

York

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Comment text:

Related subject: Wheldrake Ward

I am perplexed as to what the proposal to merge Wheldrake Ward with Osbaldwick and Derwent Ward is seeking to achieve either for the running of York or for local residents.

Wheldrake Ward is already the largest ward in the city. I have served as council for Wheldrake ward for 15 years between 2003 and 2026. It is my experience that in a rural wards such as this with widely dispersed residents in a handful of villages residents in one village see themselves as having very little in common with residents in another village. Essentially I have five separate communities each miles from its neighbour. I can think of only one occasion where I have raised in issue in Derwent & Osbaldwick ward that was impacting of Wheldrake Ward residents (an obscured set of chevrons marking a dangerous bend close to the boundary between the wards.)

The inhabitants of, say, Elvington, are not interested in the lives or needs or services in, say, Naburn. Those two villages are eleven miles apart. They access York via completely different roads. They do not travel between the villages by and large, either on their journeys into York or elsewhere. They do not use each others' amenities, buses, footpaths, shops, or pubs.

The proposal that residents would be well served or better served by spreading elected councillors even more puzzles me. The two current wards do not even have bus services in common. Elected members would be left servicing the needs of nine separate parish councils, instead of the current set up where 2 councillors in Osbaldwick and Derwent ward service 5 parish councils between them, and Wheldrake Ward's councillor (currently myself) works with 4 parish councils. The current set up allows the city councillors to have a viable working relationship with their parish

councils. The proposed set up would leave two councillors driving hundreds of miles each month to try to keep informed on nine parish councils and a dozen different communities.

If this was part of a proposal aimed at getting rid of single member wards, there might be a logic of sorts and an argument to be made, but the Boundary Commissions proposals are not aimed at merging single member wards. I also have to say that residents don't complain about having only a single councillor.

In the city centre two and three member wards work because the housing densities in the city enable ward councillors to meet large numbers of residents, deliver leaflets, organise meetings more easily. In rural wards like Wheldrake Ward, organising public meetings is difficult as it is because residents are not willing to travel ten miles and more to attend a meeting in another village. If the proposed boundary changes go ahead, my fear is that public meetings will become even more infrequent and be even more poorly attended because residents would not make the effort.

It is hard to imagine local people travelling across a proposed ward that is almost a quarter of the size of York in order to hear a presentation on how, say, £10K of ward funding might be spent in a dozen villages many of which they never visit or even drive through.

For those reasons and others local residents and parish councils have expressed to me their bewilderment at the proposed boundary changes.

I am not opposed to boundary changes per se. Indeed I believe that the greatest democratic deficit to York is the result of the decision, taken some twenty years ago, to divide York into a York Outer seat and a York Central seat in parliamentary elections. This created a York where the centre does not have an investment in the surrounding villages, and the villages are not invested in the centre. This has resulted in a perpetual battle between those politicians who represent the centre and those who represent York Outer, both at MP and at councillor/local authority level. We have struggled to coordinate transport services, planning housing delivery, active travel, and much more, with each side focusing narrowly on that part of York they represent. York would be far better served, in my view, if York and its villages were divided either north/south or east/west, we would then have two MPs who had to appeal both to city centre and to rural residents. This would help us with strategic planning and infrastructure.

That is, no doubt, for another day. But I would urge the Boundary Commission to reconsider the proposal to create a mega ward to the south and east of York. I have little hope that this would improve democratic accountability or strategic development; my honest opinion is that it would simply spread elected city councillors even more thinly.

Many thanks for considering this opinion. I understand that my political party, and the parish councils and local residents will also be making representations.

Attached Documents:

None attached