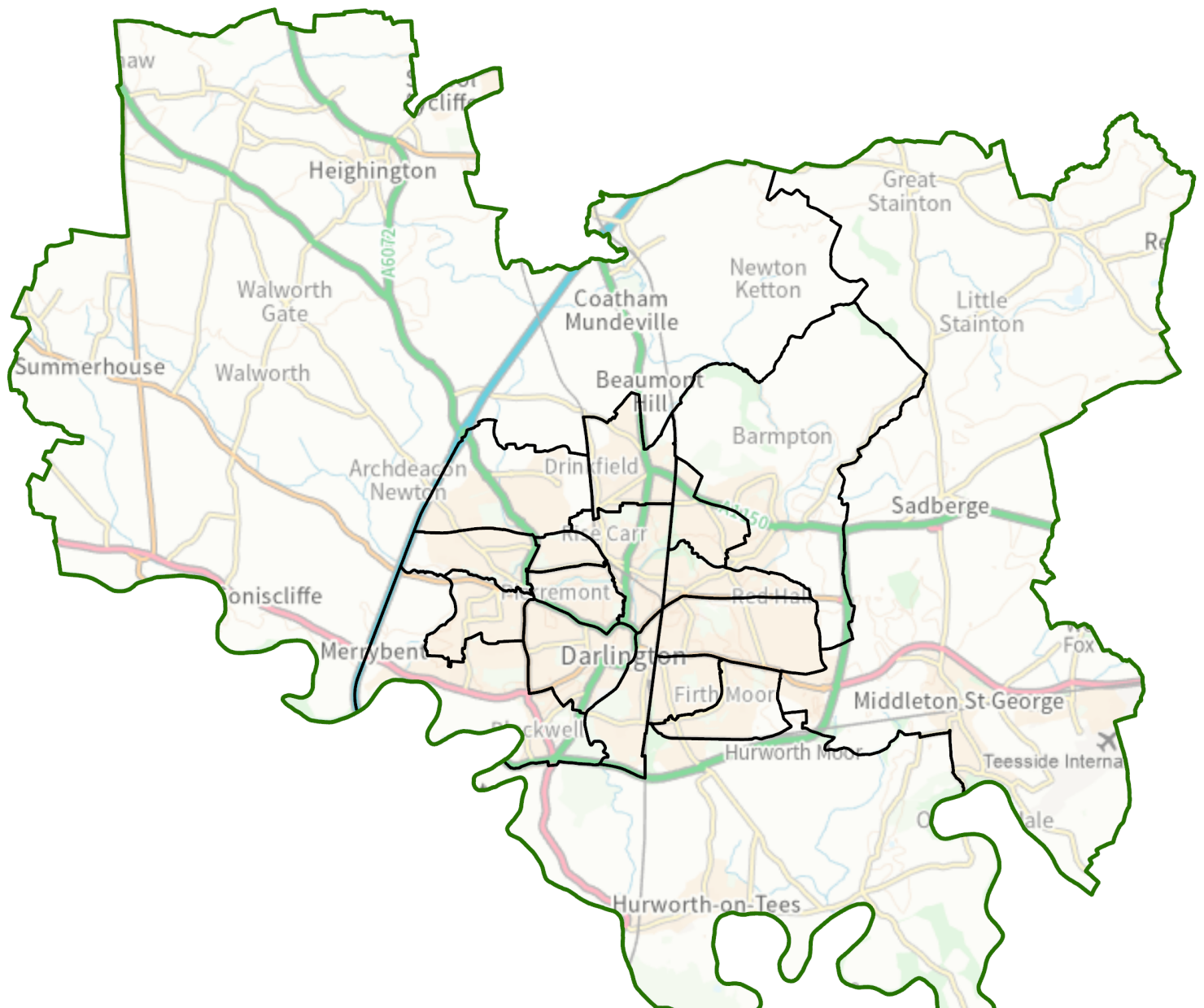




New electoral arrangements for Darlington Borough Council Final Recommendations

September 2026

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A note on our mapping:

The maps shown in this report are for illustrative purposes only. Whilst best efforts have been made by our staff to ensure that the maps included in this report are representative of the boundaries described by the text, there may be slight variations between these maps and the large PDF map that accompanies this report, or the digital mapping supplied on our consultation portal. This is due to the way in which the final mapped products are produced. The reader should therefore refer to either the large PDF supplied with this report or the digital mapping for the true likeness of the boundaries intended. The boundaries as shown on either the large PDF map or the digital mapping should always appear identical.

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Introduction

Who we are and what we do

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament.¹ We are not part of government or any political party. We are accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. Our main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England.

2 The members of the Commission are:

- Bev Smith (Chair)
- Andrew Scallan CBE (Deputy Chair)
- Dame Gillian Guy
- Wallace Sampson OBE
- Liz Treacy
- Janet Waggott
- Ailsa Irvine (Chief Executive)

What is an electoral review?

3 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority. A local authority's electoral arrangements decide:

- How many councillors are needed.
- How many wards there should be, where their boundaries are and what they should be called.
- How many councillors should represent each ward.

4 When carrying out an electoral review the Commission has three main considerations:

- Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
- Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

5 Our task is to strike the best balance between these three considerations when making our recommendations.

¹ Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

6 More detail regarding the powers that we have, as well as further guidance and information about electoral reviews and the review process in general, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Why Darlington?

7 We are conducting a review of Darlington Borough Council ('the Council') as its last review was completed in 2014, and we are required to review the electoral arrangements of every council in England 'from time to time'.² Our aim is to create 'electoral equality', where the number of electors per councillor is as even as possible, ideally within 10% of being exactly equal.

8 This electoral review is being carried out to ensure that:

- The wards in Darlington are in the best possible places to help the Council carry out its responsibilities effectively.
- The number of electors represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the borough.

Our proposals for Darlington

9 Darlington should be represented by 41 councillors, nine fewer than there are now.

10 Darlington should have 19 wards, one fewer than there is now.

11 The boundaries of almost all wards should change; one (Bank Top & Lascelles) will stay the same.

12 We have now finalised our recommendations for electoral arrangements for Darlington.

How will the recommendations affect you?

13 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the Council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward, and, in some cases, which parish council ward you vote in. Your ward name may also change.

14 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of the borough or result in changes to postcodes. They do not take into account parliamentary constituency boundaries. The recommendations will not have an effect on local

² Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 paragraph 56(1).

taxes, house prices or car and house insurance premiums, and we are not able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Review timetable

15 We wrote to the Council to ask its views on the appropriate number of councillors for Darlington. We then held two periods of consultation with the public on warding patterns for the borough. The submissions received during consultation have informed our final recommendations.

16 The review was conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
18 November 2025	Number of councillors decided
25 November 2025	Start of consultation seeking views on new wards
2 February 2026	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming draft recommendations
28 April 2026	Publication of draft recommendations; start of second consultation
6 July 2026	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming final recommendations
29 September 2026	Publication of final recommendations

Analysis and final recommendations

17 Legislation³ states that our recommendations should not be based only on how many electors⁴ there are now, but also on how many there are likely to be in the five years after the publication of our final recommendations. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for our wards.

18 In reality, we are unlikely to be able to create wards with exactly the same number of electors in each; we have to be flexible. However, we try to keep the number of electors represented by each councillor as close to the average for the council as possible.

19 We work out the average number of electors per councillor for each individual local authority by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors, as shown in the table below.

	2024	2031
Electorate of Darlington	82,040	89,947
Number of councillors	41	41
Average number of electors per councillor	2,001	2,194

20 When the number of electors per councillor in a ward is within 10% of the average for the authority, we refer to the ward as having 'good electoral equality'. Sixteen of our 19 proposed wards for Darlington are forecast to have good electoral equality by 2031.

Submissions received

21 See Appendix C for details of the submissions received. All submissions may be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Electorate figures

22 The Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2031, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2026. These forecasts were broken down to polling district level and predicted an increase in the electorate of around 10% by 2031.

23 We considered the information provided by the Council and are satisfied that the projected figures are the best available at the present time. We have used these figures to produce our final recommendations.

³ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

⁴ Electors refers to the number of people registered to vote, not the whole adult population.

24 Our mapping tool uses geocoded electoral registers supplied by the Council to locate electors, by associating addresses with specific geographic coordinates. It considers each elector's location to produce precise elector counts for each ward. There can be very slight differences between the electorate figures published on our website at the beginning of the review and the electorate figures published in this report. However, these are very minor and do not impact on our recommendations.

Number of councillors

25 Darlington Borough Council currently has 50 councillors. We have looked at evidence provided by the Council and concluded that a reduction of nine councillors will ensure the Council can carry out its roles and responsibilities effectively.

26 We therefore invited proposals for new patterns of wards that would be represented by 41 councillors.

27 We received no submissions about the number of councillors in response to our consultation on draft recommendations. We have therefore maintained 41 councillors for our final recommendations.

Ward boundaries consultation

28 We received 58 submissions in response to our consultation on ward boundaries. These included five borough-wide proposals. Those schemes mostly provided mixed patterns of two- and three-councillor wards for Darlington. The Conservative Group's was the only scheme to suggest one-councillor wards.

29 Our draft recommendations were based on elements of several of the borough-wide schemes received. We visited the area to look at the various proposals on the ground. This tour of Darlington helped us to decide between the different boundaries proposed. Our draft recommendations reflected local evidence that we received, which provided further evidence of community links and locally recognised boundaries. In some areas we considered that the proposals we received did not provide for the best balance of our statutory criteria and so we identified alternatives.

30 Our draft recommendations were for six three-councillor wards, 11 two-councillor wards and a single one-councillor ward. We considered that our draft recommendations provided for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we received such evidence during consultation.

Draft recommendations consultation

31 We received 150 submissions during consultation on our draft recommendations. These included a borough-wide submission from the Darlington Conservative Party ('the Conservative Group') as well as submissions covering

multiple areas of Darlington from the Labour Group of Darlington Borough Council ('the Labour Group') and Councillor Bryony Holroyd. These three respondents had previously submitted borough-wide schemes during the initial consultation.

32 The majority of the other submissions focused on specific areas. Our proposal to include residential roads around Woodland Terrace and Pierremont Crescent in Mowden ward was opposed, with respondents arguing that they should be included with College or Pierremont instead. Respondents in the northeast of the town wrote in to suggest that we amend the boundary between the Springfield and Whinfield & Haughton wards. Others disagreed with our proposed College & Blackwell ward considering that Blackwell has closer links with Hummersknott.

Final recommendations

33 Our final recommendations are for five three-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards and two one-councillor wards. We consider that our final recommendations will generally provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we received such evidence during consultation.

34 Our final recommendations are based on the draft recommendations with modifications to the previously proposed College & Blackwell ward and two adjacent wards (Mowden and Hummersknott), as well as a modification to the boundary between the Springfield and Whinfield & Haughton wards. These changes are based on the submissions we received to better reflect community identities in these areas. We are also making three minor modifications which we consider will better reflect communities and allow for more effective and convenient local government: to the boundary between Brinkburn and Branksome & Cockerton wards, to the boundary between Park East and North Road wards, and to include Morton Palms parish in the Sadberge & Middleton St George ward rather than the Hurworth ward.

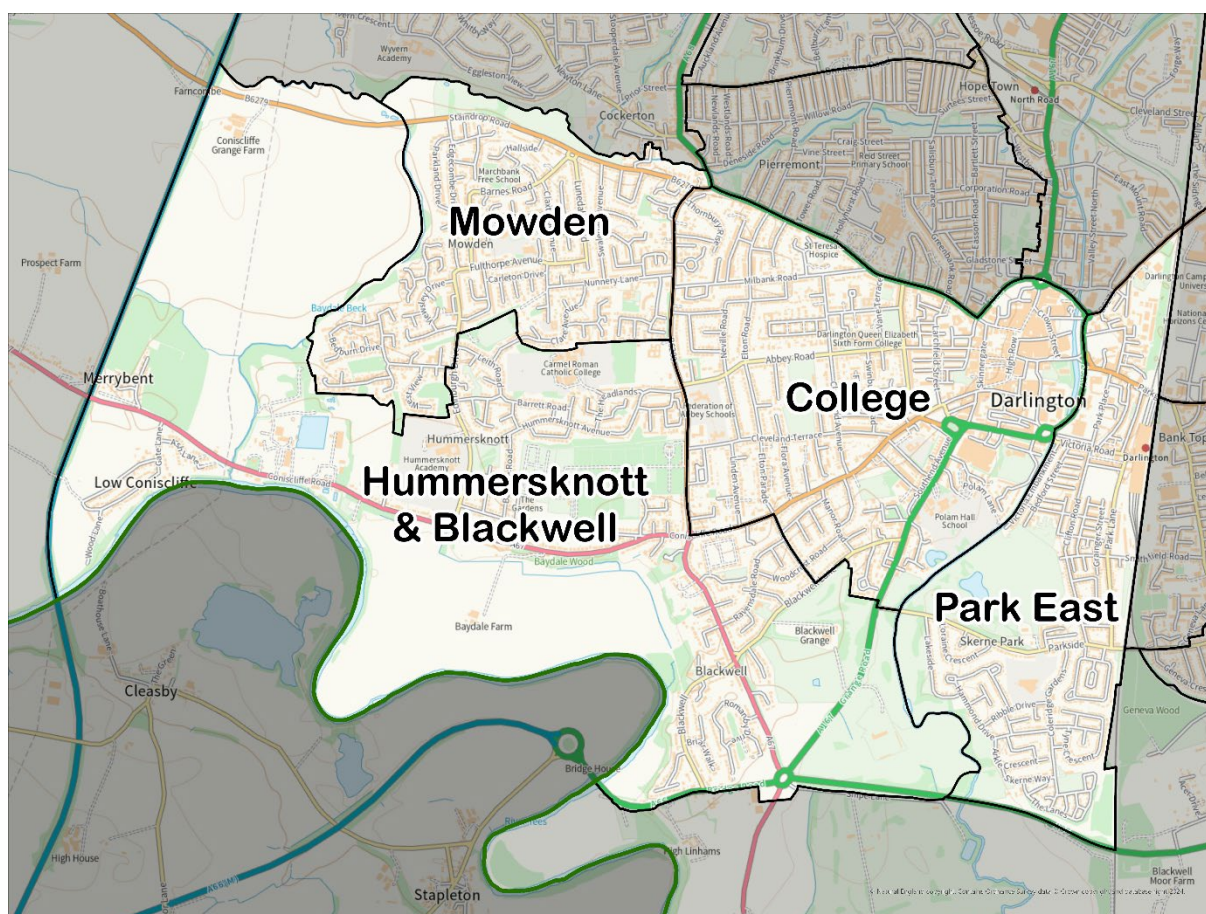
35 The tables and maps on pages 8–26 detail our final recommendations for each area of Darlington. They detail how the proposed warding arrangements reflect the three statutory⁵ criteria of:

- Equality of representation.
- Reflecting community interests and identities.
- Providing for effective and convenient local government.

36 A summary of our proposed new wards is set out in the table starting on page 33 and on the large map accompanying this report.

⁵ Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Central and Southwest



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
College	3	1%
Hummersknott & Blackwell	2	9%
Mowden	2	-4%
Park East	2	-1%

37 We are recommending four wards in this Central and Southwest area of Darlington which includes the town centre, Skerne Park, Blackwell, Mowden and Hummersknott. We note that it is separated from the rest of the borough by strong boundaries including the A66 ring road, the East Coast Main Line, the A167, the A68, the Cocker Beck river and the A1(M) motorway.

38 We received proposals to change the boundaries as set out in our draft recommendations in several areas here. Respondents suggested alternative boundaries between Mowden and College wards where we had previously included an area to the east of Carmel Road North in a Mowden ward. Respondents also opposed our decision to include Blackwell in a ward with the College area. Many respondents considered that we should instead include it with the Hummersknott area, with which they considered it shared greater links.

39 In Park East, respondents suggested that we should amend the ward's northern boundary, aligning it to an existing boundary in that area.

40 We have sought to reflect these views and have made some amendments as part of our final recommendations. We consider that, on the basis of the submissions received, our final recommendations will provide a better reflection of our statutory criteria, particularly in relation to community identities.

College, Hummersknott & Blackwell and Mowden

41 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed a two-member Mowden ward similar to the existing ward, but which also included several residential roads east of Carmel Road North and north of Milbank Road. We did this to improve the electoral equality of our proposed Mowden ward.

42 We received a large number of submissions here, notably from residents of Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens and Woodland Terrace. Almost all these respondents, including Councillor Culley of Mowden ward, agreed that roads we had proposed including in Mowden were not suited to that ward, noting the strength of Carmel Road North as a boundary between distinct communities. Of the more than 20 responses we had about these roads, the majority favoured a warding pattern in which these streets are included in a College ward, like the existing arrangement. A smaller proportion of respondents, including the Conservative Group, suggested including the streets in Pierremont ward to the north. A few responses, including one from the Labour Group, did not express a preference but noted that the area should be kept together in one ward and was distinct from Mowden, which had different concerns.

43 We considered the responses we received regarding this area and were persuaded that these streets should not be included in a Mowden ward and should instead be included in either a College or Pierremont ward.

44 We considered all the information we had received and concluded that there are greater community ties between this area and College than with Pierremont. We were told that children in the area attend the Abbey schools in College ward and that there are overlapping transport concerns for their area and College, which is a walkable community with important links into the town centre. In contrast, respondents who suggested that these streets should be included in Pierremont provided more limited evidence of shared community ties between areas on either side of the A68.

45 We additionally consider that Milbank Road is a more residential road that is less suitable as a ward boundary. In contrast, we consider that the A68 (Woodland Road) is a busier thoroughfare that acts as a more natural barrier. We consider that

using the A68 as a boundary provides for more effective and convenient local government, and that it is better understood as a local boundary by residents.

46 We note that by including the streets north of Milbank Road in a College ward, our proposed Mowden ward would have too few electors based on 2031 forecasts to provide for a good level of electoral equality.

47 Several respondents, including Councillor Culley, suggested that to address this electoral imbalance it would be appropriate to include areas around Tees Grange Avenue in a Mowden ward. They noted that this area has community ties across both the Hummersknott area (its existing ward) and the Mowden area.

48 We also received alternative proposals for the boundary between Mowden and Hummersknott in the area north of Carmel College. The Conservative Group and several residents proposed including Broadmeadows, Hillclose Avenue and part of Clare Avenue in Mowden, noting that we had previously identified the Carmel College grounds as a natural boundary between Mowden and Hummersknott.

49 We agree that the residential areas around Tees Grange Avenue, Broadmeadows, Hillclose Avenue and Clare Avenue share community ties with Mowden and would be well represented in a Mowden ward; we also consider that this arrangement would provide a good reflection of electoral equality for both wards.

50 We therefore propose a two-member Mowden ward similar to the existing arrangements, including an eastern boundary of Carmel Road North and with an amended southern boundary to include the residential areas described above. We are persuaded that this ward provides for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and using well-understood boundaries.

51 Another area where people opposed our draft recommendations and proposed alternatives related to the community of Blackwell. In our draft recommendations we proposed a three-member College & Blackwell ward which included the town centre, the area west of the centre – which was largely the same as the existing College ward – and Blackwell.

52 We received about 25 submissions in this area, the majority of which opposed our proposal to include Blackwell in a ward with the existing College ward area.

53 Several residents of the existing College ward said the proposals did not reflect local communities. They accepted the logic of a ward covering the town centre and nearby areas to the west and south but argued that Blackwell has a distinct suburban character and different concerns. They said that areas around Abbey Road, Stanhope Park, Southend Avenue, Greener Drive and South Terrace have strong links to the town centre and should be in the same ward. They cited shared

concerns for this area such as parking, traffic congestion and access to town centre shops.

54 Respondents including the Conservative Group and residents and community groups in Blackwell noted that Blackwell has existed as a distinct settlement for many years and that it remains a recognisable and cohesive community today. They listed the Post Office, the New Blackwell Lawn Tennis Club, All Saints' Church, Blackwell Meadows RFC and Blackwell Heritage Parkland as facilities which are understood by locals as core institutions and which evidence a shared Blackwell community. They suggested that Blackwell has more in common with Hummersknott, another suburban community with similar concerns. They noted that there are shared green spaces between the two areas, specifically the Broken Scar riverside walk and West Cemetery. They also noted transport connections between Hummersknott and Blackwell, including bus routes along Coniscliffe Road.

55 While we note there was some support for the principle of a College & Blackwell ward, we have been persuaded that College and Blackwell should not be in the same ward. We consider that comments from residents of Blackwell demonstrate shared community ties between their area and Hummersknott, including similar suburban characteristics.

56 We consider that Carmel Road North and Coniscliffe Road west of the Carmel Road roundabout act as strong boundaries in this area. We also note that using Hartford Road as a northeastern boundary for a Blackwell ward allows that ward to contain all the key facilities identified as essential to the local community understanding of Blackwell. Any boundary further north than Hartford Road would result in a Blackwell ward with a forecast variance beyond 10%, and in the absence of any specific evidence about where the boundary between wards should lie in this area, we consider that Hartford Road is appropriate.

57 We therefore propose a two-member Hummersknott & Blackwell ward based upon these changes, which we consider best reflects our statutory criteria, especially the evidence of community ties between these two areas identified by respondents. Our proposed boundaries for this ward also result in good electoral equality by 2031. This ward comprises the suburban communities of Hummersknott and Blackwell as well as the housing developments at Coniscliffe Park and existing settlements east of the A1(M) at Merrybent Drive and Low Coniscliffe.

58 We are also proposing a three-member College ward which does not include Blackwell but does include the area east of Carmel Road North and north of Milbank Road. We consider that this ward reflects the community ties between the town centre and areas west of the centre (largely the same as the existing College ward) which were identified by local residents. We also consider that this ward uses strong

boundaries, such as Carmel Road North, the A68 and the River Skerne, and it will have good forecast electoral equality.

Park East

59 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed a two-member Park East ward which was similar to the existing ward, though without the town centre.

60 Respondents including the Conservative Group generally supported our draft recommendations for Park East, as well as the principle of including the town centre in a ward with areas to its west and south. We note the Labour Group considered that this arrangement would not provide for effective local government. It suggested, as did one resident, that the town centre should be retained in Park East; others proposed that the centre should be represented by a single councillor as a standalone ward.

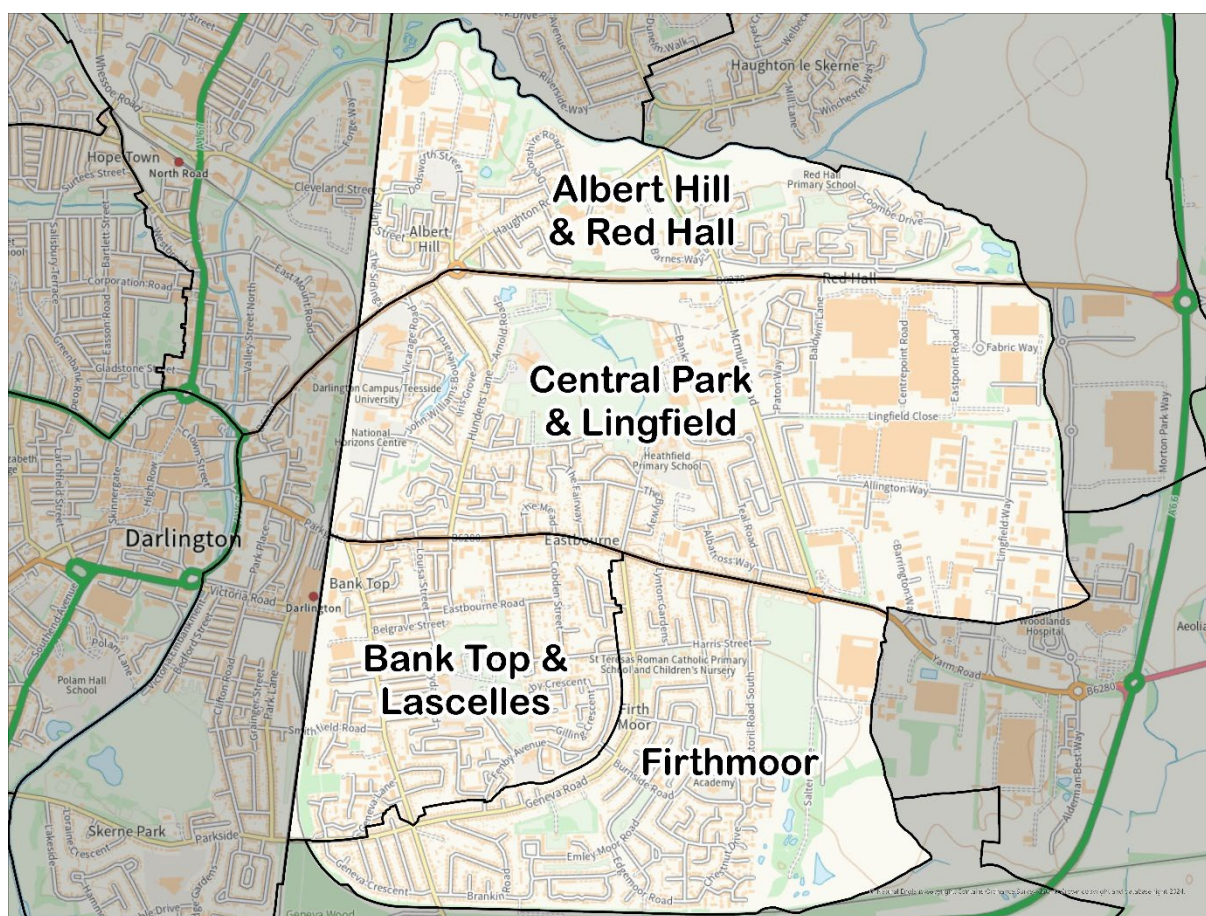
61 We consider that there has been significant local support for a warding pattern where the town centre is paired with the College area and we are not persuaded by the Labour Group's proposals to retain the town centre in Park East.

62 We are also not persuaded to move away from using the River Skerne as a boundary, which was proposed by one respondent who noted that the community around South Terrace forms one conservation area with the neighbourhood east of the river. While we note this conservation area, we consider the River Skerne forms a strong and identifiable boundary and should be retained.

63 The Labour Group and Councillor Holroyd suggested an amendment to the proposed northeastern boundary between Park East and North Road, specifically at Haughton Road rather than Parkgate. Councillor Holroyd noted that the Hippodrome theatre and surrounding streets should be within Park East rather than North Road, where the core of the community is much further away. We agree that Haughton Road provides a clearer and more identifiable boundary between the two wards.

64 We therefore propose a two-member Park East ward with a northeastern boundary along Haughton Road as part of our final recommendations. This ward is forecast to have good electoral equality by 2031.

Eastbourne



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Albert Hill & Red Hall	1	3%
Bank Top & Lascelles	2	4%
Central Park & Lingfield	2	3%
Firthmoor	2	9%

65 The Eastbourne area of Darlington includes several neighbourhoods in the east of the town. We consider this area, which is bounded by the East Coast Main Line, the Tees Valley railway line, the River Skerne and the boundaries of adjacent parishes, should comprise four wards as detailed below.

Albert Hill & Red Hall and Central Park & Lingfield

66 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed a three-member Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall ward. At that stage we noted that the B6279 (Tornado Way) was a busy road and that all the schemes received during the initial consultation suggested using it as a ward boundary. However, we still proposed a ward which crossed that road and included communities on both sides of Tornado Way.

67 We received several submissions from residents of this ward, as well as comments from the Conservative Group, all of which reiterated that Tornado Way is considered by residents as a strong boundary. These respondents further suggested that a pattern featuring a single-member Albert Hill & Red Hall ward and a two-member Central Park & Lingfield ward would better reflect local community identity by grouping together neighbourhoods that share stronger ties. They considered that Central Park and Lingfield are names that people use to understand their area and suggested we use both names in the proposed ward.

68 The Labour Group did not agree with our draft recommendations; it suggested that the proposed three-member ward 'brings together areas that are distinct in character, layout and identity'. It also reiterated the arguments that Tornado Way is 'a real boundary with only a single crossing point' and that 'it is not a road that connects local communities'.

69 It proposed one ward in line with its scheme from the initial consultation, namely a three-member Haughton-le-Skerne ward crossing the River Skerne to include Haughton, Springfield, Albert Hill and Red Hall. It did note that, to fit 'within the constraints of LGBCE proposals south of Yarm Road' it would consider a two-member Lingfield ward bounded by Yarm Road and Tornado Way.

70 We consider that there is significant evidence from all respondents to suggest that Tornado Way should be used as a boundary. We do not consider that there are strong community ties between Albert Hill and Red Hall with Haughton or Springfield, and we consider that the River Skerne is more of a boundary between these areas than a shared facility used by those areas (as suggested by the Labour Group).

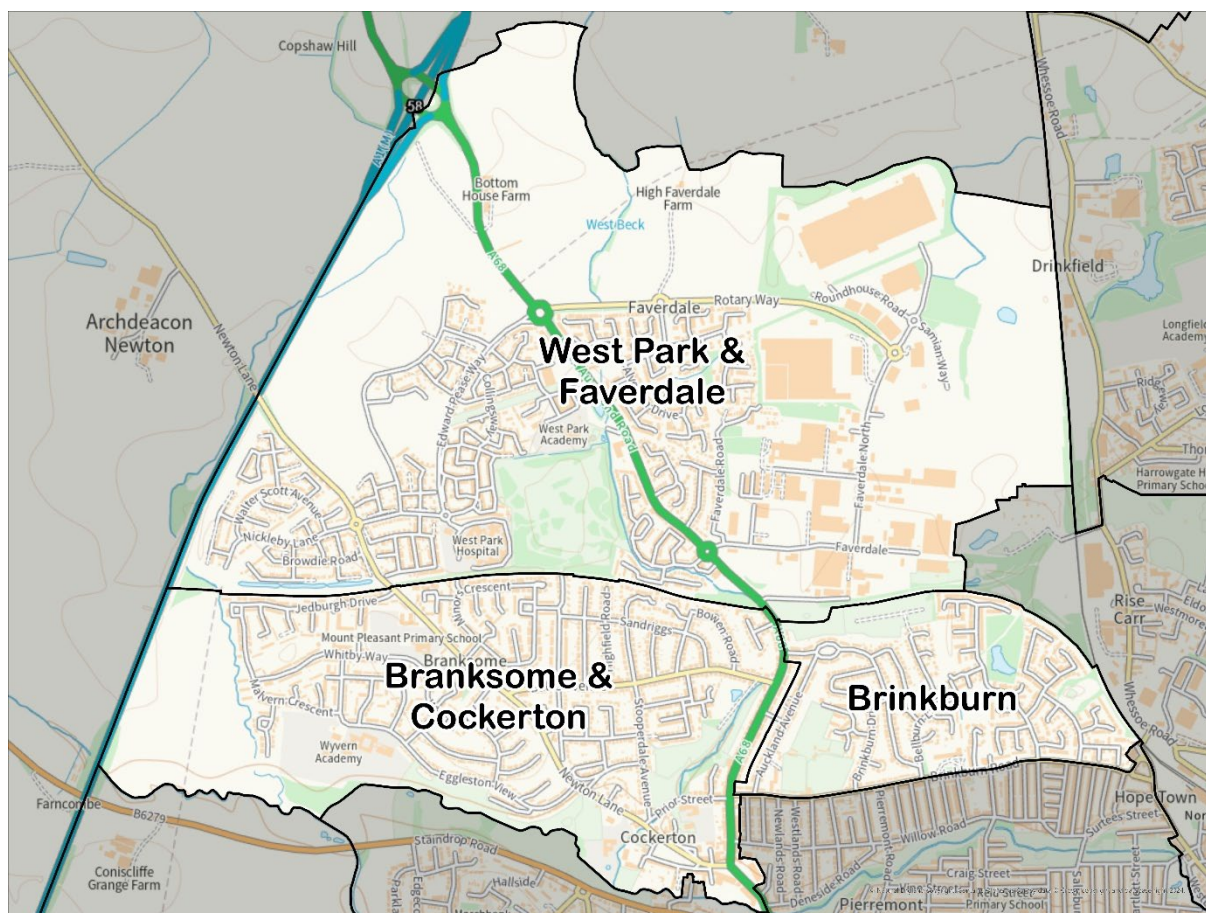
71 We therefore propose a single-member Albert Hill & Red Hall ward in line with the proposals of the Conservative Group and local residents. We additionally propose a two-member Central Park & Lingfield ward with boundaries as suggested by residents, the Conservative Group and the Labour Group. We consider that the Central Park and Lingfield areas have the most significance to locals and are therefore best suited to be used in the name of the ward.

Bank Top & Lascelles and Firthmoor

72 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed two two-member wards south of Yarm Road: Bank Top & Lascelles and Firthmoor. We received no specific responses concerned with these proposals. The Conservative Group supported our draft recommendations for both wards in this area, noting that they reflect clearly established communities.

73 We therefore retain our draft recommendations as final for these two wards.

Faverdale and Brinkburn



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Branksome & Cockerton	2	10%
Brinkburn	1	8%
West Park & Faverdale	2	12%

Branksome & Cockerton and Brinkburn

74 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed a two-member Branksome & Cockerton ward and a single-member Brinkburn ward. We received relatively few submissions specifically regarding these wards.

75 Two respondents noted that Brinkburn was the only single-member ward included in our draft recommendations and questioned whether it would be difficult for a single councillor to represent a ward without the support of another councillor.

76 One of these responses further suggested that there are shared ties between Brinkburn and Pierremont, with residents from both wards frequenting pubs and churches which lie along the Brinkburn Road. They did note, however, that 'boundaries need to lie somewhere and Brinkburn Road is a strong natural boundary'

and further agreed with the draft recommendations by suggesting that 'Brinkburn is a distinct area from Faverdale, and likewise from Cockerton and Branksome.'

77 The Conservative Group supported our draft recommendations for both wards, noting that they reflect the reality of local communities and use strong boundaries.

78 The Labour Group supported our draft recommendations with one amendment: it suggested that the proposed boundary between the two wards, along the A68 (West Auckland Road), should run down the middle of the road, rather than behind the houses on the east side of the road. They suggested that this would result in a more easily understandable boundary. Councillor B. Holroyd also made this suggestion.

79 Councillor Holroyd proposed two two-member wards comprising the Brinkburn and Pierremont areas, considering that they would allow for more effective and convenient local government than a warding pattern with a single-member ward. We note this arrangement would result in wards with forecast variances beyond 30% and we are not persuaded to adopt wards with such poor electoral equality.

80 Councillor Holroyd additionally suggested that the eastern boundary of Branksome & Cockerton ward should lie behind the buildings which face the West Auckland Road. She noted that these buildings are shops and amenities used by Cockerton residents, including the Cockerton Club and Cockerton police station.

81 We consider that a single-member Brinkburn ward reflects community ties and uses identifiable boundaries. We do not consider that the evidence received opposing single-member wards, namely that they do not allow for effective or convenient local government or result in weaker councillor responsiveness, is sufficient, particularly as we are not persuaded that there is an alternative pattern of multi-member wards in this part of Darlington that would better reflect our statutory criteria.

82 We are persuaded to amend the boundary by including properties on the east side of West Auckland Road in the Branksome & Cockerton ward, as suggested by Councillor Holroyd. Although we note the requests to run the boundary in the middle of the road north of Brinkburn Road, we note that this would result in a Brinkburn ward with a forecast variance of 12%. We consider that retaining this boundary as proposed previously better balances our consideration for electoral equality with our other statutory criteria.

83 We therefore propose a single-member Brinkburn ward unchanged from our draft recommendations and a two-member Branksome & Cockerton ward with a minor amendment to include additional Cockerton amenities east of West Auckland Road.

West Park & Faverdale

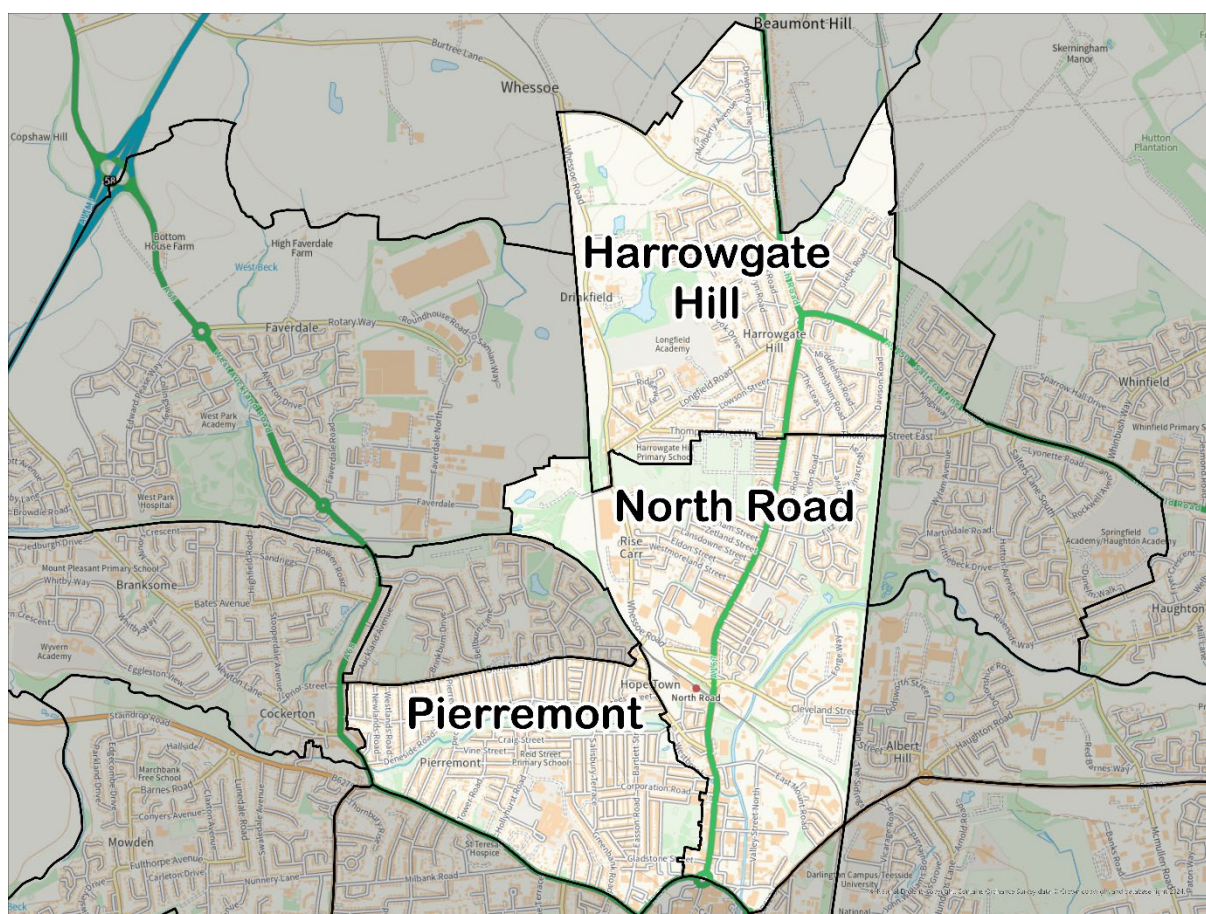
84 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed a two-member Faverdale ward. The Conservative Group supported our draft recommendations here. One respondent suggested that the ward's northern boundary could be extended to include more of the Burtree Lane development.

85 We note the proposal to extend the northern boundary to reflect the Burtree Lane development; however, as noted in our last report, we consider that it is challenging to anticipate the precise positioning of future housing around the north of this area. We do not yet know how those developments will shape communities, and we have therefore opted to retain the existing northern boundary of the ward rather than attempt to predict its full extent in the future.

86 We agree with respondents here that West Park should be included in the ward name, noting that it is already represented locally in places such as West Park Hospital and West Park Academy.

87 We therefore propose a two-member West Park & Faverdale ward with the same boundaries as our draft recommendations, but with a name more reflective of how people understand their area.

Harrowgate Hill and Pierremont



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Harrowgate Hill	3	-10%
North Road	2	-3%
Pierremont	3	-5%

Harrowgate Hill

88 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed a three-member Harrowgate Hill ward with a southern boundary extended from the existing ward to include the Harrowgate Hill Primary School. We also proposed an amended northern boundary to include the full new developments west of Beaumont Hill.

89 We did not receive any submissions specific to the Harrowgate Hill ward. Councillor Holroyd supported the inclusion of the ongoing Berrymead housing developments in our proposed Harrowgate Hill ward but suggested that the ward should also include areas east of the A167 which are designated for a potential future development site. She noted that this development, which she referred to as the Banks development, is scheduled to go to the Council's planning applications committee in the near future and suggested that once complete it will extend Darlington's urban footprint further into currently rural areas of Whessoe parish.

90 In the Conservative Group's response, it approved of the Harrowgate Hill ward from our draft recommendations. In particular, it supported the changes which mean that the Longfield community is no longer divided between wards.

91 We note that the Banks development as it is currently proposed falls within our proposed Heighington & High Coniscliffe ward. However, we consider that this development is still in its planning stage and that its ultimate footprint or timeline could still be amended. We do not consider an expansion of Harrowgate Hill's boundaries in anticipation of the development's potential extent would accurately reflect the existing community ties for residents of Beaumont Hill or its surrounding rural areas, which share more in common with neighbouring parishes rather than a ward consisting of built-up neighbourhoods of Darlington town.

92 We therefore propose retaining the Harrowgate Hill ward as set out in our draft recommendations as part of our final recommendations.

North Road

93 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed a two-member North Road ward along the A167 (North Road) between Harrowgate Hill and the town centre.

94 We received four submissions from local residents in this ward. Two respondents supported the draft recommendations; one of those noted that 'the railway line makes sense as one of the barriers for the new ward' and that 'it also makes sense for both sides of North Road to be in this new ward as this is the main road into town and out to the motorway so we use it frequently.'

95 The two other respondents suggested that the ward's southern boundary should be the B6279 (Haughton Road) rather than Parkgate. One respondent noted that 'there are limited crossings of the B6279 to link to the rest of North Road' and that amenities south of the road, including those around the Hippodrome, were better linked to the south with Park East.

96 These reflections were echoed by submissions from the Labour Group and Councillor Holroyd. They both suggested that North Road's southern extent should be the B6279 (Haughton Road) to better reflect local community ties. The Conservative Group supported our draft recommendations here, suggesting our proposals represent an improvement on the current arrangements.

97 We are persuaded by the evidence regarding the lack of connection between North Road with areas around Parkgate and therefore propose a two-member North Road ward with a southern boundary of the B6279 (Haughton Road) as suggested by respondents.

Pierremont

98 As part of our draft recommendations we proposed a three-member Pierremont ward similar to the existing arrangements but including areas between Greenbank Road and the Cocker Beck river.

99 We did not receive any submissions specifically concerned with this proposed ward, excluding those which suggested that it should include the areas around Woodland Terrace, Pierremont Gardens and Pierremont Crescent as described in the Mowden section of this report (paragraphs 42–45). The Pierremont Crescent & Gardens Residents' Association suggested that 'excluding these streets from the proposed ward does not accurately reflect the established community boundaries that residents recognise and experience in their daily lives.'

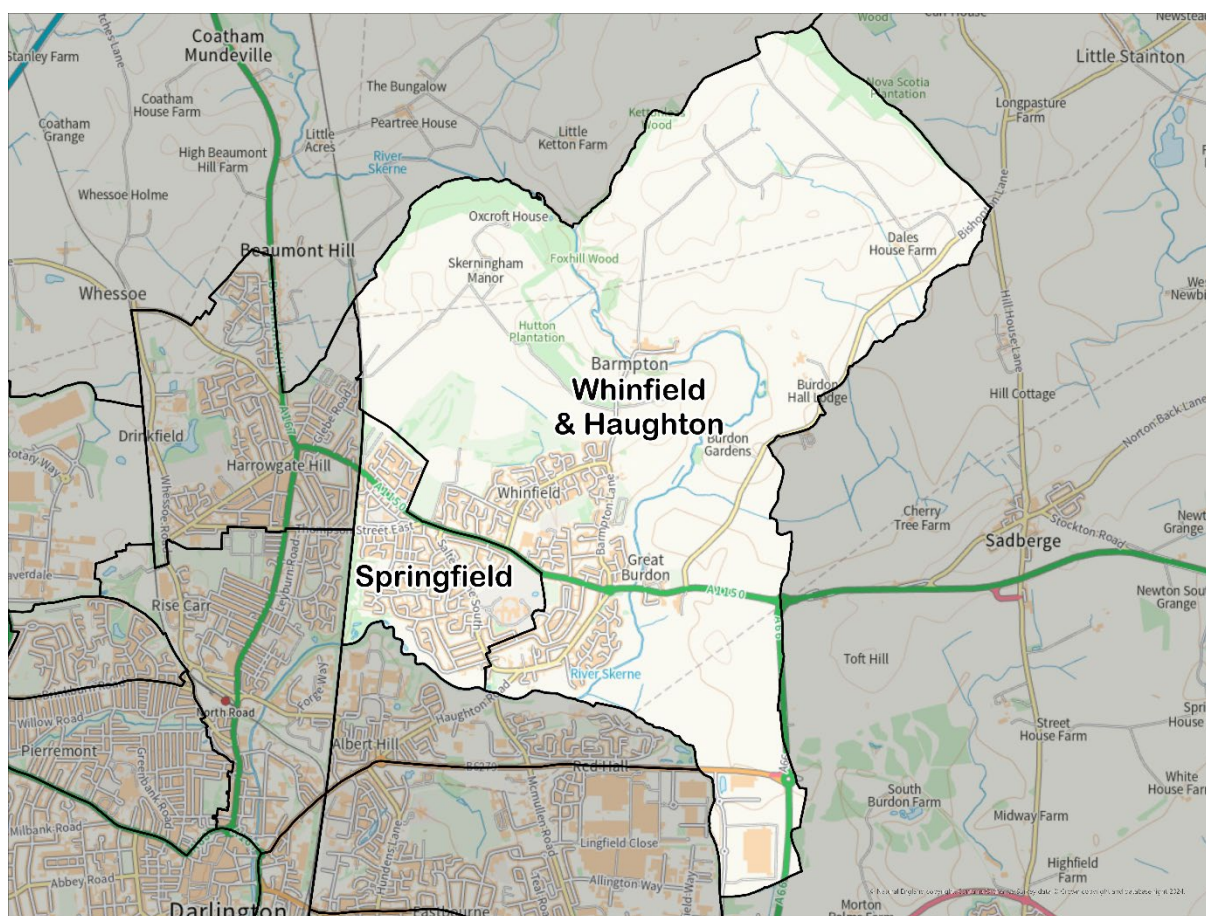
100 The Conservative Group, as noted above, suggested an amended Pierremont ward which would include the residential roads between Milbank Road and the A68 (Woodland Road). Councillor Holroyd, as mentioned above, suggested amendments to both Pierremont and Brinkburn wards such that they would both be represented by two members (rather than three and one, respectively). In the Brinkburn section of this report we note that such a pattern would have either electoral inequality or result in a division of communities that we consider unacceptable.

101 The Labour Group supported our draft recommendations and name for Pierremont but suggested an amended eastern boundary extended to the A167 (North Road) rather than the Cocker Beck river, as it considered houses between those areas more closely affiliate with Pierremont than North Road.

102 We note that there was general support for a Pierremont ward as proposed. As noted in the College section above, we consider that the area around Pierremont Crescent has greater shared community ties with College and that the A68 is a strong boundary between that area and the Pierremont ward. We also note the comments of the resident of North Road who suggested that it makes sense for that ward to include both sides of North Road to be represented together.

103 We therefore propose retaining the three-member Pierremont ward from our draft recommendations as part of our final recommendations.

Haughton, Whinfield and Springfield



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Springfield	2	-11%
Whinfield & Haughton	3	1%

Springfield and Whinfield & Haughton

104 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed a three-member Haughton & Whinfield ward, including the parishes of Barmpton and Great Burdon, as well as Whinfield, Oakwood Drive and Haughton-le-Skerne. We proposed a two-member Springfield ward including areas adjacent to Salters Lane South. Both wards were bounded by parish boundaries in the north and east, the River Skerne to the south and the East Coast Main Line to the west.

105 We received almost 50 submissions about these wards. Ten supported the draft recommendations, including the Whinfield Residents' Association, suggesting that there are strong community ties between Haughton and Whinfield, with Whinfield residents regularly using shops and other amenities in Haughton. Another five respondents requested retaining a warding pattern where Springfield and Haughton are within the same ward. The remainder of the responses were concerned with where the specific boundary between the two wards should be.

106 Over 20 respondents suggested that our proposed Haughton & Whinfield ward should be extended westwards to include residential roads such as Welbeck Avenue and Fryer Crescent, noting that they have community ties with Haughton-le-Skerne, including use of the village green, shared community projects and a residents' association. These residents suggested that although Springfield is close, they felt closer to Haughton and described it as an area that they felt part of.

107 We received three responses requesting that Cottage Mews be included in a Haughton ward. They suggested that 'Cottage Mews forms part of the historic Haughton-le-Skerne village area' and that 'residents of Cottage Mews identify strongly with Haughton.'

108 Councillor N. Wallis, of the existing Haughton & Springfield ward, noted that 'residents in Welbeck Avenue, Cottage Mews and the roads off of the southern part of Hutton Avenue' see themselves as part of the Haughton community. He additionally suggested that the wards we proposed should be renamed as Haughton Village & Whinfield and Haughton West & Springfield, to reflect the local understanding of residents around Welbeck Avenue who consider themselves as part of Haughton.

109 Councillor J. Bartch and Councillor A. Keir, who represent the existing Whinfield ward, largely supported our draft recommendations. They noted that they had led a local engagement exercise with residents which elicited overwhelming support for our draft recommendations, specifically the proposals to bring together Haughton village, Whinfield and adjacent rural parishes with incoming developments in a single ward. Both councillors suggested including the Oakwood Drive estate in Springfield ward, suggesting that Springfield Park 'provides a stronger and more natural boundary than the A167' and that Oakwood Drive residents have closer day-to-day connections with Springfield than with Haughton or Whinfield. This approach was also supported by the Conservative Group.

110 They also suggested that, as Whinfield will account for most of the electorate for our proposed ward, the ward name should be changed to Whinfield & Haughton to recognise Whinfield's status as a distinct community 'rather than simply an extension of Haughton'. A resident also put forward this name, suggesting that 'putting Whinfield first in the name would better reflect the makeup of the ward while still recognising the important role Haughton plays within the wider community.'

111 About 10 respondents from Middleton St George also supported the decision to include Barmpton in a Whinfield & Haughton ward, noting a lack of ties between Barmpton with either Sadberge or Middleton St George. They also suggested that the incoming large-scale developments proposed within Barmpton and Great Burdon parishes will 'more likely be connected with [Darlington town] in the future'.

112 The Labour Group did not support our draft recommendations. It reiterated its proposal from the initial consultation: to link Haughton-le-Skerne with Red Hall, south of the River Skerne. It suggested that both areas use the green space around the river and thus have shared community ties. While we agree that Red Hall has a distinct identity from many of its adjacent communities, we could not identify a pattern of wards which would unify it with Haughton without crossing strong natural boundaries or splitting existing communities elsewhere. We therefore consider it is better represented in the Albert Hill & Red Hall ward described above.

113 We note that a ward including both Springfield and Haughton together would have too many electors to be represented by two councillors and too few electors to be represented by three councillors while providing a good level of electoral equality. We consider that any pattern of wards which would retain the Springfield and Haughton communities together within one ward would divide adjacent communities.

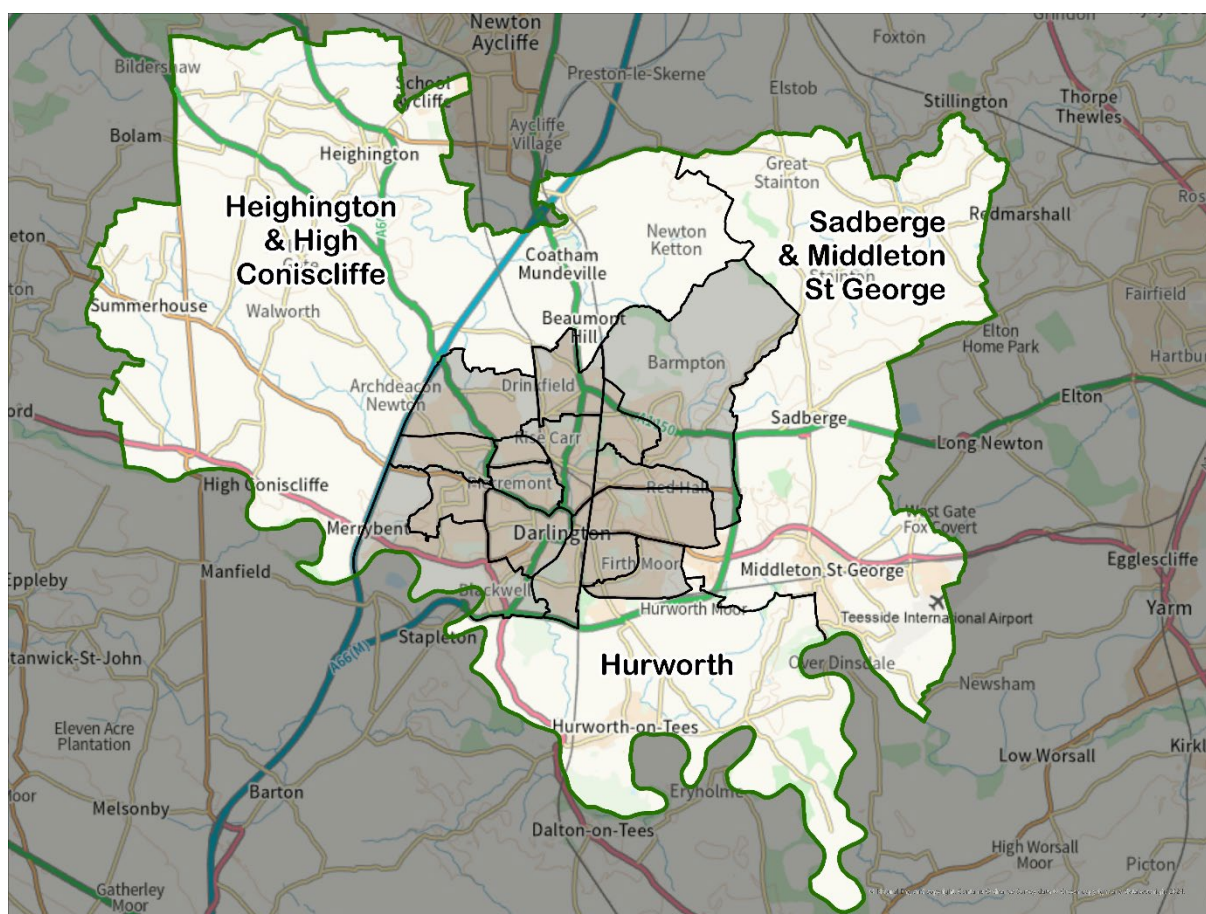
114 We are persuaded by the evidence presented in the submissions from residents of Welbeck Avenue, Fryer Crescent, Feetham Avenue, Gouldsmith Gardens and Cottage Mews; namely, that people living on these roads consider themselves to be part of the Haughton area and that they should be included in a Haughton ward. We are also persuaded by the suggestions that Oakwood Drive should be included with Springfield, with which it shares greater community ties than the Whinfield or Haughton areas (and from which it is separated by Springfield Park).

115 We note that transferring the areas above between wards as described results in a Springfield ward with a forecast variance of -11%; however, we consider that the evidence provided for including these streets supports their inclusion in a Haughton ward even with slightly poorer electoral equality. We note that including additional roads further from Haughton, such as Salters Avenue or Hutton Avenue, would result in a Springfield ward with a forecast variance of -15%. We consider that these roads have fewer links to Haughton and are not persuaded to include them in a Haughton ward on the basis that that level of electoral inequality has not been justified.

116 We are persuaded by the comments which suggested that Whinfield & Haughton would be a more representative ward name here. We do not consider that Councillor Wallis' name suggestions would be appropriate, especially in light of the changes we are proposing as part of our final recommendations.

117 We propose a three-member Whinfield & Haughton ward and a two-member Springfield ward, with amendments to draft recommendation boundaries as described above, as part of our final recommendations.

Hurworth, Heighington and Middleton



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Heighington & High Coniscliffe	2	-5%
Hurworth	2	-12%
Sadberge & Middleton St George	3	1%

Heighington & High Coniscliffe

118 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed a two-member Heighington & High Coniscliffe ward broadly the same as the current Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, with amendments to take account of new housing developments adjacent to built-up areas of Darlington town in the north and southwest. We also proposed including the parish of Archdeacon Newton to the west of the A1(M) in this ward.

119 One respondent opposed our proposal to divide Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent parish between borough wards. Councillor Holroyd noted that the Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent communities might be better represented in the Heighington & High Coniscliffe ward than in a Hummersknott ward, as in our draft recommendations. We note that this arrangement would result in a parish ward containing hardly any electors as it comprises only developments that are not yet inhabited. We do not consider that small parish wards allow for effective or convenient local government.

120 The Conservative Group supported our proposals here, noting that they reflect the identity of the rural communities in this part of Darlington.

121 We therefore propose retaining our draft recommendations for Heighington & High Coniscliffe as part of our final recommendations.

Hurworth and Sadberge & Middleton St George

122 As part of our draft recommendations in this area, we proposed a two-member Hurworth ward comprising the parishes of Hurworth, Neasham and Morton Palms, as well as the unparished area between the A66 and the Tees Valley rail line, resulting in a ward with a -4% variance. We additionally proposed a three-member Sadberge & Middleton St George ward similar to the existing ward but excluding the parishes of Morton Palms (included in Hurworth) as well as Barmpton and Great Burdon (included in the proposed Haughton & Whinfield ward).

123 We received around a dozen submissions regarding these wards, of which 10 were in support of our draft recommendations. This included Neasham Parish Council, which supported both the proposed boundaries and name of Hurworth. One other resident also supported retaining the existing name of Hurworth.

124 Councillor L. Tostevin and Councillor P. Walters, who represent the existing Hurworth ward, supported our draft recommendations for Hurworth. They presented our proposals to the Hurworth annual assembly, Hurworth Parish Council and Neasham Parish Council and noted that residents in attendance at those meetings were also supportive of the draft recommendations. They noted that there is already a Hurworth parish councillor representing the Elderbrook and Hurworth Gardens housing developments north of the A66, and that residents of those areas share some of the same facilities and transport routes as people in Hurworth village. They also agreed that retaining Hurworth as the name of the ward is appropriate.

125 The Conservative Group supported our draft recommendations for Hurworth, as well as for Sadberge & Middleton St George, with no suggested amendments. The Labour Group did not comment on our proposals for either ward.

126 Councillor Holroyd and one resident disagreed with the inclusion of new housing developments around Butterfield Drive in a Hurworth ward, suggesting that they would be better served with elements of built-up Darlington as part of either the Park East or Firthmoor wards. Another respondent suggested that a new parish should be created for the ongoing developments north of the A66; however, we note these changes cannot be considered by our borough ward review, and would instead need to be addressed by a Community Governance Review (CGR) led by Darlington Borough Council.

127 Two respondents objected to the inclusion of Morton Palms parish in our proposed Hurworth ward. One of these was Councillor Pease of Sadberge & Middleton St George ward, who objected on the basis that residents in Morton Palms have little connection to Hurworth and would more regularly pass through Middleton St George. He suggested that the boundary here should instead run along the Darlington to Middlesbrough rail line; however, we note that this would divide the parish of Morton Palms and result in an unviable parish ward (i.e. one which is too small to be represented effectively).

128 Both submissions regarding Morton Palms also noted that our proposed boundary between Hurworth and Sadberge & Middleton St George splits a planned development site. The respondents noted that the site plan straddles the parishes of Morton Palms and Middleton St George, and that a warding arrangement where those parishes are not in the same ward would therefore divide the site between borough wards. They therefore suggested that Morton Palms should be included in a Sadberge & Middleton St George ward.

129 We additionally received several identical submissions from residents of Sadberge & Middleton St George ward supporting our draft recommendations. These respondents suggested that Barmpton parish, which we proposed including in Haughton & Whinfield, is more appropriately included in that ward due to the proposed Skerningham development which will cover much of Barmpton's parished area. They also suggested that Sadberge and Middleton St George share similar rural and village characteristics and are well represented within one ward.

130 A Roman Way resident asked to be included in Middleton St George, noting that their amenities and associations are there, despite living west of the parish boundary. Parish boundary changes cannot be considered as part of this review and would need to be addressed through a CGR led by Darlington Borough Council.

131 We are persuaded that including Morton Palms parish in Sadberge & Middleton St George ward is a better reflection of local community ties and allows for more effective and convenient local government. We consider that residents of the parish share greater connection with Sadberge and Middleton St George than with Hurworth or Neasham, and that including the entirety of an incoming development will be better managed within one borough ward. We note this would result in a Hurworth ward with a forecast electorate variance of -12% but consider that such a ward would still achieve a better balance of all three of our statutory criteria.

132 We therefore recommend a three-member Sadberge & Middleton St George including Morton Palms parish, and a two-member Hurworth ward.

Conclusions

133 The table below provides a summary as to the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality in Darlington, referencing the 2024 and 2031 electorate figures against the proposed number of councillors and wards. A full list of wards, names and their corresponding electoral variances can be found in Appendix A to the back of this report. An outline map of the wards is provided in Appendix B.

Summary of electoral arrangements

	Final recommendations	
	2024	2031
Number of councillors	41	41
Number of electoral wards	18	18
Average number of electors per councillor	2,001	2,194
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	9	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Final recommendations

Darlington should be made up of 41 councillors serving 19 wards: two single-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards and five three-councillor wards. The details and names are shown in Appendix A and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Mapping

Sheet 1, Map 1 shows the proposed wards for Darlington.

You can also view our final recommendations for Darlington on our interactive maps at www.lgbce.org.uk

Parish electoral arrangements

134 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

135 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Darlington Borough Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

136 As a result of our proposed ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent Parish Council and Whessoe Parish Council.

137 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent parish.

Final recommendations

Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Low Coniscliffe	6
Merrybent	1

138 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Whessoe Parish Council parish.

Final recommendations

Whessoe Parish Council should comprise eight councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Beaumont Hill	3
Burtree Lane	5

What happens next?

139 We have now completed our review of Darlington. The recommendations must now be approved by Parliament. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. Subject to parliamentary scrutiny, the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the local elections in 2027.

Equalities

140 The Commission is satisfied that it complies with its legal obligations under the Equality Act and that no adverse equality impacts will arise as a result of the outcome of the review.

Appendices

Appendix A

Final recommendations for Darlington Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2024)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2031)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Albert Hill & Red Hall	1	2,247	2,247	12%	2,260	2,260	3%
2	Bank Top & Lascelles	2	4,548	2,274	14%	4,578	2,289	4%
3	Branksome & Cockerton	2	4,774	2,387	19%	4,838	2,419	10%
4	Brinkburn	1	2,340	2,340	17%	2,365	2,365	8%
5	Central Park & Lingfield	2	4,376	2,188	9%	4,539	2,270	3%
6	College	3	6,599	2,200	10%	6,617	2,206	1%
7	Firthmoor	2	4,744	2,372	19%	4,803	2,402	9%
8	Harrowgate Hill	3	5,347	1,782	-11%	5,930	1,977	-10%
9	Heighington & High Coniscliffe	2	3,538	1,769	-12%	4,184	2,092	-5%
10	Hummersknott & Blackwell	2	3,703	1,852	-7%	4,771	2,386	9%

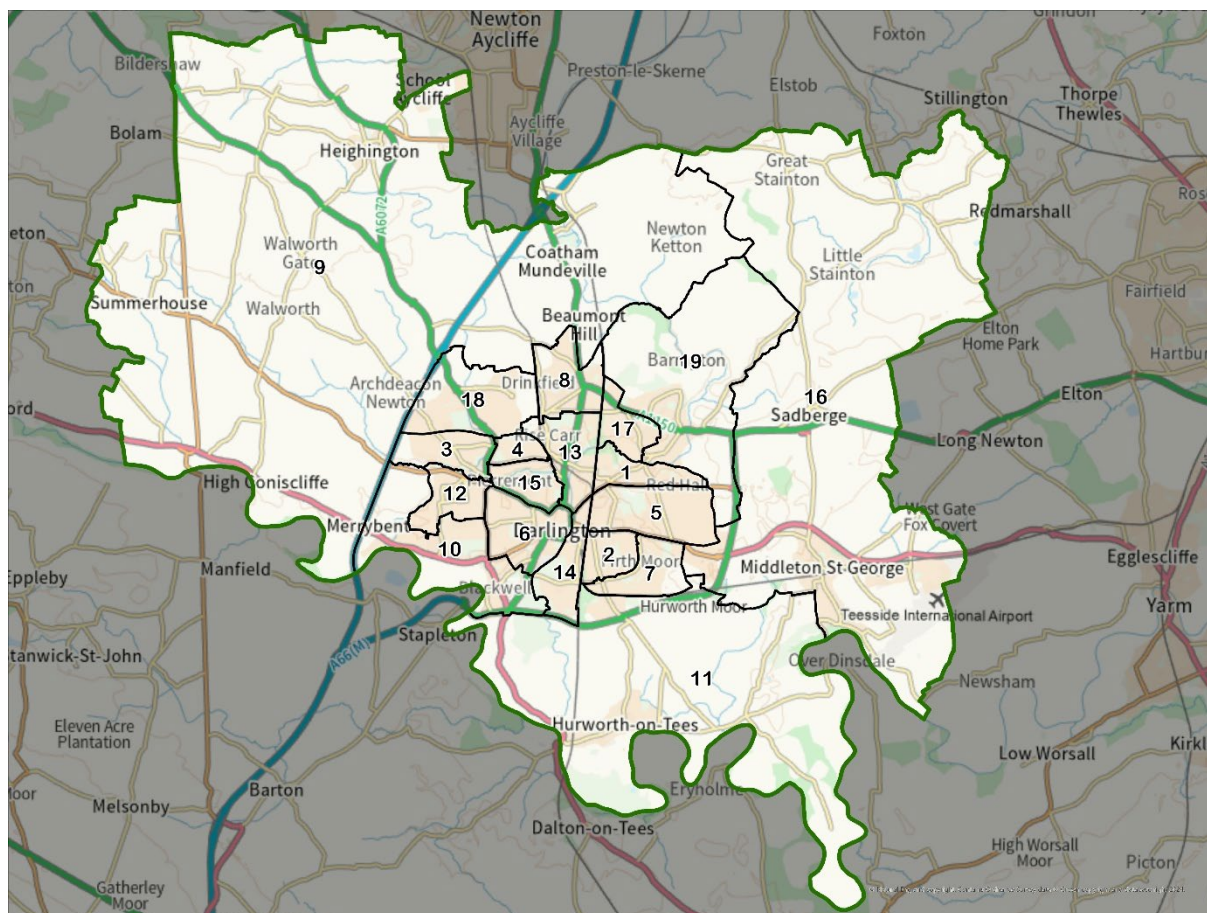
Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2024)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2031)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
11 Hurworth	2	3,620	1,810	-10%	3,858	1,929	-12%
12 Mowden	2	4,169	2,085	4%	4,210	2,105	-4%
13 North Road	2	4,069	2,035	2%	4,260	2,130	-3%
14 Park East	2	4,205	2,103	5%	4,341	2,171	-1%
15 Pierremont	3	6,269	2,090	4%	6,273	2,091	-5%
16 Sadberge & Middleton St George	3	5,298	1,766	-12%	6,637	2,212	1%
17 Springfield	2	3,854	1,927	-4%	3,902	1,951	-11%
18 West Park & Faverdale	2	3,637	1,819	-9%	4,912	2,456	12%
19 Whinfield & Haughton	3	4,703	1,568	-22%	6,669	2,223	1%
Totals	41	82,040	–	–	89,947	–	–
Averages	–	–	2,001	–	–	2,194	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Darlington Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each electoral ward varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Appendix B

Outline map



Number	Ward name
1	Albert Hill & Red Hall
2	Bank Top & Lascelles
3	Branksome & Cockerton
4	Brinkburn
5	Central Park & Lingfield
6	College
7	Firthmoor
8	Harrowgate Hill
9	Heighington & High Coniscliffe
10	Hummersknot & Blackwell
11	Hurworth
12	Mowden
13	North Road
14	Park East
15	Pierremont
16	Sadberge & Middleton St George
17	Springfield
18	West Park & Faverdale
19	Whinfield & Haughton

A more detailed version of this map can be seen on the large map accompanying this report, or on our website: www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/darlington

Appendix C

Submissions received

All submissions received can also be viewed on our website at:

www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/darlington

Political Groups

- Darlington Conservative Party
- Labour Group of Darlington Borough Council

Councillors

- Councillor J. Bartch (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor P. Culley (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor B. Holroyd (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor A. Keir (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor C. Pease (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor L. Tostevin (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor N. Wallis (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor P. Walters (Darlington Borough Council)

Local organisations

- Pierremont Crescent & Gardens Residents' Association
- Whinfield Residents' Association

Parish and Town Councils

- Neasham Parish Council

Local residents

- 137 local residents

Appendix D

Glossary and abbreviations

Councillor numbers	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral inequality	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority.
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. We only take account of electors registered specifically for local elections during our reviews.
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town council'
Parish (or town) council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
Town council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was set up by Parliament, independent of Government and political parties. It is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government.

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