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Council denies claims of boundary fiddling

HAMMERSMITH Labour councillor Frank Ing has furiously denied allegations of "gerrymandering" over the re-drawing of the borough's ward boundaries.

Speaking at this week's council meeting, he hit back at Liberal Councillor Simon Knott who had accused him of "blatant gerrymandering".

"This public attack sinks to a new low even for Mr. Knott," he said.

Mr. Ing denied that the shock decision of the majority Labour group to throw out proposals for two-member wards in favour of three-member wards was in any way politically motivated.

"I have been accused of trying to completely change the ward structure. In fact, in the new proposals six wards remain the same and the other two have been tied up as well as possible.

"In keeping six out of ten wards, I don't see how on earth I can be accused of changing the ward structure," Mr. Ing said.

Council leader Barrie Stead said that the three-member ward system had been chosen because the two-member scheme involved unnatural boundaries and the division of natural communities.

Opposition members were unconvinced by the explanations: "All criticisms of the two-man system can be levelled at the three-man system. The only other grounds for choosing the latter must be political," said Tory councillor Kim Howe.

He said that he would be amazed if the scheme was accepted and there was now a danger of the Boundary Commission forcing its own scheme on the borough.

Cllr. Knott told the meeting that a public inquiry was now inevitable. "It is insane to have the boundaries settled by the majority group in private," he said.

Cllr. Bill Smith complained that part of his ward, Brook Green, had been "shovelled" across the busy Hammersmith Road.

"This decision came as a bolt from the blue. Does Cllr. Ing really expect us to accept this nonsense?" he said.

The council voted to accept the three-man scheme proposed by the majority group.

The rejected plans had been passed by a council sub-committee following a Boundary Commission order. The re-organisation will mean ten councillors will have to be axed to meet the commission's minimum requirement of 50 members.

Map of wards: 1978-1994

