

Darlington

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Comment text:

Dear Local Government Boundary Commission for England,

Further to the release of the draft ward boundary maps, I have some comments to make. These are my own personal comments from me as an individual resident of Hummersknott ward, but also as one of the councillors for College ward - the more detailed comments therefore relate to the current College and potential future College and Blackwell ward, and experience various other parts of the town visiting for shopping, visiting friends and other social visits etc.

- Mowden and north-west College ward: This area is not cohesive. From residents I have spoken to in the northwestern area of what is currently College ward, they feel no social connection across Carmel Road North, and rarely if ever go there – they feel more affinity with the remainder of College ward (the areas currently within Carmel Rd North, Woodland Rd, Cleveland Terrace and Stanhope Roads North & South. Indeed, Carmel Road North is a very busy (and often far too fast) road, which prevents most pedestrian crossings of it, other than to access Carmel Surgery (but that has a catchment that is far larger than one council ward so should not really be considered) and the next-door pharmacy. I did urge residents who disagreed with the draft to send in their comments, and provided them with the information as to how to do that, but cannot know if they did, hence wanted to pass on the comments that I have received. If this would leave Mowden on its own too small to support a councillor, then it should go in with Hummersknott, as part of a 3-councillor ward, which does not have a significantly different “feel” (as another, suburban housing estate, though some built later than Hummersknott), nor such a hard dividing line between it as Mowden and that north-west corner of College does.

- Other than the “chunk” discussed in the point above, which I think would much better remain within College ward, I am happy in general with the principle of a College and Blackwell ward, encompassing much of what is currently Park West.

- Eastern boundary of College (& Blackwell) ward: However, I am not convinced that College and Blackwell ward should continue into and cover the whole of the town centre, which has a significantly different “feel” to it than the leafy West End which makes up most of the rest of the ward. Travelling eastwards from the current College ward boundary, homes beyond Stanhope Roads North and South become significantly smaller, gardens become yards / yards, and issues experienced are likely to be different. College ward – being old quaker land - currently has zero shops and zero pubs / cafes. Incorporating Park West would bring in more shops, garages etc., but those are smaller-scale corner shops, not the “central business district” area of the town. If more population numbers are required to bring the size / voters in the ward up to enough for a 3-councillor ward (even after the chunk from Woodland Terrace area has been “returned”), I would support the extension of the ward up to and including Larchfield Street or the western side of Skinnergate at a maximum, as people who live in the West End do feel some association with businesses along Duke Street – but in the latter case, it would probably be better to keep all of the central town centre area together, for cohesive management of the town centre. Whilst it is correct that transport links into the town centre are easier from College, the feel and social connections are not really present across the current boundary. Given the significant differences, and the large number of voters (higher than that needed for a 3-councillor ward), I worry that councillors would struggle for capacity to properly address the quite different town centre issues as well as more local / out of town issues of the remainder of their residents.
- The town centre: This is a difficult one – for management reasons, it would be easiest to keep the town centre together all in one ward, yet different parts of the town centre do feel more like different wards. As mentioned, Coniscliffe Road and even Houndgate do feel more like Park West, Duke Street more like College ward, yet other parts feel more like the proposed North Road, Pierremont and Park East wards, so I do wonder if it would be better divided up. This would mean that town centre issues would not overwhelmingly fall on only a single ward’s councillors either, and if more were required to be involved, then it might result in more ideas sharing as to how to resolve issues.
- Hummersknott ward: Further to the point made in the first round consultation, I do think that Low Coniscliffe has far more of a small rural village feel and therefore should remain in Heighington and (High) Coniscliffe ward – unless you have received comments directly from residents who live in that village who would prefer to be in one of Darlington’s urban wards? Merrybent Drive could be similarly placed into H&HC if that would leave numbers too high for Hummersknott and Mowden - which I would prefer to see combined as one 3-councillor ward, rather than shaving non-cohesive areas off College ward to “make up numbers”.
- Hurworth ward: I disagree that the new development at the end of Neasham Road opposite the stadium should remain in Hurworth ward, since most residents will feel more affinity and social connection with the much closer town wards (Bank Top & Lascelles, or Firthmoor). It feels as though the ward boundaries of Hurworth are being defined simply to “make up the numbers”, rather than any pretence at social cohesion or community feel, and I think this would have a negative effect in being able to obtain representation for their issues for those who feel more urban and may therefore struggle to get the attention of their ward councillors for issues that they haven’t previously had to deal with, and which may be physically remote from their core area. Similarly, the inclusion of Morton Palms parish with Mowden makes no sense socially / in community terms – it makes more sense to include it with Middleton St George (MSG) – indeed in my maps sent in my first consultation round submission, I had split it along the A66, with those areas beyond the A66 becoming part of MSG, and those areas within the A66 becoming part of the town wards. This latter is important since issues relating to Morton Park and the surrounding business land would be best / most cohesively dealt with if the whole area fell into the same council ward, or only two were there a north-south dividing line along Yarm Road. I would rather that Hurworth had good community cohesion and understanding of its ward boundaries, than that it had exactly the right number of voters.

- Whinfield and Haughton ward: For the same reason as the point above, land south of Tornado way (at the southernmost extent of the proposed Haughton & Whinfield ward, where Amazon is located), should be included within the same ward as Morton Park. Nobody lives there, so it wouldn't affect voter numbers, but would allow the business land areas to be managed more cohesively if it went in with Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall.
- Harrowgate Hill ward: The land covering one of the housing developments (Berrymead farm, currently being built out) has been allocated to Harrowgate Hill (which I welcome), however the other significant development – which would significantly impact Harrowgate and Beaumont Hill areas - for which a planning application has been in for several years and is due to come to planning applications committee in the near future, is the Banks development to the east of the A167 Durham Road. This should be allocated to Harrowgate Hill ward, to allow what will be residents of an urban extension to get appropriate representation from their nearest urban Harrowgate Hill councillors, but in the meantime it would seem unfair for councillors for Heighington to have to deal with the issues which arise during a development, whose effects and impacts would mostly fall on the residents of Harrowgate Hill. This would require extending Harrowgate Hill further into Whessoe parish, perhaps with the ward boundary extending north up Durham Road and ending / returning to coincide with the parish boundary just south of Ketton Lodge, where the electricity pylons cross the road. This would allow for all of the proposed Skerningham Garden Village urban extension development to be dealt with by the (I feel more appropriate) councillors from the urban area – to ensure good community cohesion etc. – from either Harrowgate Hill at the western side, and Whinfield and Haughton at the eastern end.
- Brinkburn ward: This is currently a 1-councillor ward, despite a decision having been made that for councillor responsiveness to residents and welfare reasons, Darlington would have only 2 and 3-councillor wards, so this situation I do not find to be acceptable. I note that at the eastern end of Pierremont ward, houses are small and tightly terraced. However, as you travel along Brinkburn Road, after Banklands Rd / Court, Courtlands Rd and Deneside Road, they become semi-detached larger homes, and therefore far more similar to the semi-detached housing developments in the proposed Brinkburn ward, similarly the southern end of Pierremont Road. I would prefer to see these two areas combined into a 2-councillor ward (the current proposed Brinkburn ward plus the larger similar type of homes at the western end of Brinkburn Road), and hence the proposed Pierremont ward being reduced in size and focussed on the smaller terraced streets of The Denes (which might therefore be a more appropriate name for the ward), to also be another 2-councillor ward. See the point below – I do not believe that the houses facing onto the A68 on the eastern side should have been “moved” into the Branksome & Cockerton
- Branksome & Cockerton ward: The eastern ward boundary should be BEHIND the shops that face onto the eastern side of the A68, so as to ensure that all of Cockerton shops, Cockerton club, and Cockerton police house are located within Branksome & Cockerton ward! This is essential for community feel, but also successfully managing the impact of – sometimes significant - issues relating to Cockerton shops, primarily by only one set of Cockerton & Branksome ward councillors. This was done (setting the boundary behind the properties facing onto the main road) for some reason further north for houses which face onto the A68 on the eastern side, which I do not feel was necessary and those homes should be “returned” to Brinkburn ward – but comments I made about this related instead to the shops and services which can be more easily and cohesively managed within just one ward / one set of councillors, and I feel it is important that they need to actually be within the boundary of the ward of their name, just for community understanding & feel reasons.
- Park East: the northern boundary feels far more like it should include the Borough Road area behind the Hippodrome and up to Haughton Road – this is physically distant from the nearest housing in North Road ward, so would be physically closer and have more community feel to Park

East ward.

Thank you for considering my comments, if anything is unclear, please don't hesitate to come back to me.

Attached Documents:

None attached