights.

In ten wards Labour polled over 60% of the vote and in two: **Northumberland Park** and **West Green** they won over 70%. Unlike in somewhere like Barking and Dagenham, these massive vote shares weren't in wards only they and one other opponent stood: in every ward there were at least three contestants and typically four.

The swing the Lib Dems need to win a majority on Haringey is 23.6%. It would have been statistically impossible for the Greens to win as they didn't stand enough candidates and it's simply unimaginable for the Conservatives.

Six by-elections occurred in the borough over the past four years, two of which occurred after the general election. Of these Labour lost one: the south Tottenham ward of St Ann's, which went to the Greens on a 19% swing. Even that, repeated borough-wide, would not be enough for the Greens

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Alexandra Park	68.2	9.7	21.5	54.5	5.9	5.0	77.8	22.2	65.6	7.6
Bounds Green	36.0	25.0	37.0	31.3	13.4	11.6	52.2	47.8	46.9	17.4
Bruce Castle	22.9	40.1	32.8	16.5	31.4	19.7	34.2	65.8	32.4	28.8
Crouch End	48.5	13.6	35.6	52.4	5.1	4.3	77.4	22.6	68.4	7.6
Fortis Green	57.7	12.1	29.0	50.2	4.6	5.3	73.1	26.9	63.5	9.0
Harringay	36.8	12.1	50.0	33.5	8.3	11.1	58.4	41.6	54.9	16.3
Hermitage & Gardens	32.1	25.2	40.3	27.7	14.8	13.5	52.2	47.8	49.0	18.4
Highgate	51.1	11.2	37.0	51.2	3.9	3.8	79.7	20.3	71.5	6.6
Hornsey	41.7	26.0	29.5	45.8	10.8	8.0	71.0	29.0	60.1	11.6
Muswell Hill	55.6	7.9	35.7	52.6	3.6	3.7	77.3	22.7	67.9	8.1
Noel Park	28.2	35.3	33.7	22.6	16.7	17.1	41.5	58.5	39.8	22.7
Northumberland Park	21.9	41.0	34.7	13.9	31.9	20.3	28.8	71.2	30.6	28.1
St Ann's	35.1	25.3	37.5	24.6	17.3	16.4	45.1	54.9	41.9	22.4
Seven Sisters	25.5	37.1	36.2	22.7	22.1	15.2	41.3	58.7	38.4	23.1
South Tottenham	26.2	30.2	40.6	28.6	19.8	10.7	41.2	58.8	35.3	25.5
Stroud Green	43.2	23.6	32.4	49.8	9.2	6.8	73.6	26.4	65.3	9.6
Tottenham Central	29.3	27.2	40.8	21.5	23.1	14.6	43.2	56.8	41.0	22.4
Tottenham Hale	28.3	33.2	34.1	18.6	24.5	18.3	40.1	59.9	39.2	21.0
West Green	36.5	26.7	34.9	23.4	17.4	17.9	46.9	53.1	43.3	21.2
White Hart Lane	35.5	39.0	24.2	21.7	19.8	20.3	36.1	63.9	32.9	27.6
Woodside	30.4	25.8	42.3	24.3	13.1	14.5	42.8	57.2	41.6	23.0

to win, but it is close to the ballpark of a swing that would erase Labour's majority - provided the Lib Dems did well in the wards they came second.

On a 10% swing to the Lib Dems, they would gain the split wards of **Alexandra Park, Crouch End, Fortis Green** and **Muswell Hill**, plus **Stroud Green** and **Harringay** - the ladder of streets in the centre of the borough through which runs the New River. That would produce a Lib Dem group of nineteen councillors.

The Greens only fielded 23 candidates last time which is why we can't accurately measure the swing they need to win: even if all 23 had won they wouldn't have got close to a majority of seats, and none of them were close to winning, anyway.

Given the Green surge in membership, it can be assumed that failing to stand a full 57 candidates (other than through deals with other left-wing parties or candidates) this time round is off the agenda and that they will have the capacity to build on their St Ann's by-election gain.

There is a slight problem in even working out a fantasy swing needed for the Greens to remove Labour from power - short of winning themselves - because they would wipe out the Lib Dems while getting them.

In other words, there is little prospect of Haringey falling to no overall control. Labour will win a majority (probably with some Lib Dem councillors) or the Greens will (without any).

By-elections: change in party share

	Con	Lab	LD	Ref	Grn
Tottenham Hale	-2.6	-9.0	+6.7		-2.2
Hermitage & Gardens	+0.5	-6.3	+8.1		-3.5
South Tottenham	+0.7	+4.3	-1.4		-3.6
White Hart Lane	+4.2	+0.4	+3.2		+13.5
Hornsey		-11.8	-2.7		+10.2
St Ann's	+4.3	-22.5	-3.2	+3.6	+15.6

Italics show party that didn't contest the 2022 elections but stood in the by-election

That is unhelpful for those hoping to oust Labour because, if the Lib Dems were targeting the Hornsey wards and the Greens' best shots were all in Tottenham, no overall control would be an option on the table. And it'd pull down the swing to beat Labour a fair bit. As it is, the Greens need to take the first seat in **Seven Sisters** ward - Labour majority 746 or 40.9% - and everything with a lesser majority.

It's perfectly reasonable to question if this is remotely achievable for the Greens even with Labour breaking unpopularity records and voters in boroughs like Haringey looking for a radical alternative.

That said, the December 2025 Electoral Calculus MRP has the Greens climbing this mountain. It modelled that all three Haringey constituencies would, right now, elect Green MPs. Tottenham has the Greens on 37.8% with Labour on 25.0%; Hornsey and Friern Barnet: Green 34.4% Labour 32.1%; Southgate and Wood Green: Green 25.9%, Labour 22.9%.

Those are insane figures, especially considering David Lammy won over 80% of the vote in the 2017 general election - less than a decade ago.

If the Lib Dems are on track to be crushed by the Greens, is there any other help that might be available to turf Labour out? There are now three Independent Socialist Alliance councillors who left Labour in 2025. But they sit in the same group as the Greens and, if they run for re-election are unlikely to compete against each other.

The Socialist Alliance councillors represent **Fortis Green**, **Woodside** and **Bounds Green**. These are very different wards: Fortis Green in the prosperous west of the borough, Woodside and Bounds Green in Wood Green and much less affluent. It will be interesting to see how much support goes to an explicitly socialist candidate in these different areas. Haringey Socialist Alliance registered with the Electoral Commission in December.

Reform's chances in Haringey are no better than the Conservatives - arguably worse. Given that the Tory vote is still substantial enough in **Highgate** to give them fanciful ideas of sneaking through to win if the Greens take a chunk of Lib Dem votes - just not too many to win it themselves. There are no wards anywhere close to a promising demographic for Reform.

A swing of over twenty percent is colossal, and that's why Labour, even as broken as many voters regard it now, is favourite to retain a borough they have run for fifty five years uninterrupted.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result		50	7		
Dec 22 expulsion: Joy Wallace (Fortis Green) Lab to Ind		49	7		1
Mar 23 by-election: Tottenham Hale - Lab hold		49	7		1
Jun 23 by-election: Hermitage and Gardens - Lab hold		49	7		1
Oct 23 by-election: South Tottenham - Lab hold		49	7		1
Oct 23 by-election: White Hart Lane - Lab hold		49	7		1
Nov 23 defection: Mary Mason (Bounds Green) Lab to Soc All		48	7		2
Nov 23 defection: Mark Blake (Fortis Green) Lab to Soc All		47	7		3
Nov 23 defection: Lotte Collett (Woodside) Lab to Soc All		46	7		4
Jul 24 by-election: Hornsey - Lab hold		46	7		4
Apr 25 by-election: St Ann's - Grn gain from Lab		45	7	1	4
Nov 25 defection: Alexandra Worrell (Stroud Green) Lab to Ind		44	7	1	5
Jan 26 vacancy: Mike Hakata, Lab (Hermitage and Gardens) resigned		43	7	1	5

At the 2024 general election that reduced the number of Conservative MPs from 344 seats to just 121, the Tory majority in Harrow East rose from 8,170 to 11,680. Yet Harrow East is not an archetype of a super-safe Conservative seat.

For a long time it was the more promising Harrow constituency for Labour, held by them from 1997 to 2010 and in 2001 with a majority (11,124) almost identical to the one Tory Bob Blackman won in 2024.

This contrary general election result was heralded by the 2022 borough election results in Harrow, when the Conservatives gained the council from Labour with a workable but narrow majority of seven seats.

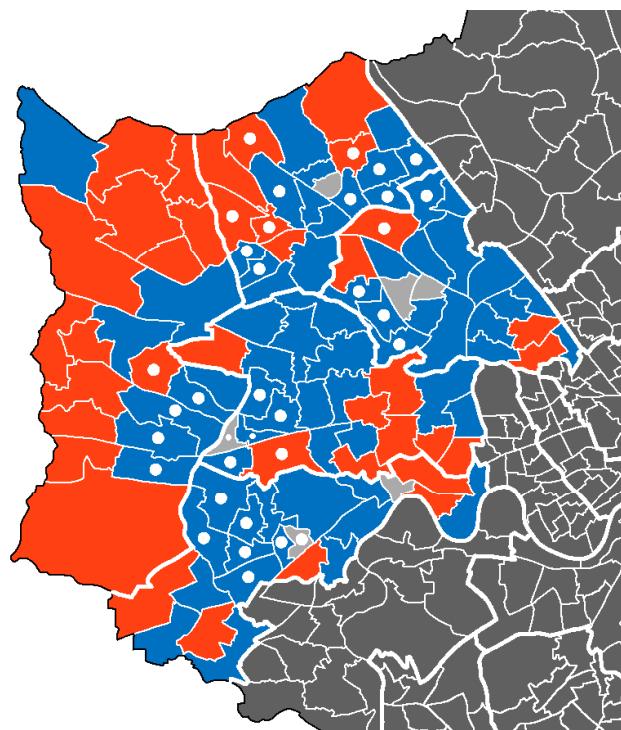
At the time there were reasons to believe the result had been a repudiation of the previous Labour council. It had implemented unpopular Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and presided over fraud in its highways contracts, among other issues. And the vote share changes: Conservatives up just 0.3%, Labour down 6.3%, provide supporting evidence that this was a rejection of Labour, not a surge to the Tories.

The subsequent general election result was clearly both: for the Tories; against Labour. In Labour-held Harrow West, there was also a swing to the Conservatives, though much smaller; as there was in neighbouring Brent West, which shares similar characteristics.

But Harrow was also the most extreme example of those elections of Labour's problems (or Conservative successes) across London in ethnically diverse wards - and particularly ward that have a large diaspora of Hindus and Sikhs. In Harrow, that community is spread across the southern half of the borough - from Harrow-on-the-Hill through Kenton and to Edgware and Stanmore. But there is a corridor running

through west London: those Harrow neighbourhoods, Wembley, Greenford and Southall, Heston and Hounslow.

The map below shows how the wards in the five West London boroughs swung (red denoting a swing from Conservative to Labour and blue denoting one from Labour to Conservatives). The few light grey wards are those that were newly created in 2022, so there was no antecedent to measure a swing. And the wards containing dots are those which have a Hindu and Sikh population of over 25%.



It's clear that a sizeable majority of wards with large Hindu and Sikh populations swung Conservative, across a map where most wards in each borough bar Hillingdon swung that

way, too. The reason this map looks quite different to one showing wards won is that Labour held most of these wards with very large majorities that now only have large majorities. Some are now marginals that Labour may well lose in May.

Despite the Conservatives winning back a majority in Harrow in 2022, their grip on the borough isn't secure. They start as favourites to retain control but it would not take too large a vote for Reform in some of those key wards to flip them back to Labour. Labour only need a 3% swing to win, though given there has been a London-wide swing from Labour to Conservatives since 2022, that will be challenging.

But just look at the list of councillors with majorities of 20% or less, opposite. Of the 38 councillors (that's a clear majority of the council) on the list, 20 are Conservative, 18 Labour. In other words, it wouldn't take very much either for the council to return to Labour or for the Tories to expand their majority a fair bit.

For the Conservatives to advance, though, they principally need to break through in wards in the borough's west where they have struggled far more than on the eastern side.

This is partly to do with both MPs: Conservative Bob Blackman in Harrow East and Labour Gareth Thomas in Harrow West, being well-known and hard-working in their respective patches. Gareth Thomas is a local Harrow lad who was first elected on a colossal swing in the Blair 1997 Labour landslide, so he's coming up for three decades as the seat's MP. Blackman was leader of Brent Council for a while before winning Harrow East back from Labour in 2010. His wife Nicola is now a councillor in marginal Edgware ward and they make a formidable campaigning couple.

If you refer to that map on the previous page, you'll see that the Conservatives did not have everything their own way in 2022. 14 wards swung to the Tories but 7 swung to Labour. Labour's problem was two-fold, though. First, the swings to them were mostly in safe Tory wards - especially in the Pinner area.

councillor	ward	maj	%maj
Janet Mote	North Harrow	5	0.1
Thaya Idaikkadar	Rayners Lane	15	0.5
Christopher Baxter	North Harrow	28	0.7
Stephen Hickman	Harrow on the Hill	52	1.7
Eden Kulih	Harrow on the Hill	53	1.7
Nitin Parekh	Edgware	79	2.0
Yogesh Teli	Edgware	182	4.5
Aneka Shah-Levy	Greenhill	157	6.1
Ghazanfar Ali	Greenhill	165	6.4
Jean Lammiman	Pinner South	369	6.7
Salim Chowdhury	Centenary	276	6.8
Sasi Suresh	Headstone	381	8.1
Nicola Blackman	Edgware	339	8.3
Natasha Proctor	Headstone	468	9.9
Dan Anderson	Greenhill	263	10.2
Kanti Rabadia	Kenton West	335	10.3
Hitesh Karia	Pinner South	577	10.4
Dean Gilligan	Wealdstone South	186	10.7
Simon Brown	Headstone	508	10.7
Vipin Mithani	Kenton West	401	12.4
June Baxter	Pinner South	690	12.8
Kandy Dolor	Wealdstone South	227	13.1
Samir Sumaria	Kenton East	573	13.9
Rashmi Kalu	Roxeth	569	14.4
Peymana Assad	Roxeth	587	14.9
Paul Osborn	Pinner	674	15.2
David Ashton	Centenary	642	15.9
Krishna Suresh	Rayners Lane	513	16.0
Kuha Kumaran	Pinner	741	16.7
Asif Hussain	West Harrow	548	17.4
Norman Stevenson	Pinner	773	17.4
Stephen Greek	Harrow Weald	671	18.2
Govind Bharadia	Centenary	744	18.4
Rekha Shah	West Harrow	596	18.9
Pritesh Patel	Harrow Weald	699	19.0
Jerry Miles	Roxeth	758	19.2
Antonio Weiss	Marlborough	532	19.5
Ramji Chauhan	Harrow Weald	737	20.0

Second, the swings to Labour were much smaller than the quite significant ones the other way. The biggest swing to Labour was in **Pinner South**: an impressive 9% - but that only got them close. In next-door **Rayners Lane**, there was a 3% swing to the Conservatives - not in the same league as Labour's advance in Pinner South - enough to gain a seat.

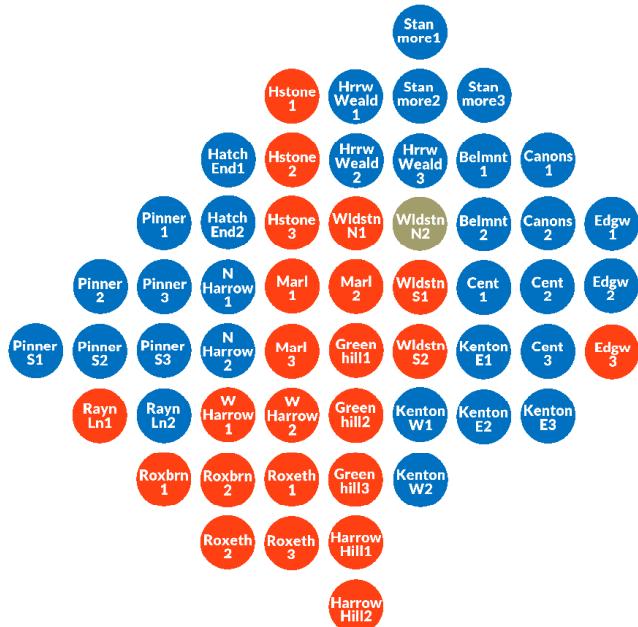
The biggest swings to the Conservatives were 18% in **Centenary** - a Kenton/Queensbury borders ward - which they gained; 13% in **Edgware** - where they gained two seats; and then 11% in **Headstone** and 10.4% in **Roxeth** - both of which stayed Labour but are now as winnable for the Conservatives as Pinner South is for Labour.

The Tories also closed the gap in **Harrow-on-the-Hill**. It's hard to believe that the ward which houses one of Britain's top public schools is now represented by Labour. Perhaps if the boarders there were old enough to vote - and the only electors - it might not be. But this ward is not as affluent as the prestige of Harrow School suggests. It's only 27% white and has, for Harrow, a lot of private renters: 37%.

Harrow-on-the-Hill is also an example of another common trend in this borough last time, which is that the Conservative vote fell a little, but Labour fell a lot.

Here, the Tory vote fell 0.9% but Labour was down 12.7%. In **Marlborough**, the Conservatives were down about 5 points, but Labour fell 18. That's Labour's safest ward, so their councillors still won by loads. In **Headstone** the Tories were down 1 point but Labour fell 22, though that isn't a like-for-like swing: it's a ward with radically changed boundaries. All the wards where both the main parties' votes fell were in Harrow West, by the way.

Clusters of wards in all three constituencies behaved differently. In Harrow East the Conservatives surged and Labour fell. In Harrow West, both parties lost votes. But in the three Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner wards within this borough, there was a clear swing to Labour.



Harrow has an unusual electoral history. It is another of those areas, a bit like Wimbledon, where the Conservatives have always looked more deeply dug in than they were, in part because there was a reasonably strong Liberal vote.

This vote surged past Labour in the 1980s after the formation of the SDP and, in 1994, the Lib Dems won 29 of the 63 seats, having won just 1 in 1978. This Lib Dem strength was why it was especially surprising that Labour won both Harrow constituencies just three years later. Why had voters swung so decisively from Lib Dems in the council elections to Labour in the 1997 general?

Whatever that reason was, the voters then stuck with Labour. In 1998 the Lib Dems crashed to just nine seats: **Harrow Weald**, **Rayners Lane**, two in what is now **Belmont** and one in the old **Headstone North**.

The Lib Dems then shot themselves spectacularly in the foot.

The government had passed legislation protecting political parties from vexatious insurgents calling themselves very similar names - "Literal Democrats" being the most prominent example - to confuse voters into miscasting their votes. The Lib Dems believed this cost them a seat in the 1994 European Elections as the Conservatives held on to a euro-constituency with a majority of 700 while the Lit Dem polled 10,203.

As part of this act, to stand as a candidate for a registered political party they had to be signed off through a number of forms that allowed them to use the party logo on ballot papers for example. They could also only stand under a set number of descriptions, pre-registered with the new Electoral Commission. In Harrow, sixty of the candidates described themselves as "Liberal Democrat Action Team" - but this was not a description the party had registered, so all sixty were disqualified. Only the three in **Harrow Weald** stood as "Liberal Democrats" and were accepted as candidates - and those three won.

But even those three only had one term left. In 2006 just one Lib Dem - their former group leader - regained his **Rayners Lane** seat, but **Harrow Weald** went Conservative and has stayed there ever since. Harrow had returned to a two-party era, with Labour winning the south and the Conservatives the north.

It also became a very competitive borough. Since 1998 Harrow has given Labour a majority four times, the Conservatives twice, and it's been hung once. The borough seemed to be inching inexorably towards Labour. And then it started inching away from them.

There are a lot of reasons for this and they're fairly complex, but they are heavily entwined in how the Hindu and Sikh communities perceive Labour. This perception is influenced by Labour's stance on the Kashmir issue, the increasing importance of the Muslim vote: a much larger community that, until Iraq and then, later, Gaza voted overwhelmingly Labour; and Labour's innate hostility to the Hindu nationalism of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

These are generally, upwardly mobile communities who set up businesses, worked long hours to build savings and push their children to get into university and into the professions. There is a path from arrival at Heathrow to getting a home close to the airport, building wealth and moving up to larger houses - maybe to Wembley, maybe to Harrow, maybe into the home counties.

This is no different to, say, the Ashkenazi Jews who arrived in Tower Hamlets on boats and, as they integrated, moved out to Stamford Hill or Finchley, Golders Green and Hendon. The same is true of most immigrant communities who have come to England and moved on and up.

So it's not just parochial issues of foreign affairs that motivate a shift away from Labour for communities like those that have moved to Harrow. It's issues like being able to build affluence without the state taking too much in tax. It's about being self-reliant not dependent on state benefits. It's about home ownership, not dependent on the council for housing. It's about being able to get children into the best schools - including sending them private. As Labour has been seen as hostile to these values, they have shifted away from it. They were staunchly loyal only a decade or two ago.

And of course, no-one of any background is going to view favourably a council exposed as fraudulent in its issuing of contracts, or which has implemented policies that are unpopular, when Council Tax keeps going up and services down.

For all these reasons Labour has a west London problem (its east London problem is different). And it has grown considerably worse since 2022 because Labour is now deeply unpopular in government.

But might they be saved, or at least salvaged, by Reform's entry onto the field? It's not apparent that they will. There are wards at which Reform might have a shot but the demographics right across Harrow aren't great for the party.

Ward	Housing			Religion		Ethnic	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Hindu or Sikh	Muslim	White	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Belmont	75.8	4.2	19.6	32.5	12.0	21.1	54.3	45.7	45.5	16.1
Canons	64.9	9.9	24.6	21.7	12.5	28.2	59.0	41.0	49.6	16.1
Centenary	63.9	4.4	29.5	35.9	15.6	12.1	46.7	53.3	42.9	19.6
Edgware	53.9	7.9	37.2	26.2	15.9	12.7	35.7	64.3	35.8	24.6
Greenhill	36.3	14.1	47.6	24.1	16.8	14.4	57.5	42.5	55.3	14.6
Harrow on the Hill	48.6	12.8	37.2	17.7	15.0	27.0	59.0	41.0	50.2	14.1
Harrow Weald	58.0	17.9	23.2	18.7	18.7	26.7	47.3	52.7	39.0	19.7
Hatch End	72.7	5.4	21.4	26.6	15.9	29.6	63.5	36.5	52.1	13.2
Headstone	65.8	6.6	26.4	28.4	14.4	21.1	57.2	42.8	52.0	13.3
Kenton East	54.9	11.9	32.2	38.5	11.1	11.8	35.7	64.3	34.8	25.6
Kenton West	75.1	2.2	21.3	36.6	11.5	13.8	47.4	52.6	42.3	19.1
Marlborough	45.8	7.3	45.5	17.4	21.4	17.0	49.1	50.9	46.7	17.0
North Harrow	65.4	3.9	29.3	32.4	14.1	19.0	57.1	42.9	51.1	13.1
Pinner	67.8	11.1	19.9	23.8	13.3	34.8	65.7	34.3	53.4	12.3
Pinner South	75.5	5.3	18.8	29.8	9.5	31.1	67.5	32.5	57.0	10.5
Rayners Lane	66.9	3.1	29.6	42.4	13.0	14.5	48.1	51.9	44.2	15.7
Roxbourne	44.3	31.0	23.4	29.6	21.3	18.3	41.5	58.5	38.3	19.4
Roxeth	54.9	9.8	34.1	18.3	17.5	15.0	41.3	58.7	38.9	18.6
Stanmore	60.0	15.5	23.1	20.1	19.2	29.3	59.7	40.3	45.4	17.7
Wealdstone North	47.2	15.6	35.5	20.0	26.1	15.7	40.5	59.5	37.0	21.9
Wealdstone South	43.0	13.7	39.8	20.4	18.2	14.1	35.6	64.4	35.8	22.7

Harrow Weald may be their best shot: it contains more of the type of voters that might be attracted to Reform. There are more C2DEs here than ABC1s, and owner occupation is somewhat lower - though still much higher than the norm in London.

There might also be something odd going on electorally in Harrow. The Electoral Calculus MRP of December 2025 is referenced a lot in these previews - but this time let's do something different with Harrow than just report its constituency modelling. This time, look just at vote share changes since the 2024 general election.

In Harrow East, Reform is on 23.5%. The Conservatives are down 10.4 points but Labour is down 15.9. In Harrow West,

Labour is down 19.7 points, the Conservatives down 7.4% (Reform is on 20.1% in West).

Put aside whether the figures are accurate, or likely. Rather, focus on the fact that Reform in Harrow is taking more from Labour than Conservatives. That wouldn't be surprising in a so-called red wall seat in the north, but it's a little more surprising in ethnically-diverse London. So, if anything, Reform isn't helping Labour: it's hurting them.

Two statements about Reform should hold up past election night. First: they are probably slightly more likely not to win any council seats in Harrow than that they will - and if so they will be a small group. Second: any opposition hopes that Reform might pull the Conservatives down enough to throw a

few seats Labour's way on a low vote share are probably forlorn.

Indeed, the Conservatives will have some expectations of extending their majority a bit. They'll want to start with the remaining Labour seat in **Edgware** - majority: 79. In **Harrow-on-the-Hill** Labour's majorities were even smaller: just 52 and 53.

The next most vulnerable ward is **Greenhill** - the eastern side of Harrow town. A fair amount of new housing has been constructed here as well as in neighbouring **Marlborough** which may disrupt how easy it is for the Conservatives to regain it. This new housing may also put the Greens in play in **Greenhill**: they polled 15% here in 2022, a share only exceeded in **Marlborough** (15.6%).

An emerging trend from these elections may well be a strong link between wards with lots of new private housing developments and Green Party strength. There was some evidence of this in 2022 (for example in Croydon's central Fairfield ward) and they've polled well in these types of wards in council by-elections (such as Thames View in Barking and Dagenham).

The reason for this is that they contain lots of young, professional, university educated, mostly white Londoners, not happy with the cost of living, of which housing costs are a significant part. These are fertile grounds for pitches about inequality and wealth taxes and cheaper public transport and tenants rights and the like: essentially the Green pitch under Zack Polanski.

Next comes **Headstone**, which is a somewhat weaker version for Labour of the old Headstone South. That ward swung heavily to Labour: it was one of the strongest Labour wards by the time it was abolished in 2022. But there was that huge swing to the Conservatives last time - mostly because chunks of Tory Headstone North had been added. Most of Headstone North is in **North Harrow** ward these days. The Labour majority in **Headstone** is about ten percentage points.

Possible key wards

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Edgware (1 Lab)
- ▶ Greenhill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Harrow-on-the-Hill (2 Lab)
- ▶ Headstone (3 Lab)
- ▶ Rayners Lane (1 Lab)
- ▶ West Harrow (3 Lab)
- ▶ Wealdstone South (2 Lab)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Centenary (3 Con)
- ▶ Edgware (2 Con)
- ▶ Kenton East (2 Con)
- ▶ North Harrow (2 Con)
- ▶ Rayners Lane (1 Con)

Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Harrow Weald (3 Con)
- ▶ Roxbourne (3 Lab)
- ▶ Roxeth (2 Lab)
- ▶ Wealdstone North (2 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Greenhill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Marlborough (3 Lab)

Lib Dem hopeful

- ▶ Rayners Lane (1 Lab, 1 Con)

Back in Harrow East, the next most winnable ward for the Tories is **Wealdstone South**, but now we're pushing some way beyond the Labour to Conservative swing there appears to have been in London since 2022. But Bob Blackman will have been working hard to chip away at the Labour strength in this ward.

Wealdstone was the ward most loyal to Labour anywhere in Harrow: it's returned Labour councillors every election since 1971. But Wealdstone was split into two wards in 2022 and the northern half is the truer successor to the old Wealdstone (which is why it's the safer ward). **Wealdstone South** contains a chunk of **Marlborough** ward, which was east of the railway line and north of Kenton recreation ground. Kenton was one of the big swingers to the Conservatives in 2018 and 2022, and some of that switch has rubbed off on **Wealdstone South**.

There may be one relatively straightforward pickup for Labour, and that's **Rayners Lane**. Last time the Labour winner finished 437 votes ahead of his defeated colleague. That's a lot, especially in a smaller two-councillor ward. One of the main reasons was that **Rayners Lane** is the ward of long-time Lib Dem leader in Harrow Chris Noyce. Noyce lost by quite a lot in 2022 but still polled 665 votes. Quite a few voters must have split their votes between him and the Labour winner.

We wait to see whether Noyce stands again: he's stood in this ward at every election since 1986, bar his 2002 disqualification debacle. But it may not matter given his vote fell away a lot last time - memories of his service as a councillor are fading. Given how far ahead the Labour winner was of the Conservative winner (over thirteen percentage

points) if voters stop ticket-splitting then **Rayners Lane** could be a gain almost by default.

The ward has the highest Hindu and Sikh population (42%) in the borough so the winners may be the candidates with the highest profile in those communities.

Labour also nearly won the newly created **North Harrow** last time, missing out on one seat by just 5 votes and the other by 28.

Should we perhaps be looking at this from the other end of the spectrum? Which wards can the parties actually be certain they'll hold?

For Labour, the list isn't that long. They are fairly sure to hold **Marlborough, Wealdstone North, Roxbourne, Roxeth and West Harrow**. That's twelve seats.

For the Conservatives: **Belmont, Canons, Hatch End, Pinner, Stanmore** and probably **Kenton East** should be absolute bankers. That's 12 seats. They'd argue strongly that Harrow Weald should be included and, subject to a potential Reform challenge there, it should be - so 15.

Both parties will win more than their core wards: the Conservatives probably considerably more and Labour a few. But the relatively small number of seats that are absolutely safe shows why Harrow has been so volatile a borough in the past couple of decades. While it's unlikely to flip again this year, that underlying volatility remains. It is remarkable, however, that in an era where the two main parties have never been more unpopular, there is only a small chance that anyone else will win representation on Harrow council.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	31	24			
Jun 23 suspension: Phillip O'Dell (Wealdstone North) Lab to Ind	31	23			1

Essex proved to be one of the best counties for Reform UK at the 2024 general election. As well as returning Nigel Farage himself with an 8,000 majority in Clacton, the party won a tight three-way contest in South Basildon and East Thurrock and wasn't far off winning Basildon and Billericay (1,551) and Castle Point (3,551). They also came 1,943 votes short of Conservative Julia Lopez in the Essex-borders constituency of Hornchurch and Upminster, which is part of the London Borough of Havering.

That makes Havering one of the top two Reform targets in London this year. But, unlike their other prize: Bexley, there is a complication. Here the Conservatives aren't their main adversary, at least in local elections.

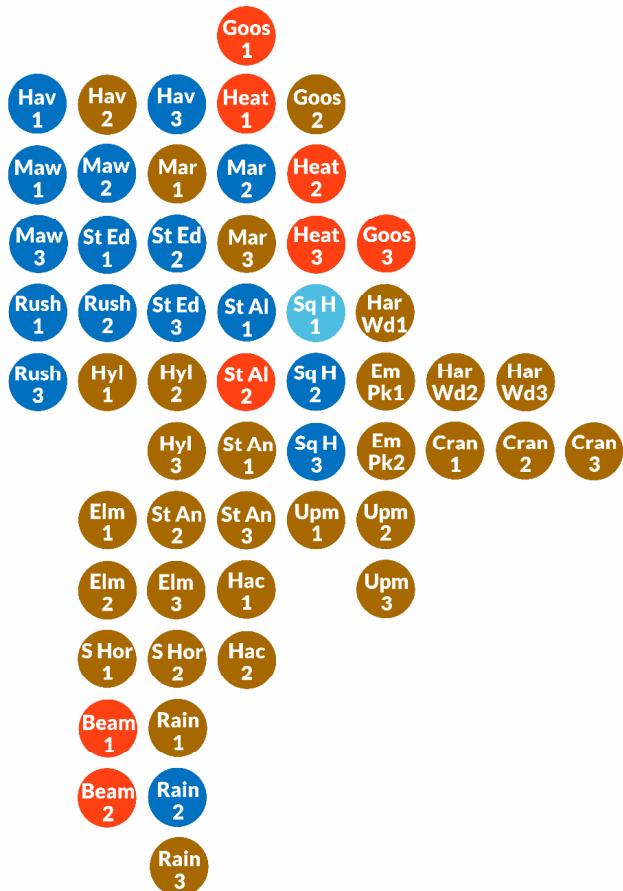
Since 2022, Havering has been run by a collective of local Residents' Associations. And this wasn't some sudden uprising: the residents' associations have been a (growing) feature of Havering politics since the beginning. Cranham and Hacton wards, for example, have only elected Residents' Association councillors since 1964; Upminster since 1990. Gradually, these associations have ousted the established political parties from ward after ward: Rainham, St Andrew's, Harold Wood, Hylands, South Hornchurch, Emerson Park - now even pressing fading Labour in their former fortresses of the Harold Hill estate.

Reform have been somewhat successful this past year at sweeping aside localist parties and residents associations elsewhere. They swept every Nottinghamshire county council division in Ashfield, for example - eradicating Jason Zadrozny's Ashfield Independents. Mexborough First was defeated in Doncaster. Fifteen independents plus all four North East Party councillors were defeated in Durham.

In council by-elections, Reform has taken seats off independents and residents in Portsmouth, Maidstone,

Canvey Island, Morley, Wickford, Herne Bay, Tewkesbury and Newark.

Some of these "other" parties have been around for a while, but none for as long as Havering's. Reform has not yet been tested in councils like this, or Epsom and Ewell - the other long-term Residents Association fixture in local government.



There must have been a great deal of crossover between Reform 2024 general election voters (the RAs in Havering do not stand for parliament) and 2022 Residents Association local election votes. The question, at least as far as Reform's prospects of winning Havering go, is whether these voters will stay with the RAs or switch.

The 2022 elections resulted in a tie for seats between the Residents and Conservatives with Labour holding the balance of power and putting the RAs into power for the first time.

But since 2022, seven Conservatives have defected to the RAs, giving the collective an overall majority. Only one - albeit a notable one - has defected to Reform: Keith Prince, the London Assembly member for Havering and Redbridge and councillor for **Squirrels Heath**. That in itself is interesting: faced with a potentially potent Reform challenge, Conservative defectors have chosen not Reform but the RAs.

The reason for that maybe that they would rather exert influence now as members of the current administration instead of being part of an entirely theoretical (at this point) Reform council from May. Or maybe they've tested the electoral weather and decided the Residents Association has a robust chance of beating Reform. They'll look a bit stupid switching to Reform only to lose to the RAs, after all. Or perhaps they just aren't the sort of Conservatives who regard Reform as a savoury alternative movement for them.

I doubt this: Havering is not the sort of borough where liberalism thrives, either embodied within the Liberal Democrats or in the Conservative Party.

What's also remarkable is that, so far, we've barely mentioned the Conservatives - who ran Havering until 2022 and now face a real prospect of obliteration. They really could lose all 16 councillors they still have, though Reform may not poll as well in the north of the borough (where most of the Conservative seats are located) as the south, which is a more politically competitive area.

Possible key wards

Residents' Association hopefuls

- ▶ Beam Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Gooshays (3 Lab)
- ▶ Havering-atte-Bower (2 Con)
- ▶ Heaton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hylands and Harrow Lodge (2 Con)
- ▶ Marshalls and Rise Park (3 Con)
- ▶ Mawneys (3 Con)
- ▶ St Edward's (3 Con)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Emerson Park (2 Res)
- ▶ Havering-atte-Bower (1 Res - def)
- ▶ Heaton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hylands and Harrow Lodge (3 Res)
- ▶ Marshalls and Rise Park (2 Res - both defs)
- ▶ Rainham and Wennington (2 Res - def)
- ▶ St Alban's (1 Lab)
- ▶ Squirrel's Heath (1 Ref - def)

Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Beam Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Emerson Park (2 Res)
- ▶ Gooshays (2 Lab, 1 Res)
- ▶ Harold Wood (3 Res)
- ▶ Heaton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hylands and Harrow Lodge (2 Con)
- ▶ Mawneys (3 Con)
- ▶ Rainham and Wennington (2 Res, 1 Con)
- ▶ Rush Green and Crowlands (1 Con)
- ▶ South Hornchurch (1 Con)
- ▶ Squirrel's Heath (2 Con)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Gooshays (1 Res - def)
- ▶ Rush Green and Crowlands (3 Con)
- ▶ St Alban's (1 Con)
- ▶ St Edward's (3 Con)
- ▶ South Hornchurch (2 Res)

But that doesn't mean they can't win in the north: just that their potential wins may well be tighter. Romford is as close to an identikit Reform area as there is: houses with Union Jack-flying flagpoles, overwhelming proportions of homeowners, almost as high proportions of white British residents. At the 2024 General Election the Conservatives outpolled Reform by nearly 6,000 (though their vote still crashed by 30 percentage points) mostly because the area's long-serving MP Andrew Rosindell could out-Reform Reform. Nonetheless, he defected to that party in January 2026.

Labour will struggle too. The party has been on life support in Havering since a disastrous term in power from 1998 to 2002. At the 2002 elections, Labour collapsed from 29 seats to just 9. Even that wasn't rock-bottom: from then on they had to fight to hold their once rock-solid seats on the huge Harold Hill council estate on the edge of London.

At successive elections Labour lost seats to Conservatives, UKIP and the BNP. These were wards in which Labour polled three quarters of the vote in the 1980s, even as Right To Buy was minting a new generation of Conservative voters. Labour has always been a party of either end of Havering: Harold Hill in the far north-east and south Hornchurch down by the Thames-side.

In 2022 Labour finally won enough seats - nine - to form a group that the others had to take notice of, though still founded on barely 20% of the vote. None of these nine is safe and, because of the profile of the electorate in these wards, they will be just as vulnerable to Reform. Labour is now culturally so far from Havering's values that their vote is confined to life-long, ageing supporters who are disappearing.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Beam Park	48.6	33.0	13.7	51.0	16.1	13.7	37.7	62.3	30.8	21.8
Cranham	85.1	5.0	9.4	83.8	2.6	1.8	53.9	46.1	29.3	16.5
Elm Park	73.1	12.8	13.5	67.3	7.2	6.8	42.5	57.5	27.8	21.6
Emerson Park	87.6	4.1	8.1	63.5	3.8	6.7	56.5	43.5	33.2	18.5
Gooshays	51.2	35.2	12.2	64.6	9.8	4.8	36.5	63.5	26.7	24.0
Hacton	83.1	5.3	11.0	79.1	3.7	2.9	46.4	53.6	26.1	19.4
Harold Wood	71.1	8.9	17.8	69.1	5.8	4.3	52.0	48.0	34.1	17.1
Havering-atte-Bower	68.5	18.1	12.4	66.9	7.5	6.2	38.0	62.0	24.7	23.3
Heaton	48.4	37.6	13.1	58.9	13.3	6.6	34.4	65.6	27.1	24.8
Hylands and Harrow Lodge	79.6	7.4	12.2	70.7	5.6	5.0	47.2	52.8	28.2	18.3
Marshalls and Rise Park	84.1	4.4	11.0	68.9	4.2	6.3	49.8	50.2	30.3	18.8
Mawneys	73.5	11.6	14.4	64.7	6.5	7.9	40.2	59.8	26.3	21.5
Rainham and Wennington	72.5	9.3	17.4	62.9	10.4	7.3	37.5	62.5	25.3	23.4
Rush Green and Crowlands	55.2	16.5	26.8	45.3	11.5	13.2	44.6	55.4	35.8	18.8
St Alban's	50.6	12.4	35.4	53.6	8.5	9.7	44.3	55.7	35.3	18.1
St Andrew's	73.3	9.4	17.1	78.9	3.5	2.7	47.9	52.1	27.5	20.0
St Edward's	52.1	14.9	29.1	56.6	8.1	7.7	50.1	49.9	37.1	18.5
South Hornchurch	73.4	12.0	13.9	62.2	11.6	8.0	37.8	62.2	25.3	22.6
Squirrels Heath	72.8	7.9	18.5	67.9	5.2	5.0	53.2	46.8	33.4	16.1
Upminster	85.8	2.0	12.0	85.4	1.6	1.6	57.2	42.8	31.4	15.2

Whereas in more inner London boroughs this "old East End" vote is being rapidly replaced by a more affluent, more ethnically diverse electorate, Havering is far out enough to be relatively untroubled by change - even with the District Line running as far as Upminster and the newer Elizabeth Line running through Romford and Harold Wood. 85% of Upminster is still white British; it's 84% in Cranham and 79% in Hacton and St Andrew's.

Even next door in Barking and Dagenham, the highest proportion of white British residents is just 53% in Eastbrook and the next highest is 41% in Goresbrook. Havering is very different from any London borough and that's why it votes very differently.

It's entirely possible that, following the May elections Havering council will comprise solely Reform councillors and Residents' Association councillors: it's the exact numbers on each side that are unknowable right now.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	R	Res
May 22 council election result	23	9			23
Sep 22 defection: Sarah Edwards (Rainham and Wennington) Con to Res	22	9			24
Sep 22 defection: Sue Ospreay (Rainham and Wennington) Con to Res	21	9			25
Sep 22 defection: Jackie McArdle (Rainham and Wennington) Con to Res	20	9			26
Aug 23 by-election: Upminster - Res hold	20	9			26
Jan 24 defection: Robby Misir (Marshalls and Rise Park) Con to Res	19	9			27
Apr 24 defection: John Crowder (Havering-atte-Bower) Con to Res	18	9			28
Apr 24 defection: Christine Smith (Hylands and Harrow Lodge) Con to Res	17	9			29
Apr 24 defection: Philippa Crowder (Marshalls and Rise Park) Con to Res	16	9			30
May 24 defection: Paul McGeary (Gooshays) Lab to Res	16	8			31
Jul 24 defection: Jackie McArdle (Rainham and Wennington) Res to Con	17	8			30
Oct 25 defection: Keith Prince (Squirrel's Heath) Con to Ref	16	8		1	30

One of the harder targets for Reform UK to pick off in London is the west London borough of Hillingdon.

On the Reform ladder that gets progressively harder for the party to climb, Hillingdon is the fifth rung behind Bexley, Barking, Havering and Bromley. From here it's about how many opposition seats Reform can win rather than about their likelihood of controlling the council.

There are plenty of potential targets for Reform, not all of them Conservative-held. Almost as much of this preview will be focussed on Labour's challenges as those of Conservatives facing a Reform threat.

The Conservatives themselves have made life harder than it need be to hold Hillingdon. At the ward boundary review prior to the last council elections, the party (via the council) submission argued for, and got, a big reduction in council size, shrinking from 65 seats to 53. All twelve abolished seats were Labour's electoral problem in Hillingdon is that its vote is concentrated in the south east of the borough: enough to give it a decent-sized group but impossible to take the party to a majority. Hayes, Heathrow and Harlington are part of a wider corridor stretching to Harrow and Kenton that has become the hub for London's Hindu and Sikh communities.

There is also a Muslim community here, but it's much smaller than East London's. Many work servicing Heathrow airport: warehousing, transporting goods and passengers, loading and unloading planes, securing the airport and its associated buildings.

Belmore has a resident population of Indian origin of 65%; Pinkwell of 60%, Hayes Town 51%, Wood End 50.5%, Yeading of 45% and Charlville of 44%. These have been reliable repositories of votes for Labour over the decades but, as we'll question further in the Hounslow preview, there's considerable doubt that they will be this May.

Conservative held and, as such, their majority fell a lot last time. Turkeys aren't meant to vote for Christmas, but Hillingdon's Conservatives did - for reasons unclear to all.

That error turned a comfortable Conservative majority of 23 into one of just 7. Labour, despite not having an especially remarkable election, found themselves just a 3.2% swing away from power. Gaining the Tory-held seats in split Charlville and Uxbridge would hang the council. They were just 131 votes from winning a seat in Colham and Cowley ward. That ward would give Labour a majority on the council.

Fortunately for them, there is typically one party even more disorganised and error-strewn than Hillingdon Conservatives - and that's Hillingdon Labour. That's evidenced by, for example, a group that numbered 23 councillors when elected in 2022 now down to 16 after defections and suspensions. It's par for the course.

With a neighbourhood so reliant on Heathrow, plans to expand the airport may also be consequential. **Heathrow Villages** ward, which includes the airport and some of the neighbourhoods that will be demolished to build a new runway, is usually Labour leaning. The Conservatives last won seats here in 2010. But now Labour is in government, pushing the expansion, will they shed anti-Heathrow votes - on top of their wider unpopularity? And if so, where will they go?

The only party consistently against expansion is the Greens. They stood here in 2022 but received less than 10% of the votes - though Labour wasn't obviously for expansion last time either. But it's not obvious that the Greens are going to pick up many votes on this issue alone.

Nor is this ward, any more, especially white (24% white, 33% of Indian sub-continental origin) so it doesn't seem to have the demographics that make it great for Reform. That party favours Heathrow expansion as well.



Contrast that profile with two far better prospects for Reform: **West Drayton**: 38% white and 55% C2DE and, **Yiewsley**: 41% white and 58% C2DE. If Heathrow Villages is to spurn Labour, it's probably more likely to opt for the Conservatives, even though they're for the third runway too.

Heathrow expansion, because of the jobs dependent on the airport, is broadly a big net positive in Hayes, Harlington and Uxbridge, so it probably won't swing many votes here as all bar the Greens support it.

Labour's larger problem in Hayes will be the Hayes Independents: a party established by three of the councillors that have left Labour since 2022 - and since joined by two more. Hayes Independents have registered as a political party with the Electoral Commission which, short of seeing the nominations, is as good a pointer as we can get that they are planning on contesting the elections.

Although Labour's core wards in Hayes and Harlington: **Pinkwell**, **Hayes Town**, **Wood End**, **Yeading** and **Belmore** look very secure on paper, they have not been fought with Labour in government, and with a credible non-Conservative challenger, since 2010.

A few of the defectors to the Hayes Independents are fairly long-serving and presumably quite prominent councillors and the areas they represent do not contain the sort of demographic that would vote Green in vast numbers.

Hayes Independents will join the collective of "community independents" - seen as to the left of Labour, for whom the issue of Gaza still features prominently. This co-operative is expected to fight across the capital - Islington, Hackney, Haringey, Newham and Redbridge being the main examples - and gain a lot of votes. They are likely to be endorsed by Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party and will work out non-aggression pacts with the Greens.

Hillingdon borough stretches far beyond Heathrow, Hayes and Harlington, and Labour's support starts to ebb very quickly moving north.

Ward	Housing			Religion		Ethnic	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Hindu & Sikh	Muslim	White Brit	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No qals
Belmore	55.5	11.2	32.2	47.6	17.6	11.6	33.4	66.6	30.0	24.3
Charville	64.0	11.1	22.9	26.7	16.9	32.2	36.9	63.1	30.4	22.2
Colham and Cowley	51.0	21.0	26.4	12.4	15.3	39.7	42.9	57.1	31.8	19.2
Eastcote	75.0	8.8	15.5	22.6	7.0	52.7	60.3	39.7	44.8	12.8
Harefield Village	66.5	19.4	13.4	4.7	3.1	73.2	50.9	49.1	32.7	18.8
Hayes Town	34.3	20.4	41.5	26.6	24.6	15.0	38.1	61.9	35.5	22.1
Heathrow Villages	39.8	13.9	45.6	17.4	15.4	24.1	28.2	71.8	31.1	22.2
Hillingdon East	66.2	13.2	20.0	19.0	13.3	41.3	48.7	51.3	36.3	17.4
Hillingdon West	55.2	14.4	28.5	16.3	14.2	38.7	57.4	42.6	45.4	14.3
Ickenham and South Harefield	75.5	6.8	16.8	15.1	6.3	58.1	61.0	39.0	44.8	12.4
Northwood	59.2	14.0	26.5	20.7	10.2	38.5	67.3	32.7	55.1	11.8
Northwood Hills	61.6	15.4	22.5	20.4	9.8	39.7	57.1	42.9	46.4	15.0
Pinkwell	50.9	17.4	30.6	37.3	22.5	14.5	31.9	68.1	29.9	24.0
Ruislip	70.6	11.2	17.6	9.3	5.0	62.1	60.0	40.0	43.5	13.6
Ruislip Manor	77.9	3.2	18.1	9.4	5.0	57.8	53.3	46.7	39.0	13.8
South Ruislip	67.6	8.5	22.8	13.4	9.7	46.7	51.4	48.6	39.4	14.5
Uxbridge	48.8	19.2	30.3	8.7	15.5	39.4	51.8	48.2	40.6	13.7
West Drayton	46.2	24.2	27.0	14.4	15.6	37.8	44.6	55.4	38.1	19.9
Wood End	43.7	28.9	26.0	26.7	23.8	22.4	34.3	65.7	30.0	24.7
Yeading	45.0	27.6	25.6	22.4	22.6	24.1	34.4	65.6	31.2	22.0
Yiewsley	36.6	28.0	33.0	9.5	16.3	40.6	42.1	57.9	35.6	20.5

The borough becomes much whiter: just two wards beyond Heathrow the ethnicity proportions for **Yiewsley** are the same for **Uxbridge** and Hillingdon, before surging at **Ickenham, Ruislip** and **Northwood**.

Relatively isolated **Harefield Village**, in the north-western corner of the borough, is nearer Rickmansworth than Uxbridge and 73% white. That is an aberrant figure for a London ward in 2026. Harefield is probably the number 1 Reform target, but it's a small ward electing just one councillor. Reform won't take Hillingdon by Harefield alone.

Harefield aside, Reform's best shots are in the centre of the borough: **Yiewsley, Uxbridge, Hillingdon East, Hillingdon West** and **Charville**. These five wards contain twelve seats.

Charville is already a closely fought wards where both Labour and the Conservatives are well organised. It's split its representation for 4 of the past 5 elections (the Tories winning all seats there in 2018). 2002 was the last time Labour won all seats in Charville. Of this central cluster Charville is most like Hayes: a much higher Asian percentage and somewhat less affluent than Uxbridge or Hillingdon.

Then there's **Colham and Cowley**. This is essentially the old Brunel ward with its well-regarded university. Reform really doesn't do well with students no matter its somewhat spurious claims that young people have been flocking to the party. That hasn't stopped the Conservatives - also not known for their widespread student support - from winning, but then the ward is much more than just the university.

Possible target wards

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Charville (1 Lab)
- ▶ Heathrow Villages (2 Lab)
- ▶ Uxbridge (1 Lab)
- ▶ Yiewsley (1 Lab, 1 Ind)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Belmore (1 Hayes Ind - defec)
- ▶ Charville (1 Con)
- ▶ Colham and Cowley (3 Con)
- ▶ Hayes Town (2 Hayes Ind - defec)
- ▶ Uxbridge (2 Con)
- ▶ West Drayton (1 Hayes Ind - defec)
- ▶ Yeading (1 Con, 1 Hayes Ind - both defecs)
- ▶ Yiewsley (1 Ind - defec)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Charville (1 Con, 1 Lab)
- ▶ Harefield Village (2 Con)
- ▶ Heathrow Villages (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hillingdon West (2 Con)
- ▶ South Ruislip (3 Con)
- ▶ Uxbridge (2 Con, 1 Lab)
- ▶ West Drayton (3 Lab)
- ▶ Yiewsley (1 Lab, 1 Ind)

Hayes Independents hopefuls

- ▶ Belmore (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hayes Town (1 Lab)
- ▶ Pinkwell (3 Lab)
- ▶ Wood End (3 Lab)
- ▶ Yeading (1 Con)

A vote strong but insufficient for Reform to win here, coming mostly from former Conservative voters, could tip Colham and Cowley to Labour for the first time since the mid 1990s, but it's a little unlikely given Labour will shed votes too.

The Conservatives should be able to rely on **Ickenham and South Harefield, Northwood and Northwood Hills, Ruislip and Ruislip Manor, and Eastcote** despite a Reform challenge. These wards contain 15 seats and while Reform will receive a hefty chunk of votes, these are very safe Conservative wards.

Without a splintered field of candidates taking sizeable chunks of votes away from the Tories and enabling Reform to win with relatively small vote shares, they will struggle in the very affluent north. The Conservatives polled nearly 17,000 more votes than Reform in the Ruislip-Northwood constituency in 2024. Yes, that was before the big uptick in Reform support but a measure nonetheless of how strong the Tories still are in patches of London.

There could be a peculiar electoral map of Hillingdon after May 7th. Labour could be left with just six seats or fewer depending on how well Hayes Independents do hoovering up protest votes against the government.

Reform may get clusters of seats: **Yiewsley and West Drayton; maybe Uxbridge and Hillingdon West; Harefield Village and South Ruislip.** If Reform do that well (or better): and those wards are worth up to 15 seats, then the Conservatives will lose control of Hillingdon. But they'll remain - by some margin - the largest party and an essential component of whichever administration emerges. Reform will need to crack the Northwood and Ruislip wards to just about get a majority of seats.

What's highly probable is that, despite coming very close in 2022, Labour will not be gaining Hillingdon in May.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	Res	I
May 22 council election result	30	23			
Jun 22 suspension: Labina Basit (Belmore) Lab to Ind	30	22			1
May 24 by-election: Hillingdon East - Con hold	30	22			1
Jun 25 defection: Labina Basit (Belmore) Ind to Hayes Ind	30	22		1	
Jun 25 defection: Peter Curling (Hayes Town) Lab to Hayes Ind	30	21		2	
Jun 25 defection: Janet Gardener (Hayes Town) Lab to Hayes Ind	30	20		3	
Sep 25 defection: Scott Farley (West Drayton) Lab to Ind	30	19		3	1
Oct 25 defection: Jas Dhot (Yeadng) Lab to Con	31	18		3	1
Oct 25 defection: Rita Judge (Yeadng) Lab to Hayes Ind	31	17		4	1
Oct 25 defection: Scott Farley (West Drayton) Ind to Hayes Ind	31	17		5	
Oct 25 suspension: Naser Abby (Yiewsley) Lab to Ind	31	16		5	1

HOUNSLOW

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The West London borough of Hounslow is as wide a borough as Hillingdon is tall. From Chiswick Eyot in the east you can almost - not quite - see Hammersmith Bridge. Were you to exit Hounslow in the west, along London Road, you'd find yourself beyond Greater London, among the vast reservoirs around Stanwell.

The ten miles between Chiswick and Feltham cover several, quite different, neighbourhoods- most of which are relatively poor, ethnically diverse and normally strongly inclined towards the Labour Party.

Hounslow is in the same category of London boroughs as Greenwich and Waltham Forest: boroughs that rarely make the headlines about loopy policies or confronting the government. They just tend to get on with administering the services they are meant to.

Hounslow, though, has looked a stronger Labour borough than it is. In part this is because the party has had a vice-like grip on the central block of wards in Hounslow town and Heston, while the Conservatives stack up votes in Chiswick. But in years of deep political unpopularity for Labour, like 1968 and 2006, the voters can turf the party out.

2026 could be another of those problematic years despite Labour winning a thumping majority of 42 seats at the last elections. They even managed to crack the last Conservative redoubt: Chiswick, winning a seat in Riverside ward (Strand-on-the-Green) for the first time since 1974.

Even in 2022 Labour didn't have everything all its own way. The Conservatives offset their Chiswick Riverside loss by gaining two seats at the other end of the borough: one in **Hanworth Village** on the edge of Twickenham; the other in **Feltham North** - on swings up to 9%.

These are extremely different neighbourhoods to Chiswick and they epitomise the story of London in 2022. The Conservatives, weighed down by Brexit and Boris in affluent

areas lost seats. More working class, less affluent and more ethnically diverse wards - typically safe for Labour, swung towards the Conservatives but didn't net them many seats.

	C	L	LD	O
2022	27.5	48.0	8.4	16.1
2018	28.0	52.7	9.0	10.3
2014	25.0	43.6	7.3	24.2
2010	31.2	34.6	15.7	18.4
2006	29.8	29.0	18.7	22.5
2002	29.7	37.9	12.9	19.6

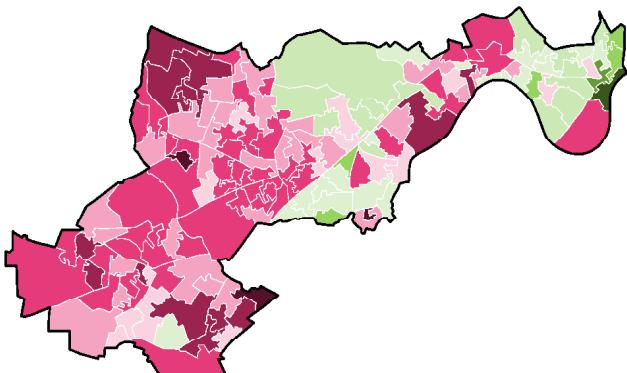
Hounslow borough vote shares 2002-2022

Of the 13 wards in the west of the borough which cover the neighbourhoods of Hanworth, Feltham, Hounslow town and Heston ten swung markedly from Labour to Conservatives. 2022 was not quite so spectacular an election for Labour in Hounslow as the headline figures suggest.

The 2022 to 2026 term started off following the pattern of previous, unexciting administrations but Labour's skies soon started clouding over.

It started off with a new council leader, Shantanu Rajawat (Heston West) after Steve Curran stood down from the council in 2022 following a cancer diagnosis. The first of ten changes of allegiance went in their favour when the Tory councillor who had gained their seat in **Feltham North**, Kuldeep Tak, switched sides without any public reason.

Hounslow borough has four distinct electoral clusters. There are the five wards west of the river Crane covering Feltham, Hanworth and Bedfont. There are eight central wards that cover Hounslow and Heston and this is where the bulk of the borough's Asian (principally Hindu and Sikh) population live.



Hounslow index of deprivation map

Then there are five wards covering Brentford, Isleworth and Osterley (within which I've included Hounslow South which is demographically quite different from the area west of the railway). This is where much of the new housing development has been concentrated. And there are the three Chiswick wards that vote differently from the rest of the borough.

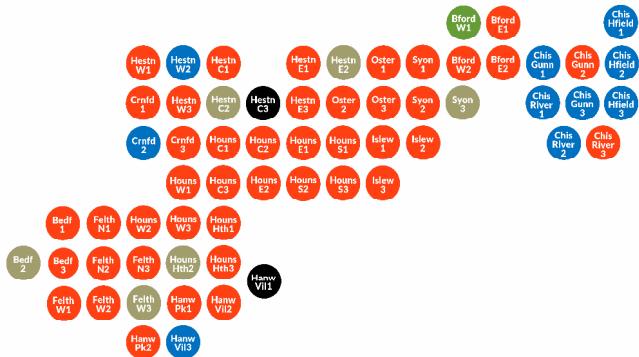
The first of those clusters: Feltham, Hanworth and Bedfont, elects fourteen councillors, twelve of whom were Labour in 2022. But rewind to 2006 and Labour could only return four from this end of the borough: after Chiswick it is the least secure part of Hounslow for Labour.

Back in 2006 **Feltham North** looked like a safe Conservative enclave with former councillor Iain Bowen winning over 60% - though he had a big personal vote. What is now **Hanworth Village** was reliably Lib Dem - the political tendencies of Twickenham spilling across the borough boundary.

Feltham, associated with its notorious Young Offender Institution (named in a 2024 inspection report as having the highest levels of prisoner violence in England and Wales) is actually in **Bedfont** ward. It's also white, working class and politically right-wing.

So there is some expectation that the threat to Labour in Feltham and Hanworth - and potentially their salvation if the right of centre vote is evenly split - will come from Reform this year. But how Feltham was in the 1980s isn't an accurate portrait of Feltham in 2026.

Would the Conservatives really have gained a seat in **Feltham North** with an Asian candidate if this was a stereotypical dormitory of nationalistic St George's flag-flying white van drivers?



Eleven of the councillors in this area are Asian right now - including all nine representing Feltham and Bedfont wards. While the Asian population is nowhere close to what it is in the centre of the borough, it's hardly non-existent. Similarly the white British population is nowhere close to a majority: 42% in **Hanworth Park** is the highest.

Reform will still be confident of winning some seats here - but so too will the Conservatives. And whichever of those two triumph, it's likely to be at least as brutal for Labour as 2006.

Heston and Hounslow should be Labour's bedrock. They won all twenty seats comfortably in 2022, including the new one created because of population growth: Hounslow East. **Cranford, Heston West, Hounslow Heath** and **Hounslow West** always vie to be the very safest for Labour.

But it's in this cluster that the really big splits in Hounslow Labour group have played out with councillors defecting left, right and centre almost literally (some following being barred

from seeking re-election). Labour has lost five councillors here: two to the Conservatives, one who's quit the council entirely and two now sitting as independents. One: **Heston East's** Amritpal Mann, a former mayor of Hounslow, initially switched to George Galloway's Workers Party, but didn't last long there.

What happens in May depends whether these are merely behind closed doors fallings out within the group or if disillusion with Labour has distilled down to grassroots.

Never forget that the ethnic origin of the vast majority in these wards is not Bangladeshi or Pakistani (so mostly Muslim) as it is in East London but Indian (mostly Hindu and Sikh). While there may be disaffection - deeply felt - with Labour it's not entirely for the same reasons or of the same disdain as is playing out in heavily Muslim areas.

Nonetheless, Labour has its problems with this demographic too. The marked swings against them in 2022 are evidence.

Labour was routed in Leicester in 2023 in both Muslim and Hindu wards and then lost two of the city's three constituencies in the 2024 general election. They also lost control of Slough (in no small part because of the council's financial problems).

Most saliently there is significantly Asian Harrow, which elected a Conservative council in 2022 and gave Bob Blackman MP an increased majority at the general election.

Some of this alienation is because of a surge in Hindu nationalism inspired, to an extent, by the populist Indian government of Narendra Modi. But let's not be so condescending as to ascribe the voting behaviour of British voters to the policies of a government thousands of miles away. It's as much to do with the same alienation as many others have with Labour and an even greater sense that the party has taken their votes for granted for far too long.

Hounslow is not Harrow: it's a good deal less affluent and a lot less suburban. But Harrow (and Wembley in Brent, to a

lesser extent) hasn't turned Conservative because it's suddenly become affluent. What has happened there can happen here. But will it?

Again, it depends if the ructions in Labour herald a deep disaffection with Labour. The only electoral evidence we have is from council by-elections, the most recent of which was **Cranford** in August last year.

Cranford swung 11.5% to the Conservatives in this by-election with Reform polling 17.3%. The combined Conservative plus Reform total was 133 votes larger than Labour's support. And this in a ward that gave Labour over two thirds of the vote in 2018.

By that measure the rupture does seem to be larger than just a falling out of councillors. But for Labour to seriously be hurt, the swings need to be a fair bit larger than that in Cranford. And every Reform vote that comes from 2022 Conservatives might save a seat for Labour.

Continuing to travel east, there are 16 seats covering Brentford, Isleworth and Osterley. This is the opportunity to talk about the prospects of parties and candidates perceived as to the left of Labour. The Conservatives used to be strong here: Spring Grove ward was always Conservative until it was redrawn in 2002, Hounslow South is the posh end of Hounslow, and Syon was usually fairly closely fought.

The last time Labour fared badly in Hounslow: 2006, they could only win two seats here - both of them in Brentford ward which split with a Lib Dem. The Isleworth Community Party of the iconoclastic Phil Andrews, a former National Front member, won both **Isleworth** and **Syon** wards with six seats; while the Conservatives took **Hounslow South** and **Osterley and Spring Grove**.

But times have changed: Conservative chances have been knocked sideways. They were more than 600 votes adrift in Hounslow South and over 500 short in Osterley last time.

Ward	Housing			Religion		Ethnic	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Hindu & Sikh	Muslim	White Brit	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No qals
Bedfont	44.1	27.0	23.3	15.1	15.9	37.0	31.7	68.3	29.7	23.1
Brentford East	24.3	42.9	28.2	5.7	20.2	31.2	53.4	46.6	46.1	17.4
Brentford West	47.5	20.4	28.6	3.6	12.8	43.9	58.7	41.3	49.8	13.6
Chiswick Gunnersbury	46.2	14.6	38.4	3.0	9.9	42.6	71.3	28.7	60.9	9.9
Chiswick Homefields	53.5	15.1	30.1	2.2	6.1	50.7	73.4	26.6	62.0	9.5
Chiswick Riverside	52.4	15.0	31.9	2.9	7.3	50.5	73.6	26.4	62.9	8.6
Cranford	36.4	27.7	34.6	27.9	20.5	12.8	29.3	70.7	31.0	24.4
Feltham North	52.3	23.6	22.1	16.2	14.4	32.9	32.8	67.2	30.6	26.0
Feltham West	45.0	25.8	25.7	13.0	12.5	38.9	38.1	61.9	34.2	20.2
Hanworth Park	53.4	20.4	24.1	10.5	11.0	42.1	38.0	62.0	34.7	19.9
Hanworth Village	47.2	32.2	18.0	8.5	18.1	41.4	34.1	65.9	29.9	23.2
Heston Central	49.1	18.0	30.8	34.6	22.3	9.7	37.0	63.0	36.5	21.2
Heston East	48.1	15.0	34.6	40.6	20.9	9.6	40.6	59.4	39.1	20.9
Heston West	47.0	23.9	27.2	42.1	25.3	9.6	34.4	65.6	32.0	25.2
Hounslow Central	28.0	12.6	56.3	27.0	18.8	9.0	40.7	59.3	46.1	17.7
Hounslow East	35.5	23.5	35.8	22.4	22.1	15.3	39.5	60.5	42.3	19.4
Hounslow Heath	38.3	18.3	41.6	23.4	25.3	13.0	34.7	65.3	36.5	20.8
Hounslow South	63.8	10.3	24.9	18.3	13.3	34.3	47.6	52.4	41.7	17.4
Hounslow West	36.7	18.4	42.2	27.8	17.6	9.8	33.1	66.9	36.1	21.4
Isleworth	47.5	27.2	24.1	6.5	16.0	42.3	55.7	44.3	46.3	15.4
Osterley and Spring Grove	56.4	6.7	34.9	22.5	15.9	23.8	56.7	43.3	52.9	12.8
Syon and Brentford Lock	42.0	24.0	29.4	7.3	15.9	37.8	58.7	41.3	49.5	15.0

In large part it's because this is where the fairly limited population of university-educated, relatively affluent, anti-Brexit professionals is concentrated: the group still most willing to give the benefit of the doubt to Labour.

If anything they are seeking a more radical alternative to Labour. This could be reflected both in the by-election success of former Labour councillor Theo Deniston, who regained a seat in **Syon and Brentford Lock** in March last year, and the switch to the Greens of long-time Brentford councillor Guy Lambert.

The Greens were runners-up in **Brentford West** in 2022,

polling a healthy 29%, while Deniston (who also contested a by-election here prior to winning in his "own" ward of Syon later) plus the Greens polled 42% combined there in 2024. That one is clearly in jeopardy.

Deniston will have a strong chance as an incumbent in Syon and Brentford Lock, while Reform did pretty well in a **Brentford East** by-election in March 2025, polling 22%. Brentford East is the more working class side of the neighbourhood including the Brentford Towers estate in Green Dragon Lane. Each of those towers is named after engineers who worked at the Brentford pumping station, now the Museum of Water and Steam, near Kew Bridge.

possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Bedford (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Brentford West (1 Grn - def)
- ▶ Chiswick Gunnersbury (2 Con)
- ▶ Chiswick Riverside (2 Con)
- ▶ Cranford (1 Con - def)
- ▶ Feltham West (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Hanworth Village (1 Con)
- ▶ Heston Central (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Heston East (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Heston West (1 Con - def)
- ▶ Hounslow Heath (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Hanworth Village (1 Con)
- ▶ Syon and Brentford Lock (1 Ind)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Bedfont (3 Lab)
- ▶ Chiswick Gunnersbury (1 Lab - def)
- ▶ Chiswick Riverside (1 Lab)
- ▶ Feltham North (3 Lab, 1 def)
- ▶ Feltham West (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hanworth Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hanworth Village (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hounslow South (3 Lab)
- ▶ Osterley and Spring Grove (3 Lab)

Green hopeful

- ▶ Brentford West (2 Lab)

Reform UK hopefuls

- ▶ Bedfont (3 Lab)
- ▶ Feltham North (3 Lab)
- ▶ Feltham West (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hanworth Park (2 Lab)

Independent hopefuls

- ▶ Isleworth (3 Lab)
- ▶ Syon and Brentford Lock (2 Lab)

The Conservatives may still have enough residual strength to win seats in Osterley and Spring Grove but they will need every non-Labour vote to line up behind them there.

Hounslow South is a harder ask given they barely polled 20% in 2022. But Reform is unlikely to factor here.

Finally there are the nine Chiswick seats. Labour has done what it can to save their one councillor here by making Amy Croft mayor for this final year. That is a mixed blessing: she'll get the publicity of being out and about and regularly in the news opening things but her politically neutral position may hamper her ability to get out and campaign for herself in **Chiswick Riverside**.

The musical chairs we've seen in the council are manifested by the Labour-to-Conservative defector from Cranford, Vickram Grewal, moving to contest the **Chiswick Gunnersbury** seat that Conservative to Labour defector Ranjit Gill opened up.

Although named "Gunnersbury" and containing the park, this ward is basically the successor to the old Turnham Green. Nonetheless, it's no more secure for the Tories than Riverside has become: Gill won by just twenty three votes last time. But Labour's decline should be more than enough to secure all nine Chiswick seats for the Conservatives this year. If it isn't then Labour will hold Hounslow comfortably.

In 2006 it took a diverse coalition of parties to oust Labour: 23 Conservatives, 5 Lib Dems, 6 Isleworth Community, and 2 Independent Alliance. Few suggest that the Tories are strong enough to win Hounslow alone. But a 2006-style mash-up is just about a credible outcome, albeit with different players to those on the scene two decades ago.

The Conservatives "only" need a 10.6% swing from 2022 to win - the sort of swing they pulled off in the Cranford by-election. So don't be completely shocked if Hounslow falls from Labour's grip this year.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	10	52			
Mar 23 by-election: Heston West - Lab hold	10	52			
Mar 24 defection: Amritpal Mann (Heston East) - Lab to WP	10	51			1
May 24 defection: Kuldeep Tak (Feltham North) - Con to Lab	9	52			1
May 24 by-election: Brentford West - Lab hold	9	52			1
Jul 24 by-election: Hanworth Village - Lab hold	9	52			1
Nov 24 suspension: Guy Lambert (Brentford West) - Lab to Ind	9	51			2
Mar 25 by-election: Brentford East - Lab hold	9	51			2
Mar 25 by-election: Syon & Brentford Lock - Ind gain	9	50			3
May 25 defection: Ranjit Gill (Chiswick Gunnersbury) - Con to Lab	8	51			3
Aug 25 by-election: Cranford - Lab hold	8	51			3
Nov 25 defection: Vickram Grewal (Cranford) - Lab to Con	9	50			3
Nov 25 defection: Harleen Atwal Hear (Heston Central) - Lab to Ind	9	49			4
Nov 25 vacancy: Riaz Gull (Heston Central) - Lab resigned	9	48			4
Nov 25 defection: Afzaal Kiani (Hounslow Heath) - Lab to Ind	9	47			5
Nov 25 defection: Raghwinder Sidhu (Bedfont) - Lab to Ind	9	46			6
Nov 25 defection: Amritpal Mann (Heston East) - WP to Ind	9	46			6
Nov 25 defection: Guy Lambert (Brentford West) - Ind to Grn	9	46		1	5
Dec 25 suspension: Hina Mir (Feltham West) - Lab to Ind	9	45		1	6
Dec 25 defection: Karamat Malik (Heston West) - Lab to Con	10	44		1	6
Dec 25 vacancy: Richard Foote (Hanworth Village) - Lab, deceased	10	43		1	6

Islington is another of those boroughs where Labour's position initially looks - and should be - impregnable.

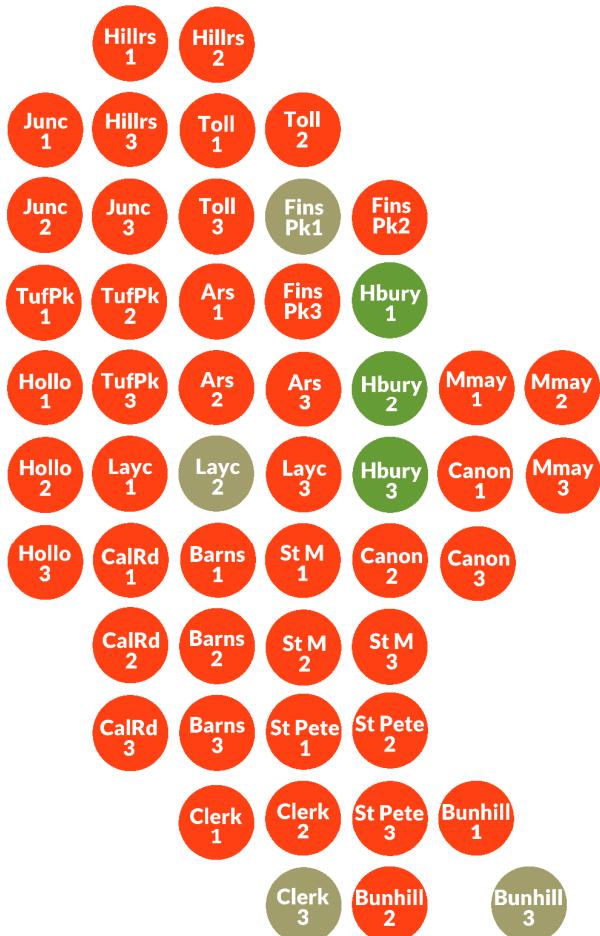
Labour won all but three seats in 2022 with 52% of the vote borough-wide. The Greens came second with 23%, winning all three seats in **Highbury** where they'd won one seat in 2014 and 2018. The Lib Dems polled 13%, winning none for the third election in a row and the Conservatives 11%. They haven't been represented on the council this millennium. Only two other wards were close: **Tufnell Park**, which the Greens almost won, and **St Mary's and St James'** - where the Lib Dems were runners-up.

A fair amount had happened since 2022 - and not just Labour moving from opposition to government. While Labour was winning nationally they were losing Islington North. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, expelled from the party by Keir Starmer, won re-election as an independent. Models of how individual wards voted in the general election suggest Corbyn won every ward within his seat - which is certainly possible as most of them aren't so different from each other.

That factor, incidentally, is why Labour has won landslides multiple times, but also why the Conservatives did in 1968 (their only election victory here) and the Lib Dems did in 2002. But it's also a significant complicating factor in previewing how Islington will go in 2026.

Since 2024, Corbyn has founded Your Party, which I've yet to discuss in any detail elsewhere - not least because charting its shenanigans would consume too many pages, but also because it now appears that this party may not contest the local elections this year.

This would be a slightly odd approach for the latest party attempting to break the mould of British politics, but then the hard left has always believed that extra-parliamentary (and



presumably extra-municipal) action is at least as important as winning votes. Anyhow, that doesn't mean the threat to Labour from this quarter is diminished because Your Party and fellow travellers plan to support so-called Community Independents or Independent Socialists.

We don't yet know how many will stand, where they'll stand, or whether they'll all stand on a joint manifesto. Will they also work with the Greens (as they appear to be planning to in other boroughs) or stand against them? That's why previewing this borough isn't straightforward.

We can't just take Corbyn's 49% of the vote in 2024 as a baseline because he has been an active constituency MP for 41 years. We do, however, have the results of three Islington council by-elections: all in Corbyn's constituency. Two were in Hillrise ward: the most northerly ward covering Archway.

The first Hillrise by-election in August 2024 resulted in Labour's vote crashing by 21 percentage points. All that fall went to an independent. Even with that huge collapse, Labour won by 429 - a big margin on a low summer turnout, which shows how entrenched they are here.

The other was in **Junction** and here Labour dropped 25 points, again with an independent coming second from nowhere. And again, despite that tanking in the vote, Labour won pretty comfortably.

The reason there were two **Hillrise** by-elections was that the Labour winner of the first was Ollie Steadman. Unfortunately for him, for Labour and for his alleged victims, The next month Cllr Steadman was arrested for that bizarre episode: the Westminster Honeytrap scandal that happened at the start of 2024.

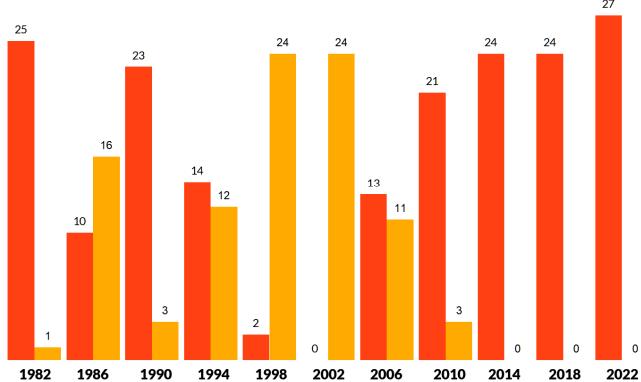
This was when then Conservative MP William Wragg was seduced over a dating app into sending incriminating selfies of himself and then blackmailed into handing over the personal numbers of several MPs and their researchers. Steadman's time as a councillor lasted about six weeks. His trial is ongoing.

Returning to the state of affairs in Islington, this emergence of independents poses something of a quandary for the Green Party. The only seats they hold in the borough are in Islington North. They had prospects before the Jeremy Corbyn saga elsewhere in Islington North.

Community independents could be a road-block to their chances - indeed, they could ensure Labour wins with massively reduced support by splitting the anti-Labour vote.

We have no electoral information about what's happening in Islington South - there have been no by-elections. South has been the more volatile end of the borough - it has been the (very much) better constituency for the Lib Dems, which they've come close to winning three times. Whenever Lib Dems have polled well in Islington, most of their seats - and their strongholds - have been in the south.

The rise and fall of the Lib Dems in Islington South



The Liberal Democrats and SDP Liberal Alliance have quite a history in Islington. It all began with the formation of the SDP in 1981. In those days, there were three Islington seats: North, Central and South.

All three Labour MPs defected to the SDP - all of them on track to be deselected by their left-wing constituency parties. They were joined in defecting by enough Labour councillors for the SDP to take control of the council just prior to the 1982 council elections. Islington voters did not take to this well: at the elections Labour defeated every Alliance councillor bar one, in Clerkenwell.

Parliamentary boundary changes reduced the constituencies to the two we have today, give or take. Three into two doesn't go, and the MPs for North and Central both went for the SDP nomination for the enlarged Islington North. Islington Central's John Grant won the SDP nomination but Islington North's Michael O'Halloran stood against him in the 1983 general election as an Independent Labour candidate. Both lost to Jeremy Corbyn in his first election. Grant got 9,344 votes, O'Halloran 4,091 - even combined, their votes wouldn't have beaten Labour.

Things were less fractious for the Alliance in Islington South and Finsbury: the SDP MP Gerry Cunningham stood unchallenged, up against an openly gay (which in those days was controversial and unprecedented) Islington Labour councillor, Chris Smith. Smith was regarded as left wing and his sexuality was an electoral issue. So too was Labour's unpopularity, locally and nationally. Smith squeaked in by just 363 votes.

This new, competitive, status for Islington was confirmed in the 1986 council elections when the Alliance won sixteen seats (all in the south) to Labour's ten. Hence, Smith did well to hold his constituency in 1987 by 805 votes, Cunningham again standing for the Alliance.

Islington joined the list of "loony left" London boroughs with its performative "anti-nuclear zone" and, even more newsworthy, placing a bust of Lenin in the town hall in solidarity with the Soviet Union. Margaret Hodge, who went on quite a political journey to the new Labour and anti-Corbyn end of the spectrum, was council leader. Steven Twigg - who famously ousted Michael Portillo becoming MP for Enfield Southgate - was a deputy leader towards the end of this period.

Islington avoided the endless excesses of Lambeth, Haringey, Brent and Liverpool but still gave its electorate plenty of reasons not to vote for them.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Arsenal	29.2	31.6	34.8	40.5	11.8	12.1	75.4	24.6	64.5	10.9
Barnsbury	30.3	35.1	33.3	48.5	7.1	7.1	74.6	25.4	61.6	12.5
Bunhill	20.8	44.4	32.9	34.9	11.5	11.2	69.9	30.1	55.4	12.5
Caledonian	16.8	48.1	33.2	29.9	13.7	16.7	61.5	38.5	49.0	16.4
Canonbury	27.1	44.7	26.5	44.3	10.6	9.0	70.9	29.1	55.8	14.9
Clerkenwell	25.8	42.5	30.5	40.4	9.6	10.5	70.9	29.1	54.7	12.1
Finsbury Park	20.4	41.3	36.9	29.8	17.8	21.5	61.5	38.5	50.6	15.7
Highbury	38.5	29.4	30.6	47.1	9.8	9.6	75.9	24.1	65.3	10.7
Hillrise	30.4	44.4	23.7	40.4	13.5	12.1	63.6	36.4	52.4	15.5
Holloway	22.2	43.7	31.0	34.7	12.2	13.0	64.4	35.6	54.3	13.6
Junction	26.9	40.8	31.1	40.9	11.9	10.0	67.4	32.6	56.7	13.9
Laycock	23.0	47.0	27.8	40.3	11.6	12.7	66.3	33.7	51.5	16.7
Mildmay	26.4	43.2	29.2	41.1	13.8	11.4	68.8	31.2	56.7	14.2
St Mary's and St James'	27.2	38.9	32.5	44.3	8.2	8.6	74.7	25.3	61.2	12.5
St Peter's and Canalside	23.4	40.8	31.8	38.5	10.6	14.0	72.7	27.3	57.7	13.5
Tollington	29.4	33.9	34.8	37.9	13.2	13.0	68.1	31.9	57.8	14.0
Tufnell Park	32.4	36.6	29.6	42.4	10.4	9.0	69.0	31.0	57.5	13.6

The newly formed Liberal Democrats lacked the potency, at least initially, of the Alliance. In 1990 they again ended up with just one ward (this time St Peter's) and in 1992, Smith won by 10,652. The Conservatives came second.

But this restoration of Labour supremacy proved transitory, at least at council level. The Lib Dems began a surge: 12 councillors in 1994, 26 in 1998 and a landslide 38 in 2002. In the 2005 general election, Emily Thornberry's first time as the Labour candidate for Islington South, her majority was again back down to three figures: 484.

This was mostly down to the deeply unpopular Iraq War, with Thornberry scathing about its justification and legitimacy. But the Lib Dems had a more credible line given they'd voted against the invasion in parliament. It was as though the 1980s had returned.

This really was the peak of Liberal Democracy in Islington. In 2006, despite these elections being pretty dreadful for Labour across most of London, they regained 14 seats. The Lib Dems won 24, Labour 23 and 1 Green was elected in then Highbury West - now **Arsenal** - ward. The Lib Dems kept control by the mayor's casting vote.

In 2010 Labour comfortably regained control of Islington (with the Green councillor also defeated) and in 2014 the Lib Dems lost all their seats - they've never since held any council seats. But the Greens regained a seat, this time in Highbury East - the current **Highbury** ward, and they've held that seat in the two subsequent elections, winning the other two in that ward in 2022.

So: 48 Labour councillors elected in 2022 against 3 Greens. 26 seats are needed for a majority in Islington.

Let's assume that there is sufficient an understanding between Greens and Corbyn-backed independents in the borough's north so that the Greens are given a clear run where they believe they can win: say in **Highbury, Arsenal, Mildmay** and **Tufnell Park** - their best chances. Let's say the Greens give the independents a free run in the other four Islington North wards (**Finsbury Park, Hillrise, Junction** and **Tollington**).

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Bunhill (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Clerkenwell (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Finsbury Park (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Highbury (3 Grn)
- ▶ Laycock (1 Ind - defec)

Community Independent hopefuls

- ▶ Arsenal (3 Lab)
- ▶ Finsbury Park (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hillrise (3 Lab)
- ▶ Junction (3 Lab)
- ▶ Mildmay (3 Lab)
- ▶ Tollington (3 Lab)
- ▶ Laycock (1 Ind - defec)

Lib Dem hopeful

- ▶ St Mary's and St James' (3 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Arsenal (3 Lab)
- ▶ Barnsbury (3 Lab)
- ▶ Caledonian Road (3 Lab)
- ▶ Finsbury Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Holloway (3 Lab)
- ▶ Laycock (3 Lab)
- ▶ Mildmay (3 Lab)
- ▶ St Mary's and St James' (3 Lab)
- ▶ St Peter's and Canalside (3 Lab)
- ▶ Tollington (3 Lab)
- ▶ Tufnell Park (3 Lab)

Conservative hopeful

- ▶ St Peter's and Canalside (3 Lab)

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result		48		3	
Mar 23 defection: Matt Nathan (Clerkenwell) Lab to Ind		47		3	1
Nov 23 defection: Asima Shaikh (Finsbury Park) Lab to Ind		46		3	2
May 24 by-election: Hillrise - Lab hold (Lab vote -2.1)		46		3	2
Jul 24 defection: Phil Graham (Bunhill) Lab to Ind		45		3	3
Jul 24 defection: Ilkay Cinko-Oner (Laycock) Lab to Ind		44		3	4
Aug 24 by-election: Hillrise - Lab hold (Lab vote -21.6)		46		3	2
Nov 24 by-election: Junction - Lab hold (Lab vote -25.2)		44		3	4

It is plausible that Labour could lose all their seats in this constituency even though their safest wards - wards they held onto even in 2002 - are here. **Finsbury Park** and **Tottenham** are (or at least used to be) the safest of these.

But equally, Labour could hold most of them - maybe the vast majority, depending on three things. First, how much of Jeremy Corbyn's vote is transferable to other independents. Second, whether the Greens and independents divide the anti-Labour vote. Third, how visible and hard-working the Labour incumbents are.

The dynamics in Islington South differ because it lacks the independent presence. Islington South is also more affluent and, though a caricature of a far more complex borough, the epitome of progressive chattering-class north London, of cafe culture around the canals and of wide avenues of multi-million pound townhouses. There are big council estates here, and the ethnic balance across Islington is relatively even, it's just not huge. For a central London borough, Islington remains substantially white, though not majority white.

The Greens haven't carved out unchallenged second places anywhere in these southern wards: **Laycock** being their clearest but miles behind Labour. But if the Greens surge in London, this is where they will explode.

Wards like **Barnsbury**, **Laycock**, **Canonbury**, **St Peter's and Canalside** and, maybe, **Holloway** given its proximity to **Tufnell Park** - the best Green prospect in Islington. It may extend as far south as the old Finsbury borough wards: **Clerkenwell** and **Bunhill**, but they have a slightly less Green demographic - though went strongly Lib Dem when they were a factor in this constituency.

It's just about plausible to imagine the Lib Dems regaining **St Mary's and St James's** rather than the Greens leapfrogging them. It is barely credible to suggest the Conservatives can win **St Peter's and Canalside**, where they were 600 votes adrift in 2022. But then this is their only prospect in the borough - so they can focus whatever activist base they have left there. Reform won't steal too many votes that might otherwise go Conservative. And the result may be decided on a very low vote share.

Because Islington has proven itself to be a quite erratic borough with its Lib Dem surges and Labour resurgences, and the fracture on the left with the expulsion of Jeremy Corbyn has caused, this is a borough to be watched.

The odds of Labour's rupture feeding into a defeat are high. For four elections now, Islington has been electorally uninteresting - dull even, which is how Labour will have liked it. It won't be like that in 2026: it will be chaos and mayhem.

KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA



For the first time, no part of Kensington and Chelsea is represented by a Conservative MP. This is remarkable given that Chelsea was the safest Conservative constituency in the country as recently as 1987 and now has a Labour MP.

Just because that is the parliamentary reality, though, do not expect Kensington and Chelsea to follow Westminster and Wandsworth into the club of London Labour boroughs.

There is no path to a Labour majority here. Indeed, there's no path to knocking the council into no overall control. And that's despite there being an unprecedented six parties (including two types of independents) represented on the council. It is Labour, not the Conservatives, which has lost seats since 2022: six - all to defections.

Although this borough is shrinking fast, and even though the Conservatives have been shedding votes rapidly, they still have a wall of phenomenally safe seats here. The Conservatives polled 69% in **Royal Hospital**, 67% in **Brompton & Hans Town**, 59% in **Abingdon** and 58% in **Stanley**, despite 2022 being their poorest elections ever.

Even though this is a recent phenomenon, the reason Labour can win parliamentary seats in Kensington and Chelsea but not come close to winning the council is that their vote is heavily concentrated in the borough's north. The three London wards with the largest amounts of public sector housing - all over two thirds of the total housing stock - are North Kensington's **Golborne, Notting Dale** and **Dalgarno**.

There is such affluence throughout the rest of the borough, and the housing is unaffordable to all but the wealthiest, that Labour's progress is blocked in a way it hasn't been in other wealthy areas like Hampstead, Muswell Hill or Streatham.

Could it also be that there are different tribes within the moneyed classes? If you are wealthy enough to be able to

live anywhere, might cultural values help you choose? Those who made their fortunes in the media or public relations, or the very highest paid public sector workers - who vote to the left - might gravitate to Dartmouth Park, Hammersmith, Dulwich or Blackheath. Those whose money comes from the City - who still largely vote to the right despite Brexit - may choose South Kensington, or Chelsea or Fulham. That limits Labour's capacity to expand: it has the wrong type of rich person.

Kensington and Chelsea is the political equivalent of stagnant or frozen: nothing much changes.

For twenty years from 1982 to 2002 the Conservatives and Labour won the same number of seats election after election: 39 Tories, 15 Labour.

Even after the Grenfell Tower disaster of 2017, for which the Conservative council's perceived attitude to its tenants were excoriated nationally, the Tories lost just one council seat.

This one loss wasn't even down to the tragedy, even though it came in the adjoining ward to Grenfell: St Helen's. This ward had split its representation in 2014, so the Conservative was already unlikely to survive Labour's stronger vote across London in 2018.

Two other factors make it very difficult for parties to establish roots in the Conservative swathe of the borough.

The first is a fairly high turnover of residents, especially in the slightly less Conservative parts like **Earl's Court**. The other is that lots of residents live behind controlled entry systems or concierges or massive security gates, making it difficult to communicate and campaign effectively.

The Liberal Democrats, after years of trying, gained a seat in Earl's Court in a by-election in 2010. This was after a long-serving, somewhat eccentric, somewhat irascible Tory councillor, Barry Phelps, became another victim of some thoroughly stupid comments on social media. He tried to weather the storm but eventually resigned. This was a strange period in Kensington and Chelsea: there were seven by-elections in barely two years.

Even in those propitious circumstances and despite mopping up most of the Labour vote in Earl's Court, Lib Dem Linda Wade only won by 109 votes. But, with dogged determination and hard work, she held her seat in 2014 (holding on by 22 votes) while the other two in her ward stayed Conservative. 2018: same split outcome, bigger Lib Dem majority - 317. In 2022, the Lib Dems could still only wrest one other Earl's Court seat off them. This time, it was the surviving Conservative who clung on, with a perilous majority of six votes. Five more than he needed, of course. While the Liberal Democrats clearly struggle to bed down in such a churning, bustling, nebulous and hard to access ward like Earl's Court, their now twelve year presence may have had some impact in wider Chelsea and South Kensington.

The party posted some decent results in nearby wards: notably adjoining **Redcliffe** - where there was a 15% swing to the Lib Dems; adjoining **Courtfield** (the area around Gloucester Road tube station) - a 20% swing; **Queen's Gate** (the embassy quarter) - a 14% swing; and in a completely different part of the borough: **Pembridge** (Notting Hill Gate) - another 14% swing.

While specific wards have previously produced shock swings away from the Conservatives, never have a phalanx of safe wards moved so decisively away from the party and towards one specific party. But is there a better demonstration of just how safe these wards are that the Tories could withstand such massive swings and still not be all that close to losing?

Was this swing a one-off for a deeply unpopular Boris Johnson-led Conservative government? Or has there been a

real shift from the Tories that the Lib Dems can capitalise on?

Not long before the council elections, planning permission was given for the vast, cross-borough Earl's Court former exhibition centre site which will become a new neighbourhood of around 4,000 homes. It's probably a decade before residents move in and a whole new ward will need to be drawn here. Even more electoral turbulence to come in this corner of South Kensington.

More immediately, can the Lib Dems turf out that final Conservative councillor or will the Tories, no longer taking flak from being in government, recover? It won't help that the second Lib Dem who won in 2022 is retiring.

If it has proved gruelling for the Lib Dems to win and then pin down Earl's Court, it is even harder for them to break into those other wards they advanced in four years ago. These wards are nothing like Earl's Court: they have more stable populations but, more importantly, they are significantly wealthier.

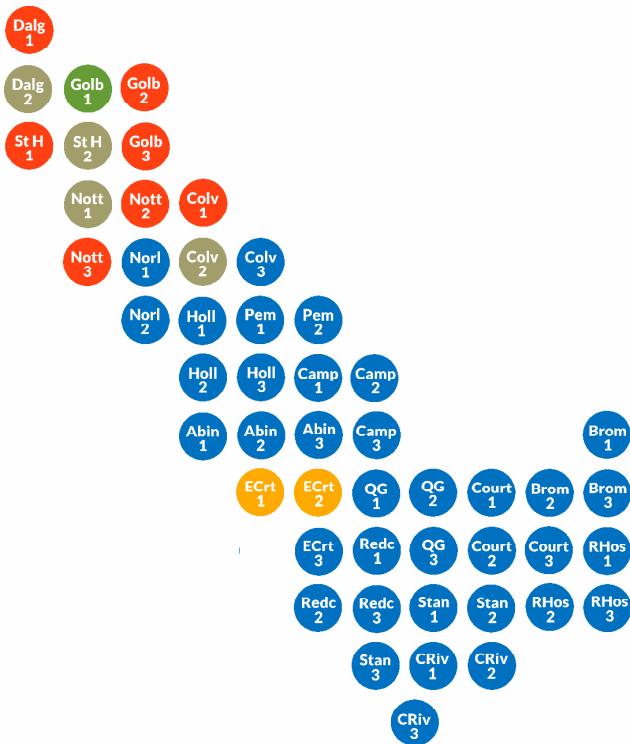
Earl's Court has always been the joker in the pack of Chelsea and South Kensington Conservative wards because it is far less affluent. There are more bedsits, hotels and hostels, and a large, high-turnover migrant population - it's the epicentre of the young, Australasian and South African community. It is densely packed and the mansions are far more likely to be subdivided into flats than stand as opulent town houses.

Part of the reason Earl's Court has always elected Tory councillors is that an (often larger) opposition vote has split fairly equally between Labour and the centre party. Even though the Lib Dems have found a way to win here, they haven't done it by squeezing Labour. In 2022 Labour polled 19%; in 2018 24%.

Neither party of the centre-left has ever persuaded supporters of the other to vote tactically - even when that would have meant Conservative defeat. If the Lib Dems can finally squeeze Labour in 2026, the Tories are toast. But

Earl's Court is unique. The blue wall beyond is far more difficult to surmount.

On paper, **Pembridge** might look the easiest Lib Dem target. It's the ward they came closest to winning (9.6% Conservative majority) and it's less daunting to campaign in than the endless squares of massive mansions that characterise South Kensington. The Lib Dems barely tried in 2022 - they only stood one candidate yet still polled over 30% - double what they won here in 2018 (and there were no boundary changes here in 2022 so it's a like-for-like comparison).



Pembridge is quintessential Notting Hill: the posh southern end of Portobello Road, of quiet Mews and leafy avenues of town houses; more liberal and bohemian. There are a few challenges, though.

Just because its conservatism is of a slightly different, maybe more liberal, hue than, say, **Queen's Gate's**, it isn't much softer. A larger problem, perhaps, is that **Pembridge** has always been in the Conservative-Labour marginal constituency of Kensington.

No-one would describe Kensington Labour Party as a campaigning behemoth, but the party has always had some presence in Pembridge - and, of course, represents it in parliament. Labour's problems here are confidence and competence. The Kensington party has never believed (with good reason) they can win Pembridge so have always been somewhat half-hearted working here when there are Labour strongholds in the north far easier to campaign in.

As with Earl's Court, Labour's vote didn't collapse in Pembridge: it held steady at 27%. The Labour seam in Notting Hill, while smaller, is as intrinsic as the Conservative strength. All the Lib Dem improvement came from the Conservatives and the disappearance of the Advance party, which stood in 2018 as a party of protest over Grenfell Tower. As with Earl's Court, if the Lib Dems can harness that Labour vote they can win - but they almost certainly can't, so they won't.

So, if the Lib Dems are to build further in Kensington and Chelsea they would probably do better focussing on **Courtfield** (13.7%) and **Redcliffe** (16.4%): the two Earl's Court-adjacent wards. Proximity to wards with existing Lib Dem representation can sometimes lead to a sort of transfer of electoral momentum. Labour is also far weaker - some might say non-existent - at the Chelsea end of the borough and has no core vote in these two wards, unlike Pembridge. It's probably more likely that the Lib Dems won't win than they will. It's even conceivable the Conservative majorities will rebound, as they have in both wards in the past.

Labour is in a far bigger mess than the Conservatives. Having started this term with 13 councillors there are now just 7. Labour hasn't lost a single by-election but two of its councillors have gone to the Greens, one has gone to the

Conservatives, two are Your Party-aligned independents, one's politics defies any attempt to categorise it and one is just disaffected with their former party.

This is a fine way to represent some of London's most deprived neighbourhoods; neighbourhoods that have lined up more or less resolutely behind Labour since the 1930s. Neighbourhoods which have suffered from the most acute, unimaginable housing conditions; that have been neglected and badly planned; where a council-owned tower block was turned into an inferno less than a decade ago; where racial discrimination among landlords has been rife; where Gideon Rachman's property empire ripped off his tenants and left them in deplorable conditions.

So we come to the other Labour problem: competence. When a party has no prospect of winning control of a council, it has the luxury of adopting positions that will never survive contact with the reality of decision making. Couple liberation from responsibility with the guarantee of election by landslide amounts in such freakishly challenging neighbourhoods as North Kensington and you end up with a unique brand of self-indulgence.

Of the five Labour-held wards, **Golborne** - albeit the safest of them - perhaps has the most potential to go rogue if a party perceived to be to the left of Labour works it very hard. The only time in recent history (in fact the only time since 1903) Golborne hasn't elected a full slate of Labour councillors was 1978. Back then the area was being redeveloped at a rapid pace and some in the community were at odds with how the change was being managed - both by the council and its Labour councillors.

Golborne has a unique history: all the North Kensington wards differ from each other and all have evolved radically, but the north-eastern corner of the borough is some way apart from the rest in the specific set of housing, planning and economic problems it faced. Until the 1950s, Golborne was semi-derelict, a semi-industrial area where factories, warehousing and fairly dilapidated housing existed side by side, street by street.

Once the planning obstructions to redeveloping Golborne had been overcome, it was rebuilt as huge council estates, with the imposing Trellick Tower looming over the area. But Trellick Tower is just the most visible of Golborne's estates: there is very little of "old" Golborne left today - most of it around the northern end of Portobello Road.

Golborne councillor Mona Adam was the second councillor to split from Labour - she joined the Greens and a Green message might resonate here if the party has the resource to campaign consistently and strongly.

South of Golborne, under the Westway, is **Colville**. Colville is the Kensington edges of Westbourne Park and includes the central part of Portobello Road. It doesn't have many big council estates - it experienced a lot less redevelopment than the other northern wards. But there are big numbers of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) or council and housing association flats with a big BME population and large numbers of Local Housing Allowance claimants.

Colville is potentially interesting electorally. It now only has one Labour councillor - one having joined the Conservatives and the other, after not being allowed to seek re-election for Labour, to independent Green. But the ward elected two Lib Dem councillors in 2010 during another spasm of Labour self-absorption and unpopularity.

Although Labour won decisively here in 2022 (60% to 25% for the Tories and 15% for the Lib Dems - the Greens didn't stand), its boundaries extended southwards in 2014 and nearly all this new territory should be very poor for Labour. It now stops just before Notting Hill's grandest terrace: Kensington Park Gardens, at the apex of the hill. If Labour's vote slumps, any of four parties could get elected here. Only Reform has no chance.

Crossing Ladbroke Grove, Kensington's most northerly ward is **Dalgarno**; essentially the successor to the old St Charles ward. St Charles Square was moved out of the ward in the 2014 boundary changes, so the long-standing name went too.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Abingdon	39.2	9.8	50.5	28.6	3.0	10.4	79.9	20.1	67.2	8.0
Brompton and Hans Town	33.2	10.6	55.6	32.0	3.3	10.3	77.9	22.1	64.2	9.0
Campden	45.4	7.6	46.3	35.5	3.2	5.9	81.0	19.0	71.3	5.9
Chelsea Riverside	30.0	43.8	25.1	37.8	8.4	16.1	66.7	33.3	52.5	14.4
Colville	22.2	47.8	28.9	32.1	11.0	11.6	67.0	33.0	54.9	13.4
Courtfield	35.0	9.8	54.9	29.6	3.5	7.1	82.3	17.7	69.2	7.2
Dalgarno	16.8	65.2	13.8	33.2	15.4	23.3	49.1	50.9	38.3	22.1
Earl's Court	26.1	23.4	49.8	25.8	4.8	9.0	74.8	25.2	62.4	10.0
Golborne	11.8	66.9	19.0	23.8	17.8	27.8	49.8	50.2	42.8	19.0
Holland	37.8	17.5	43.4	25.3	6.2	15.5	73.9	26.1	63.4	9.1
Norland	40.0	26.0	33.1	44.9	5.8	5.5	76.7	23.3	65.8	9.0
Notting Dale	13.7	65.8	16.6	26.5	16.8	22.3	50.6	49.4	40.6	20.8
Pembridge	36.2	11.3	50.9	37.1	2.9	5.4	79.0	21.0	69.5	6.7
Queen's Gate	39.3	4.9	55.3	27.7	1.5	6.9	81.5	18.5	67.5	6.8
Redcliffe	38.5	13.8	47.3	32.0	2.1	5.7	80.1	19.9	65.2	7.7
Royal Hospital	38.4	15.5	45.8	44.4	3.4	5.7	76.0	24.0	64.1	9.8
St Helen's	29.0	46.1	23.6	42.0	13.8	9.9	65.3	34.7	52.9	13.4
Stanley	37.0	25.1	37.0	40.8	4.2	8.5	74.8	25.2	60.4	11.3

St Charles went Conservative in both 2006 and 2010, but Dalgarno is better for Labour - if not so different. The ward is a mix of big tenement (though not high-rise) public housing blocks, and garden-city movement suburban streets.

Labour should be safe, but the party can have real difficulty turning out its vote. One of the Dalgarno councillors is now independent (but identifies as Workers Party - George Galloway's outfit); the other is the Labour group leader but is switching to Notting Dale.

St Helen's is the weakest Labour ward, comprising long streets of Ladbroke Grove town houses immediately north of the Westway. This is where Lord Cameron and his family lives; why that clique became known as the "Notting Hill Set". This is basically the old Kelfield ward without part of the Lancaster West estate. St Helen's elected a Tory

councillor in 2014 but Labour has held it twice now - though not securely.

Former Kensington Corbynite Labour MP Emma Dent-Coad, switched from Golborne to stand here in 2022, but she was the first councillor to quit Labour after the party blocked her from seeking re-nomination as their parliamentary candidate. Although she has declined to join Your Party at the time of writing this would seem the closest fit for her politics. She has announced her intention to stand again. The other seat remains Labour.

Last, but not least, of the Labour-held wards is **Notting Dale**. South-west of the Westway, this is the ward in which Grenfell Tower still stands within its shroud, even as it's being dismantled. This is essentially a council estate ward and the one least likely to slip from Labour's grasp. It will be absolutely safe. One of the Labour councillors elected in

2022 (Mona Ahmed) here is now independent - she resigned over the Gaza conflict; the other two remain in the party.

Labour has two offensive targets in the borough. The first is **Chelsea Riverside**. That doesn't sound much like it should be a Labour ward, does it? But the Conservatives were only 7% ahead of Labour here in 2022, and 13% ahead of the Lib Dems. About a third of this ward is council housing: the huge high-rise, red brick Worlds End estate and the smaller, older tenement Cremorne estate. On paper, Chelsea Riverside has a similar demographic profile to Kensington's Colville ward where Labour polled 60% in 2022 - so why is this one Conservative?

Partly it's because, beyond the estates, Chelsea Riverside is very not Labour. It now includes most of the former Cheyne ward that, in its last election before abolition in 1998, voted 71% Conservative. The western end used to be solidly working class, overshadowed by the Lots Road Power Station that generated the electricity to run the London tube network. But the power station is now luxury flats surrounded by exclusive sky-scrapers and the terraces beneath it have gentrified.

When the ward was just this plus the two council estates - South Stanley - it was comfortably, but not massively, Labour. While Cheyne was voting Tory by that thumping 71% in 1998, South Stanley was Labour by 54% to 37%.

Then in the 2002 boundary review, where wards were drawn to return three councillors, Cheyne was axed and South Stanley took about half of it. It became Cremorne ward and ever since it has elected Conservative councillors. It was further extended east into former Cheyne territory in 2014.

The other reason Labour struggles in Chelsea Riverside is its inherent structural weakness on this side of the constituency. The party won Chelsea and Fulham for the first time in 2024 (and then only just) mainly from votes in Fulham, not Chelsea.

Possible target wards

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Colville (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Earl's Court (2 LD)
- ▶ St Helen's (1 Lab, 1 Ind)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Chelsea Riverside (3 Con)
- ▶ Colville (1 Con, 1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Dalgarno (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ Golborne (1 Grn - def)
- ▶ Holland (3 Con)
- ▶ Notting Dale (1 Ind - def)
- ▶ St Helen's (1 Ind - def)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Colville (1 Lab, 1 Con - defec)
- ▶ Golborne (2 Lab)

Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Courtfield (3 Con)
- ▶ Earl's Court (1 Con)
- ▶ Pembridge (2 Con)
- ▶ Queen's Gate (3 Con)
- ▶ Redcliffe (3 Con)

Independent Socialist hopeful

- ▶ St Helen's (1 Lab)

Before Chelsea was twinned with Fulham it was a massively safe Conservative constituency where Labour barely functioned. Just because it has a Labour MP a Rolls Royce party organisation can't just be installed overnight.

While Chelsea Riverside has always been the focus of Labour's campaigning effort, that effort has been pretty woeful for a long time.

Because there is very little Labour support outside of the council estates, the party needs a massive turnout from within them to win. That's highly unlikely in today's electoral climate. And they also have to contend with the Lib Dems who made all the weather here in 2022: up eighteen points while Labour slipped by a couple and the Tories by about six.

If the Lib Dems can absorb some more of the Conservative vote on the Cheyne side while Labour does what it can on the estates and with what's left of their vote in the Lots Road area, Chelsea Riverside could be close. Likewise, unless the Lib Dems find a way to win votes on the estates - and there's no sign they can - they can't win the ward either.

The other long-shot Labour target is **Holland** (17.8% Con lead). Holland: the area west of the eponymous park plus a strip of mostly new-build apartment blocks down the edge of the borough boundary swung from being a very safe Tory ward to an almost-marginal in one go in 2018, but then stuck in 2022. Is it encased in electoral permafrost just beyond Labour's reach? Almost certainly.

Why did Holland swing so much from the Tories in 2018 and then stick? The new apartment blocks are of a different character to the rest of Holland and they aren't so staunchly Tory as the bulk of the ward, but they are also hardly a Mecca for socialism either.

There is a lot of comparatively unspectacular housing in the Palladian town houses (almost all subdivided) along seemingly never-ending, heavily trafficked, congested roads like Holland Road and Addison Crescent.

The Conservative decline in Holland coincided with Rock Feilding-Mellon, who was the councillor responsible for the "regeneration" of Grenfell, representing this ward. As the political face of that disaster, he may have dented the Tory vote here even though he stood down in 2018. But most of Holland does not remotely resemble a Labour ward.

There is no borough in London as polarised as Kensington and Chelsea. There is little more than a mile between Golborne and Kensington Palace.

That polarisation isn't really diminishing: the Conservative wards have shrunk, mostly as nationals of countries which don't have the franchise in this country buy up the best mansions. That loss of electorate, rather than any surge to Labour, has been what has narrowed the gap electorally, but it's still a gap of cavernous size.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	35	13	2		
Apr 23 defection: Emma Dent-Coad (St Helen's) Lab to Ind	35	12	2		1
Dec 23 defection: Mona Adam (Golborne) Lab to Grn	35	11	2	1	1
Oct 23 suspension: Eva Jedut (Dalgarno) Lab to Ind	35	10	2	1	2
Oct 23 defection: Mona Ahmed (Notting Dale) Lab to Ind	35	9	2	1	3
Mar 24 defection: Dahabo Isse (Colville) Lab to Con	36	8	2	1	3
May 24 by-election: Norland - Con hold	36	8	2	1	3
Oct 25 defection: Toby Benton (Colville) Lab to Ind	36	7	2	1	4

At first glance, Kingston-upon-Thames and Richmond-upon-Thames seem to be identical twins, occupying a continuous strand of ultra-affluent south west London Thames-side and with almost identical Liberal Democrat near-monopolies. But that glance would be mistaken.

They are different in several important ways. Richmond is a homogeneously more affluent borough. The type of suburbia each represents is different:

Richmond does not have any neighbourhoods resembling inter-war Surbiton, let alone Chessington. Likewise, away from the north-western corner of the borough nestled between the river and Richmond Park, Kingston does not have any neighbourhoods that resemble Richmond, Kew, Barnes, Twickenham, Teddington or Hampton.

Liberalism is ingrained amongst the sort of set that makes Richmond their home whereas Lib Dems gained their ground laboriously over years of pavement politics: it isn't so instinctively liberal. It's even possible (though no figures exist) that one or two of the outlying wards in Kingston voted Leave in the 2016 EU referendum.

There are more working-class, less affluent neighbourhoods in Kingston that once voted Labour and which the SDP-Liberal Alliance began its ascent in this borough by co-opting. Norbiton, Tolworth, Chessington, Canbury and parts of New Malden are examples.

Even with Labour ground down to near-extinction, Kingston remains a far more diverse political battleground than Richmond. There is the potential of a (minor) Reform skirmish in outlying parts of the borough: Reform have no hopes in Richmond. There is also Kingston Independent Residents' Group (KIRG), and the Greens can challenge in one or two wards without the Lib Dems gifting them seats. In Richmond,

the battle is and has been since the 1970s relentlessly, monotonously Lib Dem versus Conservative.

And there has never existed in Kingston the sort of Lib Dem-Green pact that has proved important in pushing back the Conservatives in Richmond, even if that arrangement appears to have ended.

While the Lib Dem majorities in both boroughs are currently similar and massive, in Kingston the Conservatives are nowhere near as far from a rebound - Reform's threat to them notwithstanding - as they are in Richmond.

The Conservatives were almost wiped off Kingston Council in 2022, surviving only in the super-affluent Coombe Hill ward with its gated villas immediately south of Richmond Park. They were slightly hard done by in Kingston because, while their vote slumped four points to its lowest ever 25%, the Lib Dem vote fell too -by slightly more. Yet the outcome was a Lib Dem gain of 5 seats and a Conservative loss of 6 - down from an already dreadful 9.

In part, this was because of new ward boundaries, which were especially radical in the areas in which the Conservatives were strongest. Both Coombe Hill and Tudor - wards in which the Tories held seats - were cut from 3 councillors to 2. Old Malden in the borough's south east: the other more Conservative enclave, was chopped into two 2-councillor wards, both of which they narrowly lost (Motspur Park by 103, Old Malden by 213).

But the blame for there being just 3 Conservatives on a council the party had run just four years earlier cannot be laid on electoral systems or redrawn boundaries. It was the reaping of the Brexit realignment on London, the unpopularity of Boris Johnson's leadership and the resurgent Lib Dems, recuperating from their 2015 general election loss.

Whereas in Richmond the Conservative loss of support directly benefited the Lib Dems, in Kingston the lost Tory vote split in other directions - and could because more parties stood.

The Greens contested about half the wards but there was also that KIRG residents grouping and assorted others. Whereas in Richmond there were just 3.2 candidates contesting each seat, in Kingston the number was 4.1. That may not seem a big difference, but it was thirty more candidates for a council that is six seats smaller.

There was also unhappiness with Kingston's Lib Dem council over a feeling that very high Council Tax was not delivering high-quality services, about poor spending choices and about the regeneration of large sites in the town centre.

Faced with a choice between the Lib Dems unpopular locally and the nationally unpopular Conservatives, it was not all that surprising that a sizeable chunk of voters chose neither. The consequence, though, was an even larger Lib Dem council majority.

But a big majority based on a relatively weak electoral mandate makes a party's grip on power look firmer than it is: the Labour government is evidence of that. That's not to say the Lib Dems don't have a handy cushion in Kingston - it's just that because the principal opposition here was and remains the Conservatives, and that party has been in the doldrums things look a lot more comfortable for the Lib Dems than they are.

Indeed, there may continue to be a move towards other parties, especially with Reform debuting this year. Kingston was a comfortably Remain-voting borough (61% to 39%) in the EU referendum a decade ago but there were probably some quite different outcomes across different wards.

The southern "peninsula" of the borough that is centred on Chessington, plus Old Malden and maybe Norbiton, probably voted much closer to the national result. This gives Reform a faint chance in the borough's south: a slither of opportunity if they campaign very hard.

Possible target wards

Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Coombe Hill (2 Con)
- ▶ Coombe Vale (1 KIRG)
- ▶ Green Lane and St James's (2 KIRG)
- ▶ Tudor (1 KIRG)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Alexandra (3 LD)
- ▶ Canbury Gardens (3 LD)
- ▶ Chessington South and Malden Rushett (3 LD)
- ▶ Coombe Vale (2 LD, 1 KIRG)
- ▶ King George's and Sunray (2 LD)
- ▶ Kingston Gate (3 LD)
- ▶ Motspur Park and Old Malden East (2 LD)
- ▶ Old Malden (2 LD)
- ▶ Tudor (1 LD, 1 KIRG)

KIRG hopefuls

- ▶ Kingston Gate (3 LD)
- ▶ New Malden Village (3 LD)

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Kingston Town (3 LD)
- ▶ Norbiton (3 LD)

Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Hook and Chessington North (3 LD)
- ▶ Chessington South & Malden Rushett (3 LD)
- ▶ King George's and Sunray (2 LD)
- ▶ Motspur Park and Old Malden East (2 LD)
- ▶ Old Malden (2 LD)
- ▶ Tolworth (3 LD)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ New Malden Village (3 LD)
- ▶ St Mark's and Seething Wells (3 LD)

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	Hindu	Muslim	White Brit	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Alexandra	78.0	3.0	18.6	7.1	6.8	57.1	62.4	37.6	49.1	10.9
Berrylands	65.0	7.2	27.4	3.6	3.3	66.4	67.5	32.5	58.1	8.3
Canbury Gardens	52.2	11.0	33.8	3.4	7.3	49.5	74.5	25.5	65.2	7.7
Chessington S. & Malden Rushett	71.4	12.4	15.4	3.3	4.3	70.0	46.9	53.1	34.3	15.8
Coombe Hill	65.1	5.0	29.4	5.0	16.6	39.0	68.4	31.6	58.8	10.3
Coombe Vale	68.0	6.9	24.8	7.3	8.4	45.9	66.2	33.8	57.7	10.2
Green Lane and St James	60.7	16.4	21.2	8.4	11.6	45.0	55.5	44.5	45.7	15.5
Hook & Chessington North	73.6	12.0	13.5	3.2	5.1	68.9	46.0	54.0	32.8	18.3
King George's and Sunray	70.6	6.3	22.5	8.9	9.7	52.3	42.8	57.2	36.3	15.2
Kingston Gate	56.1	12.7	30.6	2.9	7.5	56.0	70.6	29.4	61.5	9.0
Kingston Town	42.4	14.3	42.5	2.8	6.8	51.5	64.9	35.1	54.7	8.1
Motspur Park & Old Malden East	81.0	4.0	14.8	8.7	11.3	49.1	59.8	40.2	46.6	13.8
New Malden Village	62.0	8.4	28.5	6.4	8.0	45.1	61.9	38.1	54.1	12.9
Norbiton	41.6	27.3	29.7	4.8	11.8	45.6	53.2	46.8	45.9	16.0
Old Malden	70.2	11.2	18.1	7.6	12.8	49.4	55.7	44.3	44.2	13.9
St Mark's and Seething Wells	50.4	6.6	42.6	2.1	4.9	57.4	71.7	28.3	62.1	6.9
Surbiton Hill	46.4	14.7	38.4	3.2	5.6	58.2	66.8	33.2	57.2	11.3
Tolworth	65.2	11.6	22.2	7.8	8.5	53.7	56.0	44.0	46.7	14.5

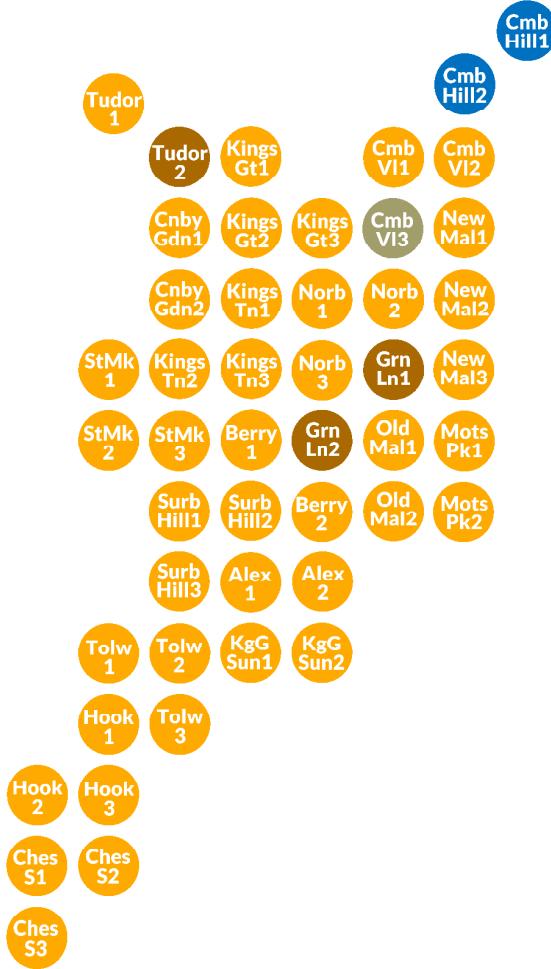
The seats Reform might look closely at are - probably in this order: **Chessington South and Malden Rushett**, the southern-most ward; **Tolworth** - though this is the safest Lib Dem ward, **Hook and Chessington North** and **King George's and Sunray** - a newly-created ward south-east of the A3. These are all working class, heavily owner-occupied wards - long ago Labour and Lib Dem because of decades of campaigning. They might also do well in **Old Malden** and **Motspur Park and Old Malden East** but their impact there is more likely to stop the Conservatives regaining them.

Then there is Kingston Independent Residents' Group. KIRG is a strange entity. It was founded as a breakaway from the Conservative group and presents itself as a localist party. Yet its leader and first elected councillor, James Giles is on the far left: helping run George Galloway's Workers Party campaign in Rochdale, sitting on the board of Your Party and

advising three of the independent MPs who defeated Labour in 2024. He wouldn't win here under his true colours.

KIRG has gained seats since the 2022 election. The first by-election in the borough occurred the following November and in the **Green Lane and St James** ward in which James Giles had gained his seat in May.

The KIRG candidate, Yvonne Tracey, was a former postmaster at a point where national media focus had been on the plight of postmasters falsely accused of fraud because of dodgy accounting software the Post Office provided them with. And local Lib Dem MP (and party leader) Ed Davey had been the minister responsible for this scandal in the coalition government.



The Lib Dems were always going to struggle - and they lost, though not catastrophically. A 7% swing to KIRG gained them full control of this 2-councillor ward.

A **Tudor** ward councillor either expelled or resigned from the Conservatives then defected. He had received national news coverage for circulating a round-robin email to councillors throughout the country demanding they oppose the Gaza intervention or be "named and shamed". This was felt to be threatening by many recipients who complained.

KIRG then picked up a Lib Dem defector in Coombe Vale, though she left the group in early 2026 and now sits as an independent.

For KIRG to become a serious party in Kingston politics it needs to field more candidates (they contested ten wards) and poll better more widely (they only exceeded 20% in two wards) than they managed last time.

The Greens have two prospects: **St Mark's and Seething Wells** where one of their councillors defected but fell 300 votes short of retaining her seat in 2022, and **New Malden Village**, where the Lib Dems won with just one third of the vote. They may also do well in student-heavy Kingston Town, especially if the Labour vote collapses.

The Conservatives require a swing of slightly over 10% to regain Kingston and resume the ping-pong of council control. In itself, that would not be beyond the realms of possibility. But they also need a huge number of seats to win: twenty three, while being far lower in the polls and with Reform competing for the same voters. This is not likely: they'll be doing well to get back to the nine seats they won in 2018.

Yet there are quite a few seats with fairly small majorities. These begin with **Motspur Park and Old Malden East** (Lib Dem majority 103), **Tudor** (168 - plus the seat of KIRG defector Jamal Chohan), and **Coombe Vale** (262).

Then come **Chessington South and Malden Rushett** - though Reform are more likely to do well here (Lib Dem majority: 248), **Old Malden** (213) and the Surbiton ward of **Alexandra** (222). Those wards contain fourteen seats and would fall on a 6% swing.

The harder ones for the Conservatives to win are **Kingston Gate, King George's and Sunray, Canbury Gardens and New Malden Village**. Those would just get the Conservatives to a majority on the council - and that would be a major surprise.

A local elections modelling website, Britain Votes Now, has **New Malden Village** going Conservative by a large margin, but none of the more marginal wards.

The Conservatives may no longer have the unpopularity of being in government to cost them votes. That could mean that their tide starts to wax in Kingston again and they could end up with a decent-sized group.

But while there has been a Labour to Conservative swing in London since 2022, because the Tories have lost support since those elections too, there has also been a small Conservative to Lib Dem swing.

The Lib Dems maximised their vote spread last time but, despite their landslide many wards remain competitive. They could even win the hold-out Conservative ward of Coombe Hill. If the Lib Dems slip much at all, we are going to see a lot of councillors elected with very low vote shares. and they won't all be the same as last time. We could end up with a far more diverse council in Kingston than we've had for a while.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	KIRG	Ind
May 22 council election result	3		44	1	
Nov 22 by-election: Green Lane and St James - KIRG gain from LD	3		43	2	
Nov 23 defection: Jamal Chohan (Tudor) Con to KIRG	2		43	3	
Jul 24 by-election: Hook and Chessington North - LD hold	2		43	3	
Aug 24 defection: Kamala Kugan (Coombe Vale) LD to KIRG	2		42	4	
Feb 25 defection: Kamala Kugan (Coombe Vale) KIRG to Ind	2		42	3	1

In the 1980s several London boroughs regularly generated negative press headlines because of the antics of the so-called "loony left". Of these "loony left" boroughs, Lambeth probably attracted the most attention.

Under the leadership of "Red" Ted Knight - then Linda Bellos and Joan Twelves, Lambeth revelled in its attempts to antagonise the government across the river and showcase its radical socialism.

The hard left began taking control of Lambeth Labour in the early 1970s. It began in the Norwood constituency: the south-eastern third of the borough and the most politically mixed neighbourhoods. Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone were both elected for (aptly enough) Knight's Hill ward in 1974 but in the early stages the priority for the left was to seize power in the branches and constituencies so that their supporters could be selected as candidates next time.

In 1978 there was a big swing to the Conservatives in Lambeth, but they piled their votes up in safe Tory wards while missing out on the marginals that would have brought them close to a majority. Despite losing by just 2.3% borough-wide the Tories finished with only 22 seats (up 8 from 1974) with Labour winning 42.

That first hard left Labour administration proved so popular that, in 1982, they lost power and the council fell to no overall control: 32 Labour, 27 Conservatives and 5 SDP/Liberal Alliance councillors. The Conservatives attempted to run Lambeth in the minority but only lasted six months before SDP councillor Gordon Ley defected to independent. That handed power back to Labour.

In 1985, Lambeth refused to set a rate because Labour wanted to set it higher than the government-permitted cap. This action was unlawful. The District Auditor stepped in, surcharged all 32 Labour councillors who voted not to set a rate and disqualified them from elected office for five years.

The left didn't back down. The Bellos administration was chaotic, filled with Labour councillors with no experience of running a council, and it often failed to provide decent services to Lambeth residents most dependent on them. In 1990 Joan Twelves and, aptly enough, twelve other Labour councillors attempted to repeat the Ted Knight brinkmanship by refusing to set a Community Charge (poll tax).

Labour's national leaders were long-tired of their poor election results in the capital. At that point there were just five Labour constituencies in south London: Tooting, Peckham, Vauxhall, Norwood and Deptford. It attributed the rout to the gesture politics of the hard left and so immediately suspended these councillors, eradicating Labour's majority in Lambeth and removing Twelves as leader.

Labour had kept control of Lambeth in 1990 but by 1994 voters had tired of the poor services, allegations of corruption, the splits and posturing and suspensions of councillors within Labour and the constant feeling that Labour had created a council under siege.

The Lib Dems surged from 4 seats to 24; Labour fell from 40 to 24 also; and the Conservatives dropped from 20 to 16.

The map of the borough from that election is remarkable: a Lib Dem north (Waterloo, Kennington and Stockwell), a Labour centre (Brixton and Clapham) and a largely Conservative south (Streatham and West Norwood).

Joan Twelves was the only Labour candidate defeated in Brixton's Ferndale ward and survivors of the 1985 surcharge battle like Lloyd Leon also went down to defeat.

This was a far more stable non-Labour majority; defection and by-election proof. It was the beginning of the end for the hard left in Lambeth. It was also the start of the Tory decline towards eradication from the council, though it was not obvious at that point.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Clapham Common & Abbeville (1 LD)
- ▶ Clapham Park (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Herne Hill & Loughborough Jnct (1 Grn)
- ▶ Streatham Hill West and Thornton (2LD)
- ▶ Streatham St Leonard's (1 Grn - defec)
- ▶ Stockwell East (1 LD - defec)

Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Stockwell East (1 Lab)
- ▶ Streatham Wells (2 Lab)
- ▶ Waterloo and South Bank (2 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Brixton Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Brixton North (3 Lab)
- ▶ Brixton Rush Common (3 Lab)
- ▶ Brixton Windrush (2 Lab)
- ▶ Clapham East (2 Lab)
- ▶ Clapham Common & Abbeville (1 Lab, 1 LD)
- ▶ Clapham Park (1 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ Clapham Town (2 Lab)
- ▶ Gipsy Hill (2 Lab)
- ▶ Herne Hill & Loughborough Junction (2 Lab)
- ▶ Kennington (3 Lab)
- ▶ Knight's Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Myatt's Fields (2 Lab)
- ▶ St Martin's (2 Lab)
- ▶ Streatham Common and Vale (3 Lab)
- ▶ Streatham Hill East (2 Lab)
- ▶ Streatham St Leonard's (1 Lab)
- ▶ Vauxhall (3 Lab)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Clapham Town (3 Lab)
- ▶ Clapham Common & Abbeville (1 LD, 1 Lab)
- ▶ West Dulwich (2 Lab)

The see-saw election results: Labour out, then back in before 1982; then out in 1994, then back in again in 1998, continued in 2002.

This time Labour and Lib Dems got 28 seats each with the Tories down to just 7: 3 in Thurlow Park (now **West Dulwich**), 3 in **Gipsy Hill** and 1 in **Clapham Town**. 2002 was a mediocre year for Labour across London: a lot poorer than 1994 and 1998, but nowhere near as horrible as 2006 for them. They shouldn't have lost Lambeth - should never lose Lambeth.

And yet, when 2006 arrived, Lambeth bucked the trend and returned to Labour. This was a gain of seats not matched by votes: Labour won a slightly smaller vote share in 2006 than 2002. But both Lib Dems and Conservatives lost a lot more, mostly to one of the earliest Green surges in London. The Lib Dems lost 11 and the Tories lost Clapham Town, but they held their other 6 seats. The Greens gained their first ever Lambeth seat in Herne Hill while Labour gained 11 for a majority of 15. They have never since lost their majority.

In 2010 that majority increased to 25 and in 2014, following four years of the Lib Dems in national coalition with the Conservatives, Labour almost won a monopoly. No Lib Dems won, there were just 3 Tories and 1 Green - this time in St Leonard's: once the safest Tory, then safest Lib Dem, ward.

In 2018, the Greens won four additional seats while the Tories were ground down to just one councillor in affluent Clapham Common. And in 2022? Another Labour landslide, knocking the Greens back to just two seats but seeing the Lib Dems regain a foothold in **Streatham Hill West and Thornton** and taking the last Conservative seat in **Clapham Common & Abbeville**.

Since 2022, Labour has lost one seat, once again in Herne Hill, through a by-election and another to the Greens through a defection, making all three seats in Streatham St Leonard's Green once more. The Lib Dems have gained one defector: long-serving **Stockwell East** councillor Tina Valcarcel, who had been deselected.



One Labour councillor from Clapham Park was suspended from the Labour group. But that still leaves a Labour majority of 45.

So is Lambeth safe for a sixth consecutive Labour term? The answer is no. This is a top Green target. 23 Labour seats need

to switch. There is a little low-hanging fruit. There is one split ward and one wholly Labour ward that are the best opportunities for both opposition parties.

For the Lib Dems, the split is **Clapham Common and Abbeville**, where the Labour councillor has a majority of just 41. Their next best chance is **Waterloo and South Bank** - their old Bishop's stronghold, where the Labour majorities are 67 and 128.

The Greens should easily retain **Streatham St Leonards** and then there is split (since the by-election) **Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction**.

What aids them is that the Labour resignation that caused the by-election was that of Jim Dickson, now MP for Dartford. He was the most popular and long-serving Herne Hill councillor. With him gone the ward is easier to win. And they've already won it - more recently than Labour.

The best wholly-Labour ward for the Greens is **Gipsy Hill** which they missed out on by 51 and 186.

Where next? Let's segue and talk about the Conservatives. They were not completely out of the picture in two wards. **Clapham Common and Abbeville** remained a three-way marginal in 2022. Given there's been a small Conservative to Lib Dem swing, as well as a Labour to Conservative swing since the last council elections, they probably can't regain their seat. Yet Clapham can often vote a little perversely - so it's not entirely implausible that they'll win back a seat or two.

The other ward is **Clapham Town**. This is more tricky, and boundary changes last time didn't help them by bringing in a chunk of the abolished Larkhall ward: strongly Labour. The Tories need a swing of about 7% to win Clapham Town but the Greens will also fancy their chances of leapfrogging from third to first.

The Conservatives have one last joker in the pack. You may have seen some of the controversy about a Low Traffic

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Brixton Acre Lane	31.6	30.5	36.4	47.2	18.2	5.2	71.4	28.6	63.5	10.9
Brixton North	20.2	53.5	22.9	23.8	33.5	11.7	50.2	49.8	46.2	17.2
Brixton Rush Common	32.6	36.6	29.1	35.3	25.6	7.4	61.9	38.1	56.6	13.0
Brixton Windrush	22.3	45.8	27.7	31.3	32.1	9.6	62.6	37.4	56.6	11.8
Clapham Common and Abbeville	44.8	17.3	37.4	56.6	7.5	3.5	80.2	19.8	73.8	6.3
Clapham East	25.0	35.9	38.2	43.2	18.6	7.9	69.6	30.4	62.8	11.5
Clapham Park	28.9	38.1	28.9	35.1	23.8	8.9	58.9	41.1	53.9	13.5
Clapham Town	34.6	27.1	36.8	48.9	13.5	4.7	74.0	26.0	65.9	9.4
Gipsy Hill	36.2	38.8	23.8	40.7	23.9	7.5	59.4	40.6	49.6	14.9
Herne Hill & Loughborough Junct.	37.5	32.2	28.6	41.7	21.5	8.1	66.6	33.4	60.9	11.3
Kennington	26.1	47.8	23.5	34.7	23.0	8.8	62.0	38.0	54.3	14.5
Knight's Hill	43.0	31.6	24.3	37.5	22.7	6.9	57.4	42.6	48.6	15.1
Myatt's Fields	24.2	51.8	20.6	30.1	31.4	9.6	57.0	43.0	50.1	16.1
Oval	25.5	36.0	37.7	36.4	18.2	7.0	62.3	37.7	57.4	14.2
St Martin's	29.9	38.6	29.8	30.5	27.6	7.9	54.3	45.7	48.5	15.0
Stockwell East	27.7	38.1	32.4	36.8	25.2	7.2	63.7	36.3	58.6	12.9
Stockwell West and Larkhall	21.0	47.3	30.2	28.0	27.0	10.8	53.6	46.4	50.1	16.0
Streatham Common and Vale	49.8	17.4	31.4	30.6	18.9	12.8	51.8	48.2	46.0	16.8
Streatham Hill East	39.8	28.8	30.2	35.8	21.7	8.9	60.9	39.1	54.3	13.9
Streatham Hill West & Thornton	47.8	17.3	33.8	53.3	10.0	4.8	75.3	24.7	68.0	8.5
Streatham St Leonard's	41.2	14.1	42.9	38.6	13.2	10.4	60.8	39.2	55.6	14.0
Streatham Wells	45.5	17.1	35.6	38.4	15.5	9.2	61.6	38.4	56.0	13.0
Vauxhall	21.8	31.4	41.3	28.1	16.0	8.9	69.4	30.6	61.4	9.9
Waterloo and South Bank	21.0	36.2	41.2	32.0	12.6	7.7	68.7	31.3	55.1	11.8
West Dulwich	47.6	24.6	26.8	50.9	14.2	4.2	70.2	29.8	61.6	10.9

Neighbourhood (LTN) in Dulwich which a court has ruled the council implemented unlawfully. That LTN is not in the London Borough of Southwark: it's in **West Dulwich** - part of Lambeth.

West Dulwich ward is much of the old Thurlow Park: one of the last Conservative wards standing. They've fallen back a lot: Labour was about 30% ahead in 2022 which should make it safe. But if you want to kick the council and Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens all support LTNs, who is left to vote for?

The Conservatives won a 2024 by-election on the back of anti-LTN feeling in Cambridge: a city that has turned its back on the party to at least the same degree as Lambeth. Could the same thing happen here? It's unlikely but possible. Those three Lambeth wards are the only Conservative prospects and all three are very tough. But they exist.

Back to the Greens' path to power. If both they and the Lib Dems have plucked their low-lying fruit that's nine fewer Labour seats. But that means their majority's still 27.

The Labour wards from this point on clump together in terms of majority as well as geographically. They are **Brixton Rush Common, Brixton Acre Lane, Stockwell East, West Dulwich, Kennington, Waterloo and South Bank, Vauxhall** and **Brixton Windrush**.

If the Greens are winning these, they'll also possibly leap from fourth to first in **Clapham Common and Abbeville**, and from third in **Streatham Hill West and Thornton**. They need swings of around 15% to win this little trove.

But the Greens don't need to win every seat in all these wards: there are 24 seats and they only need 14 to wipe out Labour's majority. I say "only" but it's incredibly difficult. The largest Labour majority in **Kennington**, for example, is 1,357. Labour's vote there last time was almost three times the Greens'. But Labour is so unpopular right now that it's conceivable.

Labour has one saving grace in boroughs like Lambeth where the principal ethnic minority is not from the Indian subcontinent. Here it is Afro-Caribbean and concentrated in that central band of wards including Brixton, parts of Clapham, Stockwell and Kennington.

Brixton Acre Lane, Brixton Windrush and **Myatt's Fields** (the former Vassall ward) are a third black; both **Stockwell** wards, **Brixton Rush Common, Gipsy Hill, Clapham East, Kennington** and **St Martin's** are around a quarter black.

Why does this matter? It is because Labour's support among minority ethnicities has withered the least among those with African or Caribbean heritage (and especially Caribbean, which is the larger community in Lambeth).

In October 2025, Labour's favourability among the black community was plus 14 (favourable: 51%, unfavourable: 37%). Among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, it was -28. Among Indians it was minus 33. And among white communities (though probably not the sort of white communities living in Lambeth) it was minus 41.

That's the good news for Labour. The bad news is that the level of turnout among blacks - especially - of Caribbean origin is low. And while Labour's favourability with them is okay, the Greens are even more popular. So maybe not quite such good news for Labour after all.

Lambeth is almost as good a "Goldilocks" borough for the Greens as Hackney. In fact, they need a smaller swing from 2022 to win Lambeth (16.3%) than Hackney (17.4%). Only Lewisham (14.3%) is easier.

Lambeth is another iconic borough for Labour: for the party's left because of the fights they fought and for new Labour types because they sorted it out and it's become a very safe, stable borough.

Labour's Communities Secretary, Steve Reed, was leader of Lambeth from 2006 and now represents Streatham in parliament. Recently departed Downing Street Chief of Staff Morgan McSweeney was Lambeth Labour organiser when they recaptured the borough. So there is a direct link from Lambeth across Westminster Bridge to Whitehall.

A Labour loss here would hurt, badly, especially as a loss of Lambeth would likely be just one of a set of dreadful results. Starmer's grasp on power is now so weak that this could simply terminate his premiership.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result		58	3	2	
Oct 23 by-election: Vauxhall - Lab hold		58	3	2	
May 24 by-election: Knight's Hall - Lab hold		58	3	2	
May 24 by-election: Streatham Common and Vale - Lab hold		58	3	2	
Jul 24 by-election: Streatham Common and Vale - Lab hold		58	3	2	
Jul 25 defection: Irfan Mohamed (Clapham Park) - Lab to Ind		57	3	2	1
May 25 by-election: Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction - Grn gain from Lab		56	3	3	1
Aug 25 defection: Martin Abrams (Streatham St Leonard's) - Lab to Ind		55	3	3	1
Sep 25 defection: Martin Abrams (Streatham St Leonard's) - Ind to Grn		55	3	4	
Nov 25 defection: Tina Valcarcel (Stockwell East) - Lab to LD	54	4	4		



Long before the Green Party was a national threat to Labour (if that's what it now is) their largest councillor group in London was to be found in Lewisham.

They only held two wards: Brockley and Ladywell plus a near miss in Crofton Park at the Deptford end of the borough. But this was significantly more electoral success than the party had enjoyed anywhere in London - before or since.

The Greens should surpass that achievement in Lewisham this year. Based on the 2022 council election results, this is the borough they need the lowest (or rather: least distant) swing to win. But that swing is still a massive 14.3% - a measure of how big a challenge London is for them.

That London elects all in one go rather than by thirds is an extra difficulty for smaller parties - even surging ones. The problem is two-fold compared to councils that elect annually. They have to find enough candidates to fill every seat rather than a third, and they lack the all-year-round campaigning momentum that comes from having a new seat up for election in the same ward every twelve months.

An added problem in Lewisham is that Labour has twice held all the council seats in the borough. They've acquired two councillors since 2022 through defections - one of whom is their candidate for Lewisham's directly elected mayor. The most likely outcome after May 7th is that there'll be only two parties represented in Lewisham. That being so, the Greens have to win a majority or Labour will.

There is less likely to be a space where others hold the balance of power, although there are wards where the Greens aren't the main challenger to Labour. A road to a majority is relatively clear, if long and winding. But it would be a little less of a challenge if there was a chance of

no overall control - and that can only happen if more parties have seats on the council.

Lewisham has been one of Labour's stronger London boroughs since the late 1990s when the Conservative vote collapsed. Even in 1962: the last contest of the old boroughs, the Conservatives were only one seat short of a majority (Lewisham in those days didn't include Deptford, which had its own borough). Go back to 1949 and the Tories won easily: 44 seats to eleven Labour; and go back further still to, say, 1925 and every ward in Lewisham (and almost half of much more working class, poorer Deptford) was Conservative.

Until 1992 the Conservatives were strong enough to win two of the three Lewisham parliamentary constituencies: East and West - typically in years they won the general election. These were classic suburbs that felt like, but weren't quite, outer London: neighbourhoods like Sydenham and Catford, Blackheath and Forest Hill where Conservative and Labour voters lived in almost equal numbers in the long terraced streets that typify the borough away from the big council estates of Deptford.

But the rapid demographic change that swept London, coupled with declining Conservative popularity as the Thatcher years came to their conclusion ended Tory hopes here. The Tories went from 28 councillors in 1982 to 17 in 1986, 6 in 1990 and just 1 in 1994. They lost their last seats - in the far south-eastern corner by Mottingham - in 2014.

Those demographic changes have not led to a more prosperous borough. Some neighbourhoods of London have "gentrified" but on most measures Lewisham has gone from being an affluent suburban borough to one in which large tracts are in the lowest deciles in terms of measures of deprivation.

Large villas in Sydenham, built to be a grand neighbourhood beyond London for the wealthy, have been converted into HMOs: Homes in Multiple Occupation. These have not, in the main, been sold or rented to affluent professionals but to those on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) - often for councils' temporary accommodation.

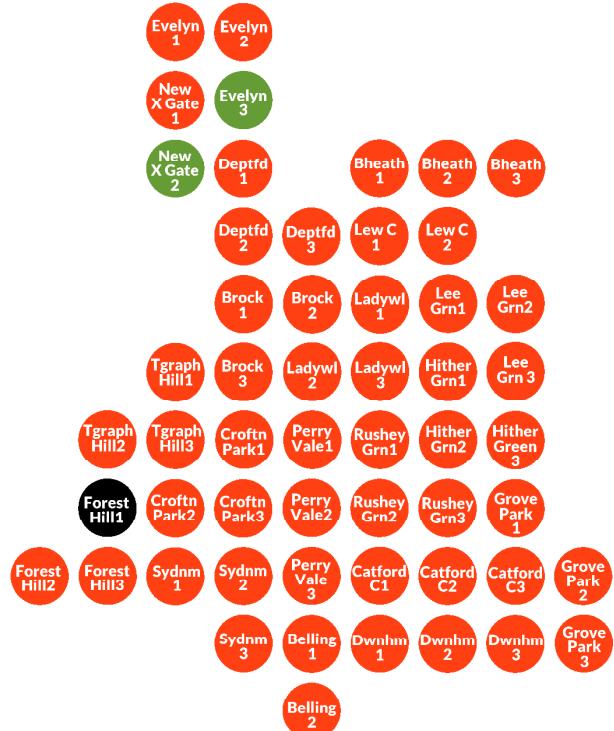
Incomes have not kept pace with the soaring cost of living in London: one third of Lewisham households now have an income less than 60% the UK median. So, while some London boroughs like Hammersmith and Fulham and Wandsworth and, increasingly, swathes of Waltham Forest, have gentrified, boroughs like Lewisham and Croydon have travelled in the opposite direction.

Problems beget problems. As house prices ripple outwards from the centre, even though housing is increasingly unaffordable for Lewisham locals it is cheaper for those inner councils to rent properties in boroughs like this and disperse some of their lower income households. A cycle can develop - what some sociologists call a sink of deprivation.

And, of course, there's a direct political correlation between Lewisham becoming poorer and becoming less Conservative. It's not that one stable electorate has simply decided to switch its vote en masse. Instead, large tranches have moved out - they have principally been Conservatives; and a new lot moved in - much more Labour-inclined.

Not that Labour has had everything its own way. In 2006, for example, Labour lost its majority on the council when 17 Lib Dems and those 6 Greens won, plus 3 Conservatives and 2 Socialist Alternative councillors. Labour also held the elected mayoralty (though with only 38% in the first round).

There has also long simmered a segment of the electorate seeking something more radical. There were those two Socialist Alternative councillors elected in 2006 (one of whom also won in 2002) in Telegraph Hill. There was that early Green Party breakthrough even if, eventually, it lacked the momentum to build into a wider transformation of Lewisham.



There have been other hard left groups contesting Lewisham in recent years: Lewisham People Before Profit; the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (polling far better than most TUSC candidates typically manage) and the All People's Party. But they have lacked funding, organisation and a consistent campaigning presence. This, coupled with Labour when in opposition nationally making far more sense as both a means to protect council services and serve as a protest against Tory government, meant they never got it together.

Is that changing? This is the key question in inner London Labour fiefdoms like Lewisham in 2026. To what extent is weariness with never-ending Labour wins locally, a feeling that the party has taken its voters for granted and grievance against the Labour government going to dent or erase their grip on this borough?

Is there a sense of complacency? In 2024, the borough's second elected mayor: Damian Egan, resigned to go off and become MP for Kingswood. Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, was blocked from standing in a parliamentary by-election earlier this year on the premise that vacating an important role like that is costly and comes with a risk of losing the position being vacated. But Egan was given the green light to run (and there is no distinction in party rules between regional mayors like Burnham and single council mayors like Egan).

His successor, Brenda Dacres, only in post two years, was elevated to the House of Lords in the New Year Honours and won't be defending her seat.

One of Lewisham's former MPs, Heidi Alexander, resigned from parliament during the Corbyn years to become Sadiq

Khan's Deputy Mayor for Transport; then returned to parliament for Swindon South and is now a cabinet minister.

In other words, Labour politicians appear to be playing a game of musical chairs rather than focussing on the constituents they're meant to be serving.

So far there has been little sign that this has dented Labour's appeal in Lewisham. Damian Egan won the mayoralty with 58% of the vote in 2022: an improvement on Labour's 2018 showing. Brenda Dacres also won the 2024 mayoral by-election with over half the votes.

Labour polled strongly in the three council by-elections (two in **Deptford** ward, one in **Blackheath**). But all these happened before the 2024 general election. We are in a different world now.

Ward	Housing			Ethnicity		Relig	Employment		Education	
	Owner Occ'd	Public rented	Private rented	White Brit	Black	Muslim	ABC1	C2DE	Degree upward	No quals
Bellingham	29.6	47.4	21.3	29.3	32.3	8.7	38.9	61.1	34.5	20.9
Blackheath	39.1	27.6	31.5	46.6	15.0	5.6	67.7	32.3	58.4	11.9
Brockley	36.2	25.8	36.0	40.2	19.6	6.5	65.9	34.1	58.5	10.6
Catford South	60.5	17.7	20.7	31.3	27.4	9.3	50.2	49.8	41.8	17.7
Crofton Park	57.3	16.2	25.3	48.8	16.2	4.9	67.6	32.4	58.2	11.3
Deptford	24.2	43.0	30.9	25.7	30.0	9.7	53.6	46.4	49.7	15.1
Downham	43.3	37.7	18.2	38.9	24.3	7.2	38.6	61.4	31.9	22.3
Evelyn	23.1	41.8	31.3	23.5	25.7	11.2	56.8	43.2	52.3	14.0
Forest Hill	49.1	24.0	25.7	46.8	17.5	5.2	66.7	33.3	58.8	10.6
Grove Park	51.0	26.7	21.1	41.7	21.1	6.1	48.6	51.4	40.7	18.2
Hither Green	44.9	24.9	28.7	32.3	28.0	7.1	52.1	47.9	45.5	16.6
Ladywell	47.5	26.5	24.9	40.2	21.6	6.6	63.2	36.8	55.1	12.4
Lee Green	53.6	20.8	24.8	47.4	14.5	5.7	64.7	35.3	55.1	11.9
Lewisham Central	25.3	23.0	47.4	26.1	18.5	7.1	64.4	35.6	60.8	10.5
New Cross Gate	22.9	41.8	30.6	24.4	34.0	13.5	48.2	51.8	44.0	17.2
Perry Vale	52.9	22.8	23.1	44.8	20.6	5.6	62.9	37.1	52.7	12.9
Rushey Green	41.0	24.6	32.8	29.2	27.4	8.3	52.9	47.1	47.2	15.9
Sydenham	43.2	33.9	21.9	42.8	22.5	6.8	58.7	41.3	49.0	15.0
Telegraph Hill	35.4	35.9	26.3	36.9	25.5	7.7	58.6	41.4	54.5	12.5

The Greens now claim they have over 1,500 members in Lewisham - still smaller than Labour's but plenty if they're mostly activists rather than lay members. When a party has a membership of that size, likely to be young and enthused and willing to go out and evangelise, that means they can organise thoroughly and consistently, matching Labour leaflet for leaflet, canvasser for canvasser, street stall for street stall.

The Greens aren't the only party with potential to win seats in Lewisham. The Liberal Democrats were close in three wards in 2022: **Blackheath and Lee Green** - immediately to its south - both of which they won in 2010 and 2014; and **Catford South** - once the best Conservative ward in Lewisham but that was a long time ago now.

That said, **Lee Green** and **Catford South** are also the sort of wards that Reform might appeal to: white, working class, owners of their own homes. So it depends how adhesive Lib Dem support is in these not especially liberal wards. Will they stay loyal to long-term Lib Dem campaigners, or switch to a party whose values they may more closely align with?

The Conservatives still have some hopes that **Grove Park** might return to them: but probably only if the vote is deeply divided. They last won seats here in 2010 and it's now the only ward in which they have anything like a large enough vote to challenge Labour. But it's also the sort of ward where Conservative-inclined voters will also be Reform-inclined, and that's the more fashionable pick in 2026. Reform will either have the momentum to come from nowhere to win **Grove Park** or simply split the Conservative vote enabling Labour to hold on.

There is no Conservative vote to split in next door **Downham**: a council estate ward that sprawls along the bottom of the borough and Reform should be popular here too; maybe also in **Hither Green**. These wards carry over some of the working class social conservatism found in Eltham.

A big challenge with previewing these elections is that the landscape we were left with in 2022 may not make any sense this year.

Possible target wards

Labour hopefuls

- ▶ Evelyn (1 Grn - def)
- ▶ New Cross Gate (1 Grn - def)

Lib Dem hopefuls

- ▶ Blackheath (3 Lab)
- ▶ Catford South (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lee Green (3 Lab)

Reform hopefuls

- ▶ Bellingham (2 Lab)
- ▶ Catford South (3 Lab)
- ▶ Downham (3 Lab)
- ▶ Grove Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Hither Green (3 Lab)

Green hopefuls

- ▶ Blackheath (3 Lab)
- ▶ Brockley (3 Lab)
- ▶ Crofton Park (3 Lab)
- ▶ Deptford (3 Lab)
- ▶ Evelyn (2 Lab)
- ▶ Forest Hill (3 Lab)
- ▶ Ladywell (3 Lab)
- ▶ Lewisham Central (2 Lab)
- ▶ New Cross Gate (1 Lab)
- ▶ Sydenham (3 Lab)
- ▶ Telegraph Hill (3 Lab)

Conservative hopeful

- ▶ Grove Park (3 Lab)

The safer Labour wards last time were **Evelyn, New Cross Gate, Deptford, Telegraph Hill** and **Brockley**. These are all relatively gritty, albeit somewhat mixed wards.

New Cross Gate for example is home to Millwall Football Club and the imposing SELCHP waste incinerator which provides heat and power to the surrounding area. **Evelyn** is a council estate ward, despite one of the Pepys Estate's three high-rises: the riverside Arragon Tower, being handed over to developers to fund the "regeneration" of the wider estate.

In normal times Labour would expect to win these with thumping vote shares almost by default. This time these might be the most susceptible to a Green swoop.

Then, further south lie wards that have a relatively recent history of electing the Greens: **Ladywell** and **Brockley**. **Lewisham Central** is a small ward where lots of new apartment blocks built for younger professionals. **Blackheath** and, to a slightly lesser extent Dulwich-adjacent **Forest Hill** are full of more established, wealthy older liberal professionals; another demographic that will be open to a Green pitch.

It's easy to visualise Greens winning these wards - we just can't state with any certitude that neighbourhoods like these that gave Labour around 60% of the vote just four years ago are going to swing so massively. It's simply an alien electoral battleground we are all shuffling around trying to understand.

While there has been an awful lot of noise around the Green Party since Zack Polanski's election as its leader and a polling surge, there is no consistency in poll findings. Some polls have the Greens on 18%, some have on 12%. There's no question that there's been a big growth in the party - especially in London. But results like the December 2025 Electoral Calculus MRP suggesting Greens could win up to 30 London constituencies really serve only to excite and muddle.

The difference between a 12% vote share and an 18% vote share is a lot. 12% nationally, which might translate to 20% across London and maybe 30% in specific boroughs, won't win the Greens Lewisham. 18%, which might translate to support in the high thirties here, could do the job if chunks of Labour's vote stays at home or goes to independents, Lib Dems and some even to Reform. That's how finely balanced the Lewisham result is.

Events 2022-2026	C	L	LD	G	O
May 22 council election result	54				
Nov 23 by-election: Deptford - Lab hold	54				
May 24 by-election: Deptford - Lab hold	54				
Jul 24 by-election: Blackheath - Lab hold	54				
Sep 24 by-election: Mayoral by-election - Lab hold	54				
Mar 25 defection: Hau-Yu Tam (Evelyn) - Lab to Grn	53			1	
Jun 25 defection: Liam Shrivastava (New Cross Gate) - Lab to Grn	52			2	
Jan 26 vacancy: Sophie Hill, Lab (Forest Hill) - resigned	51			2	

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.

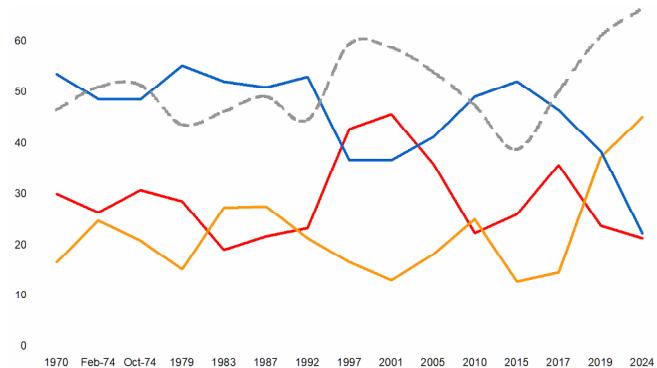
At the 1997 general election, Labour gained both Mitcham and Morden (which was expected) and Wimbledon (which wasn't).

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 had 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.

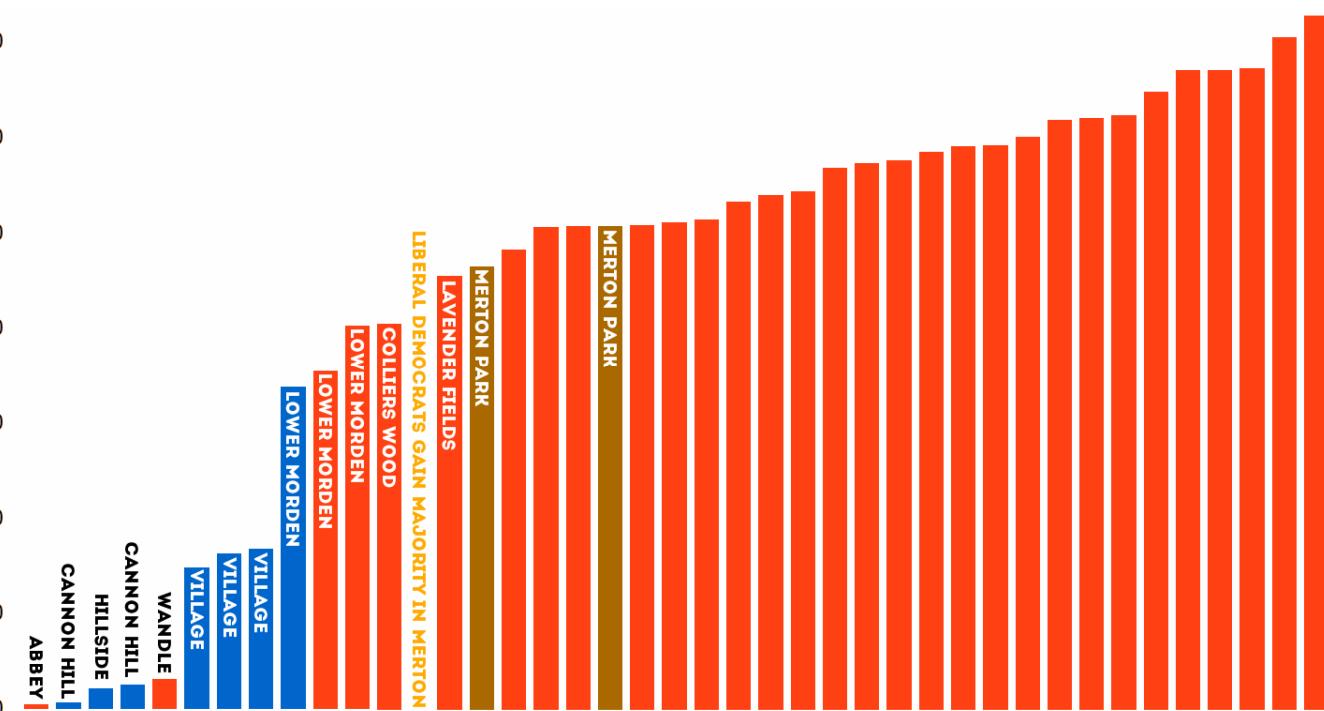
The massive problem the Lib Dems have in winning a majority in Merton is the Mitcham and Morden constituency and the fact that Labour is very well organised in this constituency. The chart below shows the wall the Lib Dems have to climb just to win a majority of one seat.

They need twelve gains, the twelfth of which is the least safe seat in St Helier 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 **Graveneys**, 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 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 Vilalge 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.

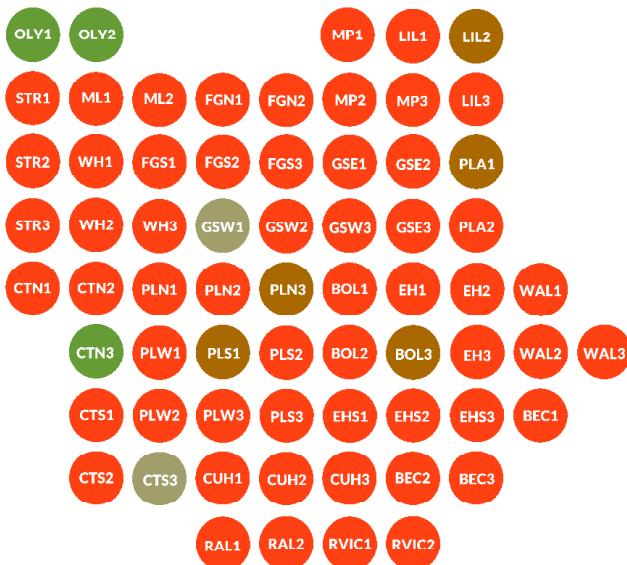
There is a legacy: the Olympic Village site has been transformed into a brand new neighbourhood and West Ham Football Club have moved into the stadium to the noisy complaints of its fans and high costs to the taxpayer. Some of the facilities like the Zahra Hadid-designed aquatics centre do benefit the 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.

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 **Lxford** 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: **Monkham**s 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.

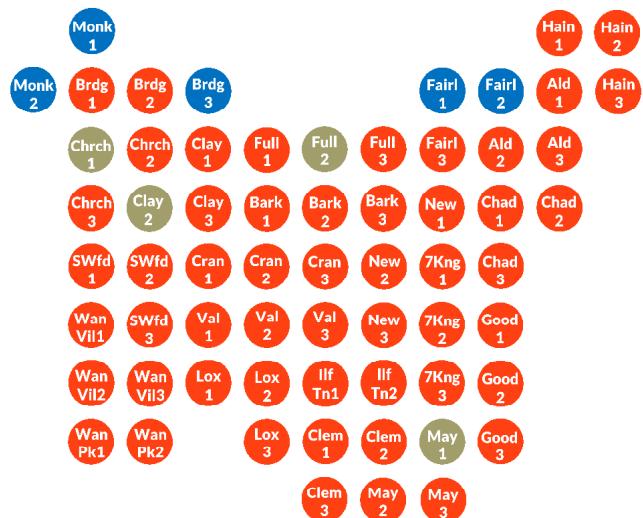
Then there is outer Ilford: the semi-rural **Aldborough**, atypical **Hainault**, **Fullwell** and **Fairlop**, **Barkingside** and **Clayhall**. **Hainault** was always reliably Labour until the Blair government, then swung heavily to the right electing both Conservative councillors and (briefly) a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

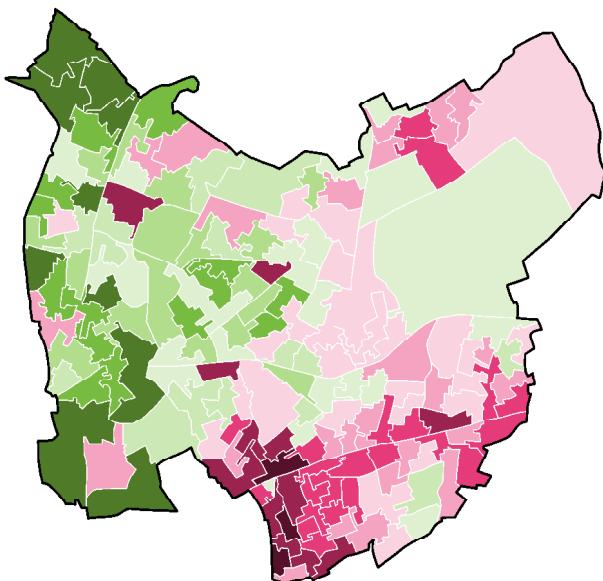
Corbyn-controlled head office then engineered a complaint to suspend the non-Corbynite council leader Jas Athwal from standing to replace Gapes. That enabled left-winger Sam Tarry - Angela Rayner's partner - to win the selection and, of course, the constituency, in 2019.

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' 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 it's 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)
- ▶ Churchfields (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Clayhall (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Fairlop (2 Con)
- ▶ Fullwell (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Mayfield (1 Ilf Ind)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Aldborough (3 Lab)
- ▶ Barkingside (3 Lab)
- ▶ Bridge (2 Lab)
- ▶ Churchfields (2 Lab, 1 Ind)
- ▶ 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 (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

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 needed 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.

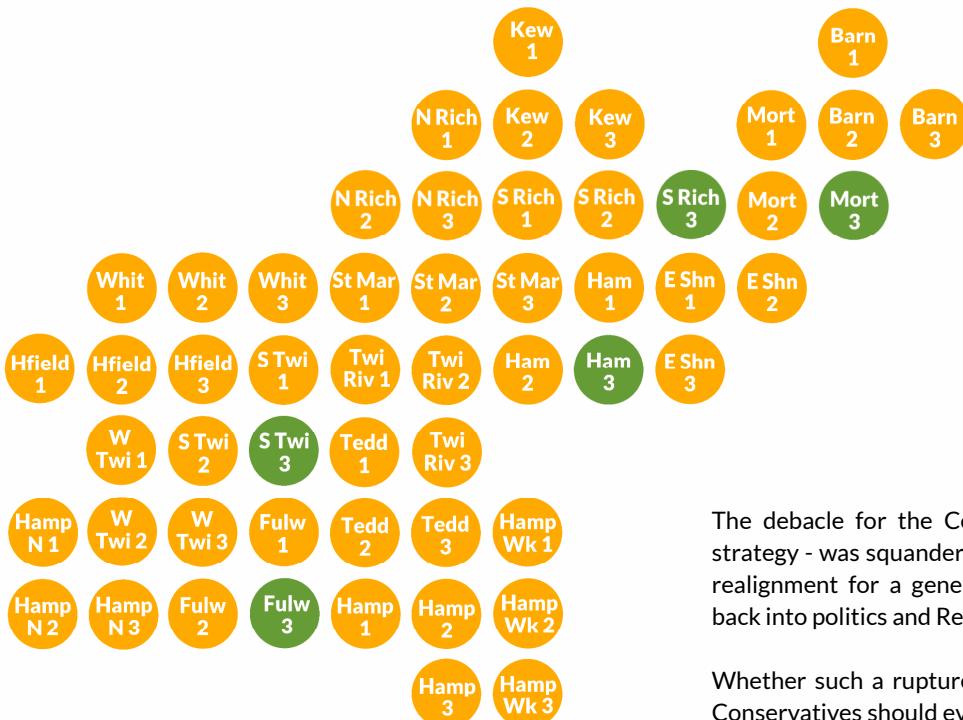
Then, across the Thames, the Tories might hope to get **Hampton North** back, though they lost by a lot in the by-election.

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 copper 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 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**.

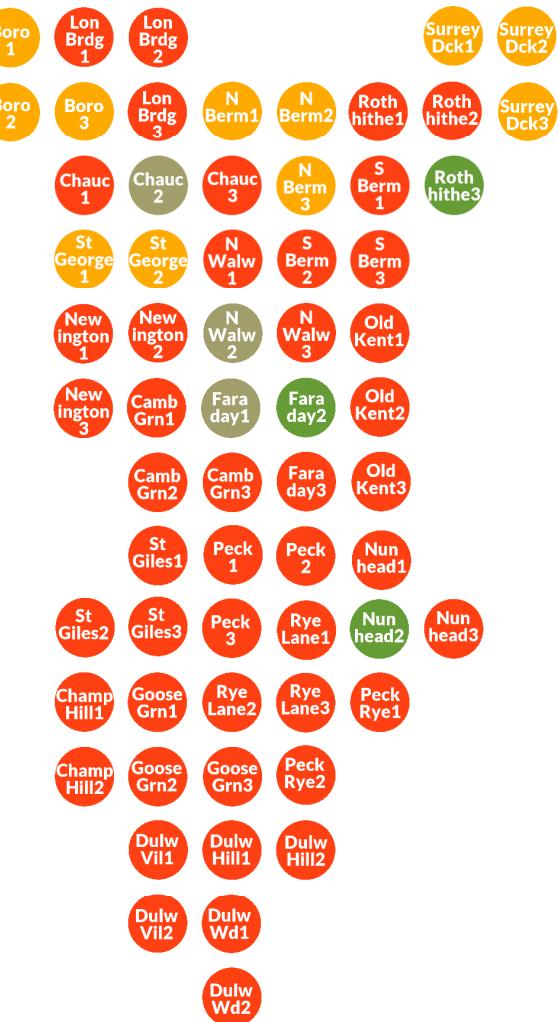
Since the 1950s (and 1968 aside) the Conservatives have only been able to win two - at most three - wards, all in the far south of the borough: **Dulwich Village** (the old Ruskin ward) and what is now **Dulwich Wood** (College). Occasionally they added the old Rye ward, most of which is now **Dulwich 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)
- ▶ 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.

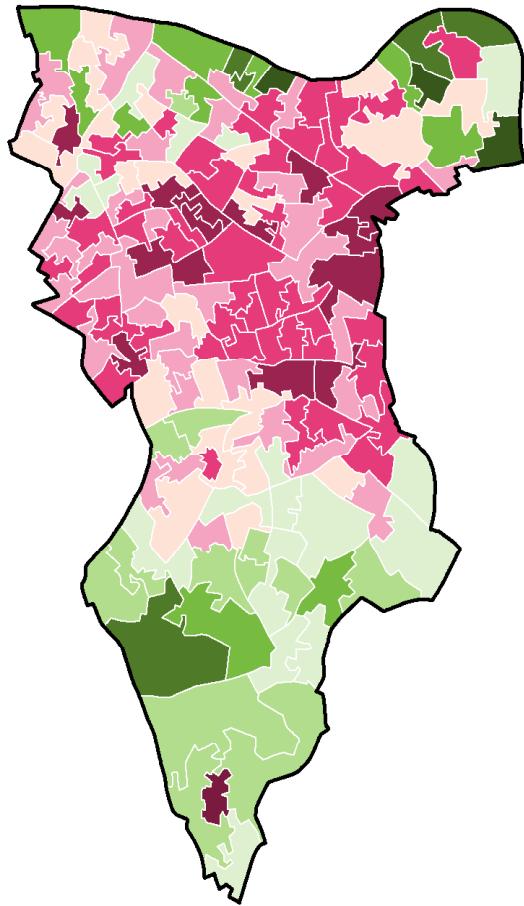
Until the Liberal Alliance breakthrough in 1983, caused by incumbent "right wing" Labour MP Bob Mellish resigning after endless battles with an increasingly left-wing constituency party, Bermondsey was phenomenally safe for Labour. He'd won with over 63% in 1979 - hardly a great election for Labour;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

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 (3 LD)

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.

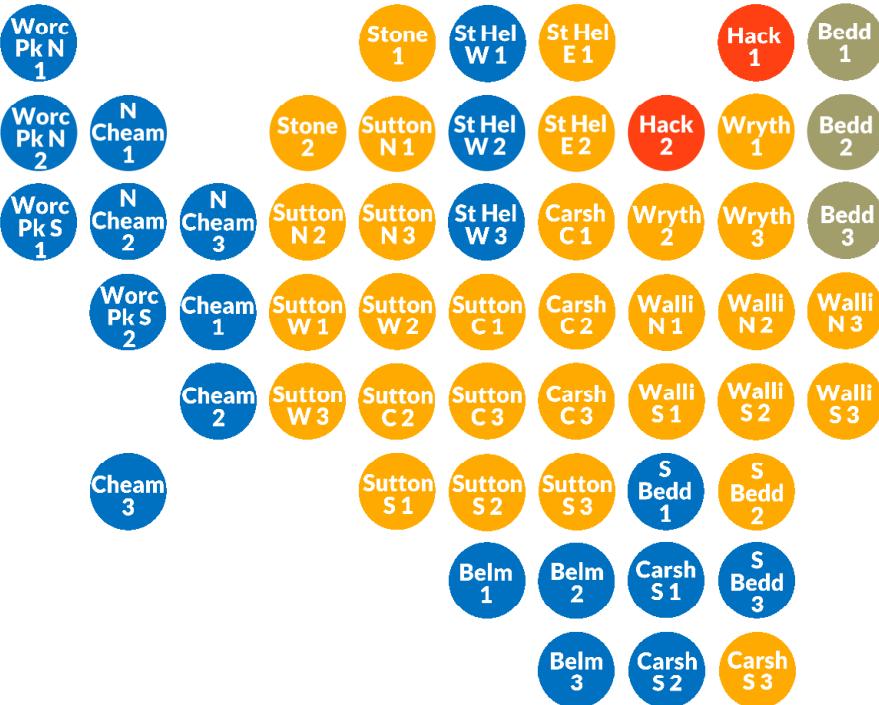
Even in that Sutton Central by-election - Sutton being not especially Reform-friendly and them winning only 12% of the vote - the Conservatives dropped eight points.

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

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.

TONIGHT'S WEATHER: COLD

CITY PRICES

Evening Standard
LONDON, FRIDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER, 1993

30p

A DREAM CHANCE TO PAY OFF YOUR MORTGAGE UP TO £60,000

OR WIN £50,000 CASH

DON'T MISS OUR UNIQUE FREE DRAW. SEE FULL DETAILS ON PAGE 29

5
GUARANTEED WINNERS

OUTRAGE OVER RACIST VICTORY

Ministers attack London poll win by 'thoroughly nasty' fascist BNP

by SNEKHAR BHATA

CABINET MINISTERS today expressed the Government's dismay and disdain over the British National Party's victory in a council by-election on the Isle of Dogs.

And as the shock waves from the result spread, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon warned of heightened fear in the East End.

It is a tale of two worlds. In one scene, a confederate racial Devil Beckson, a representative with a seven-vote victory in Tower Hamlets, is seen in a pub. Mr Beckson and date do not recognise that all sections of the community are under threat under him.

While the rest of this country is fully entitled to live their own lives free from harassment and racial abuse, the people of the Isle of Dogs are not. We must redouble our efforts to ensure good relations. We must redouble our efforts to ensure that the Environment Secretary John Gummer is right when he says: "We are not the sort of party that would be the party of racism or fascism. We are not the party that can say that there is something inherently wrong with people merely because of their colour."

It is a tale of two worlds. We expect the result page to be voted for it.

The British people are no longer hard with the local community to work with.

Leader comments Page Nine
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Member of our independence." Today Tower Hamlets is facing a revolt from the employing class. The BNP has won a seat in Tower Hamlets and warned of strikes if they were re-elected. The BNP has threatened to picket Mr Condon's office. The BNP has threatened to picket the Youth Connection group, set up to encourage young people to stay in school and not be drinking champagne tonight, but his

"We are going to be in the council chamber and we are going to be in the pub to make him listen to us."

It is a tale of two worlds. We expect the result page to be voted for it.

The British people are no longer hard with the local community to work with.

Continued on Page 2 Col 1

Shot girl flies home

FLORIDA shooting victim Margaret Jagger boards a plane for Britain to fly home with the body of her son. Margaret Jagger, 52, was shot dead as she attacked them as they slept in their car. A boy of 13 is among the suspects. See Page 2 Col 1

Continued on Page 2 Col 1

DTV 32 & 41 BUSINESS DAY 33-40 WEEKEND 27 ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE 51-56 LETTERS 47 PATRIC WALKER 46

It also broke the Lib Dems in Tower Hamlets. Labour HQ overhauled their local parties, professionalising them, overseeing candidate selections and making sure Labour was out campaigning, not just in the town hall.

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

- ▶ Blackwall 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.

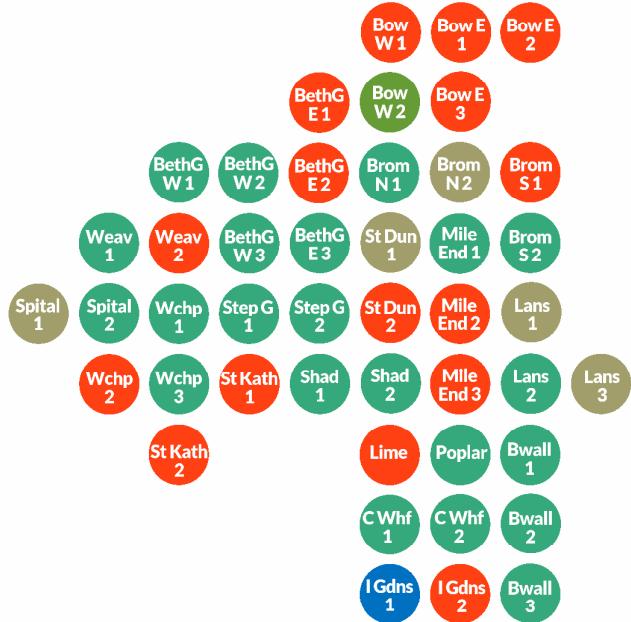
Had the Lutfurite vote not split, Labour would not have won seats in Bromley North, Canary Wharf, Lansbury, Poplar, St Dunstan's, Shadwell and Whitechapel. There was sufficient a swing back for Labour to have still won the council - just not by the lopsided amount they did.

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 Dunstans** 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 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."

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.

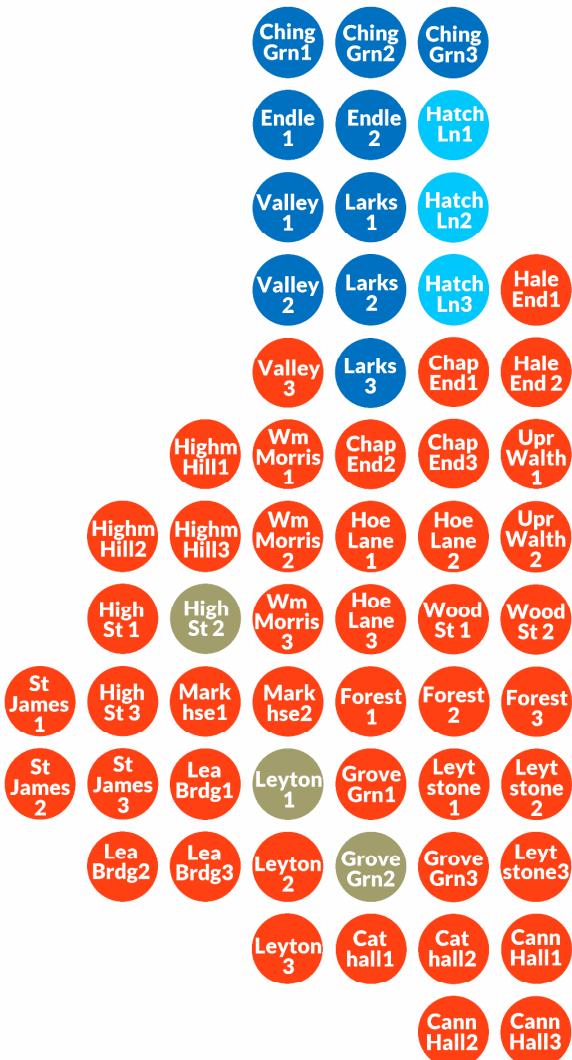
Waltham Forest was politically a borough of thirds. At the top, beyond the North Circular, was Chingford: rock solid for the Conservatives. But Chingford plus the few wards they could win elsewhere in the borough were, bar 1968, never enough for the Conservatives to win. Pretty much everything south 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 Larkswood, 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. Iain Duncan-Smith's majority fell from over 8,000 to 2,438. 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)
- ▶ Larkswood (3 Con)
- ▶ Leyton (1 Ind - defec)
- ▶ Valley (2 Con)

Conservative hopefuls

- ▶ Hale End and Highams Park South (2 Lab)
- ▶ Hatch Lane & Highams Park North (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)
- ▶ Larkswood (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.

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.

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, 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. But then Walthamstow is nowadays the sort of place that

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

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

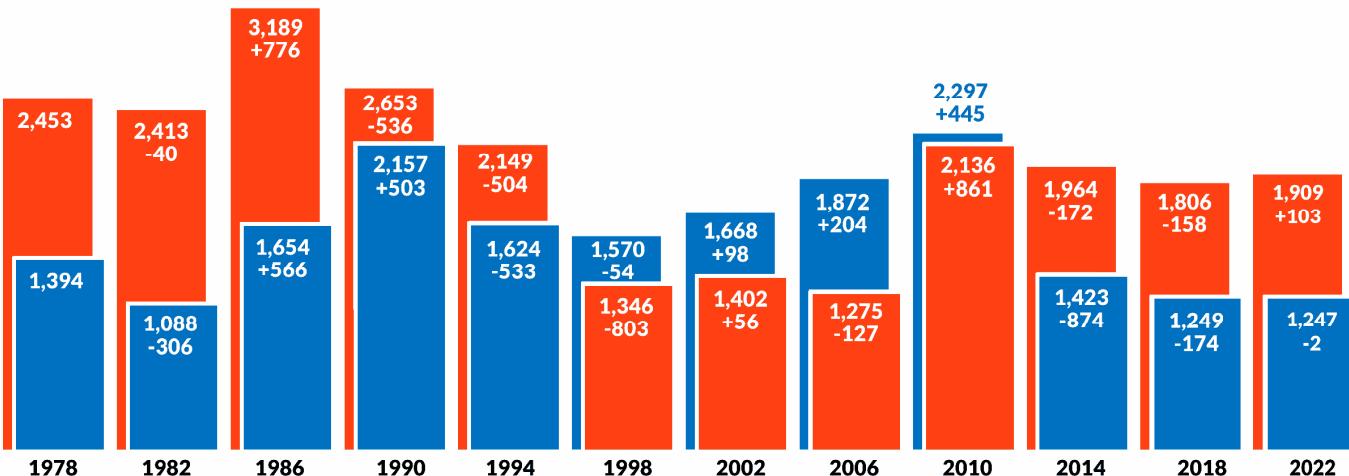
There are also two wards slightly beyond this list that might produce a surprise. One is **Roehampton**, where Labour has begun a big house-building plan on the Alton estate and is pushing even less popular plans for a high-rise scheme on the Lennox estate through the planning committee now.

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.

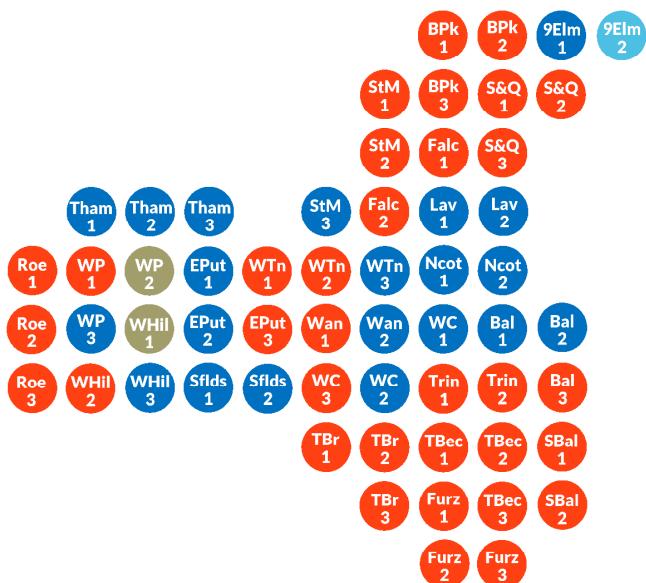
In the 1980s there was genuine Conservative municipal radicalism here: not just cutting tax, not just selling off council homes, but also privatising hi-viz council services that everyone experienced, brightening up council estates and revolutionising the council's communications.

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

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.

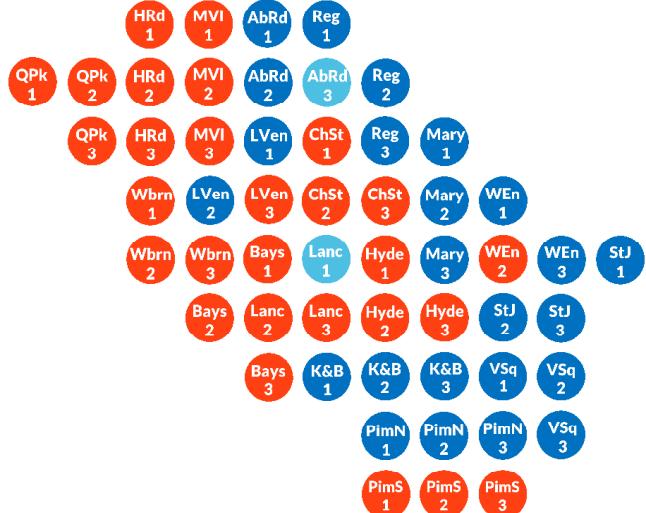
Westminster's marginals are interesting in that there are different dynamics in each. **Vincent Square**, for example, is crudely a battle between the Millbank and Grosvenor council estates and exclusive Victoria mansion blocks in and around Westminster Cathedral, plus the villas of that square itself.

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.

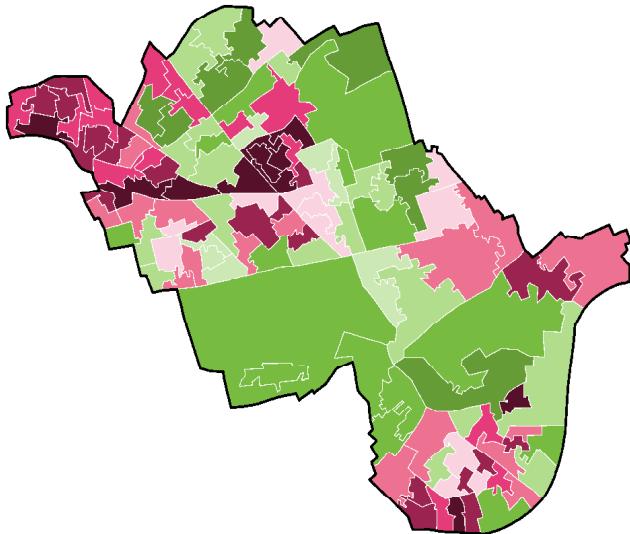
The Conservatives were very pleased with themselves in 2002 when they persuaded the boundary committee to move the Hallfield estate out of marginal **Bayswater** and into safely Tory **Lancaster Gate**. Now Bayswater looks safe for Labour and Hallfield is responsible for that party having two councillors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



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 hopefus

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

Conservative hopefus

- ▶ 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	