

# County Durham

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## Comment text:

**Related subject:** Consett

I am disappointed by these boundary proposals in the Consett area which fail to take account of the very community-centric nature of the people who live within the longest developed parts of the area. I approve of the commission's perfectly proper respecting of Blackhill's integrity in the proposals for Benfieldside at the expense of the former Consett North division, but ask it to show the same respect for Consett itself.

My particular concern is with the proposed new "Consett North" division is that it shows no regard for the unique (within the immediate area) importance of Consett Town Centre. Consett's town centre is the compact hub for all the surrounding district. It contains the district's main shopping area, its cultural facilities like the Empire Theatre and Library, its night life in the shape of pubs, night-clubs and restaurants, its senior education facilities of Academy and FE College, and its traffic hub through its bus-station and taxi firms. It has the only bank for miles around. As a result it faces the problems that town-centres experience; parking issues, the rowdy aftermath of week-end night life, litter, a changing retail and service offer which requires dedicated management.

These issues principally affect the area former division of Consett North which were not in Blackhill, which makes the remaining polling districts a sound basis for a town centre division. The issues also affect the relatively small group of inhabitants to the South East of Sherburn Terrace and Front Street (between those roads and the bypass) who are as much residents of the town centre and experience its problems. I attach a map to illustrate what I mean. It is incomprehensible to people in those streets that at the moment if they contact a "Consett councillor" they will be told that that councillor cannot look after them – instead they need to contact one from Delves Lane (which they don't associate with). They rightfully belong to a Consett division, just as they did in the old district council when they were in Consett East.

If it is accepted that Consett truly has a town centre, it should also be recognised that town centre councillor(s), as well as having to deal with their residents' localised concerns, also have to deal with the problems visitors' problems and raise them with the town-centre councillor. It's a

particular type of councillor role and it makes much more sense for it to be undertaken by a single councillor than to have two councillors, very possibly duplicating effort in the town centre whilst trying to cope with the much wider range of issues that will arise across the swathe of communities in the current proposal for Consett North.

I also feel that the Consett North proposal works to the detriment of Leadgate and Medomsley. Leadgate itself is a proud and separate community which maintains a firm identity of its own and in many ways operates in competition with Consett in terms of its small but varied secondary shopping centre (the largest secondary shopping centre in the district) and its cultural and sporting life. This is a long-standing separation and a quick look at Facebook shows it very clearly. I have referred to Leadgate and Medomsley together because a look at the map shows how the two communities have been linked by the built environment arising from their mining heritage since the beginning of the twentieth century and that linkage is still strong today.

Unless the boundary commission is wedded to a preference for two member wards (a historic anomaly arising from the desire to double the number of councillors when the county moved to a unitary structure) I am sure that it will be able to see how much more community-based the new arrangement would be with a single member Consett Central division and a single member Leadgate and Medomsley division.

## **Attached Documents:**

- Consett Town Centre.jpg



