

# North East Lincolnshire

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## Comment text:

**Related subject:** Freshney Ward

North East Lincolnshire Council has put forward a controversial recommendation to disband the Freshney Ward and expand the boundaries of the Wolds, Yarborough, and West Marsh wards. This proposal, presented in a report for council approval, has raised significant concerns due to its lack of narrative justification and the absence of meaningful consultation with parish councils, community groups, or residents. Alarming, the consultation process was initiated only after the completion of the report, suggesting a disregard for community input in shaping local governance.

The Freshney Ward currently has representation from three Independent Ward Councillors, while the Yarborough Ward is served by two Independent Councillors. Historically, the Freshney Ward has been a stronghold for the Labour Party, creating a dynamic that some perceive as a thorn in the side of the current council leadership. It is no surprise, therefore, that the recommendation to remove Freshney Ward has emerged amidst a backdrop of political manoeuvring.

The report was generated by a so-called cross-party working group, which notably excluded the lone Independent candidate. The voting outcome of this group reflected a Labour and Independent alliance, with the vote tallying 4-3 in Favor of disbandment. This was particularly striking as it was the three Conservative and one Liberal Democrat representatives who voted against the proposal, raising suspicions of partisan motivations behind the recommendation.

At the recent Full Council meeting, where the proposal was debated, the atmosphere was palpable. As an observer, it was evident that the discussion was heavily skewed. All five Independent Councillors and a significant majority of Labour Councillors—11 out of 15—expressed their concerns regarding the proposal. In stark contrast, only five of the 18 Conservative Councillors chose to speak, with one candidly stating how the vote would likely proceed and another indicating a lack of concern as long as her own ward remained unaffected. This behaviour led many to

believe that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat alliance was engaging in gerrymandering—a manipulation of electoral district boundaries to favour a particular party.

The report itself is strikingly weak, lacking substantive evidence to support its recommendations. It appears to be politically biased, failing to adequately address the requirements set forth by the Boundary Commission for such changes. The uniqueness of the Freshney Ward, with its distinct geographical features and community ties, is not given the consideration it deserves.

Geographically, the Freshney Ward is characterized by the River Freshney, which distinctly divides the area into three communities, each with its own unique characteristics in terms of population, housing, and social connections. The ward is served by three schools and a nursery, fostering inter-community relationships as children travel from different neighbourhoods to attend these educational institutions. Additionally, two community centres in Willows and Great Coates serve as hubs for social interaction, while local pubs contribute to the vibrant community life.

In recent years, community ties within Freshney have strengthened significantly, largely due to the initiatives undertaken by the Great Coates Village Council. This council has organized bi-monthly events, including the annual Scarecrow Weekend, which attracts around 1,800 visitors from the ward and beyond. Such events not only highlight the community spirit but also contribute to the local economy and social fabric. The recognition of Great Coates as a Gold Award winner in the national Britain In Bloom Awards underscores the dedication and pride residents have in their community. One judge remarked that if community spirit could be bottled and shared with the world, it would lead to a better society. This sentiment exemplifies the strong ties that exist within the Freshney Ward, which are seemingly overlooked by the council's current recommendations.

The current Independent Ward Councillors are among the most active representatives the area has seen in years. Their collaborative efforts to unite the ward and address the needs of their constituents should not be dismissed lightly. It is scandalous that North East Lincolnshire Council fails to recognize the value of this active representation and the community cohesion it fosters.

The geographical implications of the proposed changes also warrant scrutiny. The Wolds Ward is already expansive, and the addition of Great Coates could dilute representation for existing residents. A more logical and community-focused approach would involve disbanding the South Ward and redistributing its areas among neighbouring wards: moving SO1, SO5, and SO6 into Yarborough; SO4 and SO7 into Park; PA2 into West Marsh; and SO2 and SO3 into Scartho. This strategy would not only enhance community cohesion but also better balance representation in light of anticipated growth in surrounding areas such as Humberston, Waltham, and Freshney, where planned developments are on the horizon.

In conclusion, the recommendation to disband Freshney Ward raises significant concerns about political motivations, lack of community consultation, and potential impacts on local representation. The unique characteristics of the Freshney Ward, combined with the active engagement of its councillors and residents, underscore the importance of maintaining its integrity. The council must reconsider its approach, prioritizing community cohesion and fair representation over partisan agendas to ensure a more equitable and inclusive governance structure.

## Attached Documents:

*None attached*