

Darlington

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Comment text:

Related subject: Whinfield

We welcome the Commission's proposal to expand Whinfield Ward to include Haughton Village and the two parish areas. In our view, this creates a more coherent ward and reflects existing community links.

There are already strong connections between Whinfield, Haughton Village and the surrounding rural parishes. Many Whinfield residents regularly use the shops, pubs and other facilities in Haughton Village, while residents from Haughton frequently use amenities in Whinfield, including Asda, the Shuttle and Loom, and open spaces such as Whinfield's parks, play areas and walking routes. These communities are closely connected through everyday life, with residents routinely travelling between them for shopping, leisure and social activities.

As part of our response, we have also undertaken further engagement with local residents through our community Facebook page, which has more than 2,200 followers. Feedback received has been overwhelmingly positive towards the proposal to bring Haughton Village and the rural parishes together with Whinfield, with many residents recognising the existing links between these communities and supporting the creation of a single ward.

However, we believe Springfield Park provides a stronger and more natural boundary than the A167. The Oakwood Drive estate and surrounding streets sit adjacent to the proposed Springfield Ward and, in our view, have closer day-to-day connections with that area than with the wider Whinfield and Haughton community.

Excluding the Oakwood Drive estate would also create a more sensible long-term balance between the two wards. Under the Commission's proposals, Springfield Ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of around -9%, yet there are currently no significant housing developments planned within the ward that would increase its electorate in future. By contrast, the proposed Whinfield and Haughton Ward has a forecast variance of around 0% despite being the part of Darlington expected to accommodate substantial future growth, including the potential for thousands of new homes at Skertingham and other planned developments.

Given these circumstances, it would seem more logical for Springfield Ward to begin slightly larger than currently proposed, allowing greater capacity for future population growth within Whinfield and Haughton. Transferring the Oakwood Drive estate to Springfield would help achieve this while also creating a boundary that follows a clear and recognisable local feature.

Finally, I would encourage the Commission to consider the proposed ward name. Given that the overwhelming majority of residents within the revised ward will live in the Whinfield area, it may be more appropriate for the ward to be named "Whinfield and Haughton".

There is also a wider issue of local identity. For many years, Whinfield has often felt like the lesser-recognised part of the wider Haughton area despite being a substantial community in its own right. Under the Commission's proposals, Whinfield will make up the majority of the ward's population, yet it would still appear second in the ward name. Reversing the order to "Whinfield and Haughton" would better reflect the makeup of the ward while also recognising the importance of Whinfield as a distinct community rather than simply an extension of Haughton.

Overall, we believe the Commission's proposal provides a strong basis for a revised ward, but that the transfer of the Oakwood Drive estate to Springfield and the adoption of the name "Whinfield and Haughton" would create boundaries that better reflect local identities, community ties and future representation.

Attached Documents:

None attached