

'Alternative vote system would help the BNP'

MOVES to change the voting system would benefit the BNP, a South Devon MP has warned.

Tory MP for Totnes Sarah Wollaston raised her concerns in Parliament in response to a raft of sweeping reforms announced by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, which would also see constituency boundaries redrawn and the number of MPs cut from 650 to 600. Legislation will be tabled in Parliament before the summer.

While welcoming the chance for voters to have a say on replacing first-past-the-post Westminster elections with the Alternative Vote in a referendum to be held on May 5 next year, Dr Wollaston argued it would give "a second bite of the cherry" to minority parties such as the BNP.

Under the proposed AV system, voters rank candidates in order of preference and anyone getting more than 50 per cent in the first round is elected.

If that does not happen, the

candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and voters' second choices allocated to the remaining candidates.

The process continues until a winner emerges.

Prime Minister David Cameron has said that he will be supporting first-past-the-post, unlike his deputy, Nick Clegg.

Speaking during the parliamentary debate on the proposed reforms, Dr Wollaston said: "I welcome the opportunity for the electorate to have a chance

to vote on AV, but does the Deputy Prime Minister share my concern that it gives a second bite of the cherry to minority parties such as the BNP?"

Responding Mr Clegg said: "I think that the alternative vote system, were it to be introduced, would not be susceptible to the dangers of some other electoral systems of fostering and allowing extremist parties to get a foot in the door of mainstream politics. If it were susceptible to such dangers, I would be as concerned as she is."