

Durham County Council

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Organisation Name: Brandon Meadowfield and Langley Moor Labour Party Branch

Comment text:

I am getting in touch on behalf of the Labour Party Brandon, Meadowfield and Langley Moor Branch in relation to the Durham County Council Boundary review. First, we would note that we are sceptical about the decision to reduce the number of councillors from 126 to 98. County Durham is a large, very rural county and as such, communities are often very dispersed across the whole area. Although not directly affected by this issue, we are concerned that for some communities, this would lead to less contact with their councillors as wards will necessarily need to grow significantly to normalise the number of electors per ward. Council wards will begin to look more like Parliamentary constituencies rather than council wards. There is a grave concern that this will lead to a democratic deficit in the county, with residents having less contact with elected officials. In relation to Brandon, Meadowfield and Langley Moor, we would like to put on record the need to keep these three villages (along with Browney) in one distinct ward. While all three of these villages (four including Browney) are considered to be different places, in reality they are one conurbation. In the way people live their lives, access services such as shopping and education, they act as one. Critically, without the roadside signs indicated that one has passed from one village to another, visitors to the ward would have no idea that they had passed from one to another. In terms of shopping, there is a small precinct in Brandon that includes a supermarket, hairdressers, Greggs and gift shop that is accessed by people from all three areas (indeed, one can walk up the street to this arcade and pass from Meadowfield into Brandon without any indication that a different area has been entered) while Langley Moor has a vibrant High Street and 2 supermarkets which is again well used from residents in all three areas. Transport links are strong throughout all areas. Although a bus does not travel to Browney, the nearest bus stop in Meadowfield is approximately 700m from the furthest property. Buses link throughout all three of the areas, with residents of all areas catching the same services. There are schools in Langley Moor, Brandon and Meadowfield, with children moving across the villages to access these schools. Langley Moor school does not simply serve residents in Langley Moor for instance. In this regard, there is simply no difference between the area. As well as the 'flow of life' which means this ward should remain as it is. It is clearly enclosed by natural borders and boundaries. The River Browney creates a natural boundary to the east and north of the ward, while open fields create boundaries to the east and the south. In terms of other villages, the Deerness River to north and west of the ward creates a natural boundary with Ushaw Moor, while open fields create a break before New Brancepeth. Alongside the River Browney, to the east the landscape is broken up by the A167, a major trunk road in the North East. Equally, while these villages are close to the ward, there are few links in everyday life that link them. Both of the, are served by their own primary schools, and they are not linked with public transport services. In fact, to reach these villages by public transport would require a change on the major bus routes that serve the City of Durham. In terms of Browney, this is a very small village that has recently expended due to a new housing development. However, it is worth noting that it is possible to walk into Browney from Meadowfield with no indication that you have moved into a different village. Browney is also served by a small primary school, however, as with the other three areas mentioned, this is not exclusively used by residents of Browney, with children from across the ward attending. It is also worth noting that there are no other wards that Browney could sensibly be added to, as the natural boundaries of the ward include Browney. It is worth noting that in terms of representation, The Brandon Ward is currently a two member ward, and these councillors currently represent a high number of electors. It may in fact be that they represent a number of electors in excess of the average. This is good fit for the area however, and it would make no sense to split this ward as a desktop exercise simply to make numbers work. As indicated above, we do have concerns that a reduction in councillors would create a democratic deficit in County Durham, however should this reduction go ahead, it is vital that Brandon, Meadowfield, Langley Moor and Browney are kept within their own ward.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded