

York

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Comment text:

Related subject: Osbaldwick & Derwent

Dear Sir/Madam,

Local Government Boundary Commission England - Electoral Review, York.

In response to the release of the LGBCE Draft Recommendations for Ward Arrangements in York I will begin by referring to the general city wide system but mainly confine my remarks to the implications for the current Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward that I represent.

I make these comments in the full realisation that the draft proposals put forward by the LGBCE at the behest of the political parties are unlikely to be changed.

City of York Council Electoral System.

For many years now the system of Local Government in York has been thoroughly dysfunctional and fails to engage with or maintain any degree of trust amongst the electorate and this current exercise in 'gerrymandering' is part of that dysfunction.

The opportunity was not taken up a few years ago for radical change in North Yorkshire when the 'East-West' split into two Unitary Authorities was not progressed and instead we currently have a huge North Yorkshire Council Unitary Authority and the dysfunctional, too small to be effective City of York Council Unitary Authority (CYC) with another wasteful bureaucracy having been recently imposed on the citizens of North Yorkshire & York with the York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority.

It is not just the size of CYC that contributes to the ongoing dysfunction but the putting together of rural villages with a small city centre core in the 1996 Local Government reorganisation (that most of the village residents rejected) is the main factor behind dysfunction.

Every electoral cycle sees a new council elected in a four year 'all out' election, when a Labour council has control of the council the inner city wards usually get the attention with outer wards at the back of minds, frequently such terms are brief and then result in a form of Lib/Dem/Conservative and occasionally Green coalition council before the citizens of York get fed up again and Labour return.

With a four year 'all out' election cycle this dysfunction will always continue not only is it damaging to the well being of residents and the City in general it is hugely costly when abrupt reversals in policies based on politics occur every four years.

In the absence of any willingness on the part of CYC to bring back a collaborative committee system of governance then this latest set of tinkering by the LGBCE ought to have consulted the York electorate over having one quarter of CYC members up for election every year.

Such a much more accountable system would ensure more collaborative and effective working that would have to be transparent to the electorate otherwise the control exerted by one party would be challenged every year with an election.

This type of system has been requested many times in the past without any success.

Allied to this 'institutionalised dysfunction' at CYC is the opportunity for the political parties to put forward proposals to 'gerrymander' Wards for their own electoral advantage which the LGBCE appear, from the two boundary reviews I have had the misfortune to witness, to be perfectly amenable to providing the numbers add up to enable another box to be ticked.

If the LGBCE were serious in providing real electoral accountability in York there would be a change to ALL single member Wards and not just Ward councillor numbers decided for electoral advantage.

It's an appalling set up.

Turning to the current Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward I represent and have since 2015 and previously Osbaldwick & Murton Ward from 2011.

The draft proposals for this Ward tabled by the LGBCE largely from what I can see at the behest of the Labour Group are a disgrace, nobody even bothering to hide the obvious 'gerrymandering' going on.

Prior to the 2015 local elections in York the LGBCE undertook a similar exercise in 2013 to invite views on drawing up new Ward boundaries, the Labour group made proposals for this Ward to try and get rid of me as a councillor because my forthright views were uncomfortable for them (I was told of this at the time by two principled Labour councillors so disgusted at what was going on) on the basis of 'good road links between Osbaldwick, Murton and the wider Derwent Ward - the LGBCE excepted that view then and altered the Ward into a two member Ward comprising Osbaldwick, Murton, Dunnington, Holtby and Kexby.

Whilst this arrangement was supposed to make life difficult for me I've been re-elected in 2015, 2019 and 2023 and it didn't surprise me in the least that disruption to this Ward would be proposed again, but what did surprise me was the willingness of the LGBCE to accept such blatant 'gerrymandering' even to the point of having to carve up two Parish Councils to make things fit.

In terms of the Parish Councils in York a long overdue Community Governance Review has been requested and never progressed, surely that should have been carried out by CYC before this LGBCE review especially given the changes proposed to Ward of PCs that will likely lead to parish boundary changes in time with obvious implications for local governance and finance.

Similarly requests to consider the creation of new Parish/Town Councils have been repeatedly raised for better governance in un-parished areas but have fallen on deaf ears in York in contrast to for example the NYC and Scarborough/Harrogate Town Councils recently created.

Therefore I would ask that the LGBCE review into electoral arrangements is paused until after the 2027 local elections and CYC 'encouraged' to carry out a Community Governance Review prior to reviewing electoral arrangements in York straight after the next elections which would give ample time to get the whole system right for once.

I would imagine such a request will be ignored by the LGBCE so I'll move on to the specifics of the changes proposed to the Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward.

Separation of Osbaldwick from the current parishes within the Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward with the parishes left being amalgamated in a geographically huge Ward with Elvington, Wheldrake and bizarrely Naburn, Crockey Hill and Deighton - I note with interest that this madness is then qualified by the LGBCE being opened to this being two single member Wards.

Separation of Osbaldwick from Murton, this is totally unacceptable from the point of view of geographical, road connections, history and social connections, the two parishes share a common Osbaldwick & Murton Parochial Church Council, common scouting, social groups, shared use of facilities and a strong tie between the two parishes.

The fact this 'split' has even been considered just goes to highlight the 'gerrymandering' behind the scenes.

Removal of Meadlands from the Osbaldwick or Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward - again totally unacceptable, this was suspected at the time of the last review and was strongly resisted by the then active Meadlands Area Resident's Association, it is an estate that is part of Osbaldwick Parish, has strong ties with Osbaldwick and again this should not be happening without a Community Governance review exploring if Meadlands residents have any desire to be moved to another parish which will inevitably occur if the Electoral Warding takes place - I can just see now how it will be framed - 'to avoid confusion it is recommended that the Meadlands estate becomes part of Heworth Without Parish'.

When construction of the Land West of Metcalfe Lane, now known as Derwenthorpe began in 2010 Osbaldwick Parish Council made the request for the whole parcel of land to be taken out of the Osbaldwick Parish boundary before any properties had been occupied, cognisant of the move that has now been made on Meadlands.

That request was tangled up in the stalled CYC Community Governance Review and ought to be considered again now in the light of the LGBCE draft Ward recommendations with Derwenthorpe then able to form its own distinct Parish Council.

If the current LGBCE Ward review is not going to be paused until after the 2027 Local Elections and run in tandem with a Community Governance review then the whole of the Derwenthorpe estate ought to be taken out of the electoral ward boundary and included within a Tang Hall & Derwenthorpe Ward if only to avoid confusion.

I would suggest that if numbers need to be balanced then Heworth Without electoral ward should be spread out into the Heworth Ward that could then be split into three single member Wards as there are distinct differences in the various parts of that populous area.

Splitting Osbaldwick from the other parishes on the East of the city is unacceptable given the close ties between the parishes, shared histories, shared schooling, shared facilities and of course connecting roads, the current Ward system has worked well since 2015 so why change it other than for 'gerrymandering'.

I understand the LGBCE will then try to play the numbers game to justify these proposals but the same two member Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward minus the Derwenthorpe estate works perfectly well with the numbers and of course the very, very optimistic predictions used by the LGBCE as to increased numbers by 2031 of a housing development between Osbaldwick and Stockton Lane (Heworth Without) optimistic because the housing to be built from the Osbaldwick end of the development has not even seen the submission of an Outline Planning application and we are in May 2026, assuming a submission this year, approval early next year and a year for infrastructure works I wouldn't envisage any occupation of any scale by the 2031 local elections.

Indeed Derwenthorpe 16 years after development started is still a long way from finished and fully occupied such are the timescales.

I have no doubt that the five Parish Councils in the current Osbaldwick & Derwent Ward will have comments to make on the LGBCE proposals to carve up the current ward and lump them in with areas they have little or no connections with which is hardly good electoral governance or indeed effective council administration going forward.

I will though temper expectations of anyone who wishes to contribute to the 'consultation' either as part of a Parish Council or as an individual that the LGBCE will be unlikely to take any real notice.....if the organisation was to listen the whole process would be paused until after 2027 and allow for a wide reaching Community Governance Review to take place.

Attached Documents:

None attached