

Darlington

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Comment text:

Related subject: Hummersknott & Coniscliffe Park

The proposal to subdivide the existing parish of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent, resulting in the Low Coniscliffe parish ward being combined within a borough ward otherwise comprising largely unparished urban areas, raises longer-term governance concerns that should be addressed proactively.

In particular, this arrangement risks creating a structurally uneven model of local representation within a single borough ward - where a small parished area sits alongside a significantly larger unparished population. This has implications for future neighbourhood governance, especially in light of the anticipated requirements under the forthcoming English Devolution and Community Empowerment legislation, which is expected to place duties on local authorities to establish neighbourhood or area-level governance arrangements.

Such mixed governance geographies may complicate the operation of neighbourhood or area committees, risk inequity of representation, and make it more difficult to align community identities, funding mechanisms (e.g. precepts vs general fund), and participatory structures across the ward.

To mitigate these issues, it is suggested that:

- o The Commission recognises the potential governance imbalance created by this proposal; and
- o There should be a clear presumption that the remainder of the ward — and, where appropriate, adjacent urban wards — are considered for a future Community Governance Review (CGR) led by Darlington Borough Council.

This would allow the Council to explore options such as:

- o Extending parish governance into currently unparished areas;
- o Rationalising parish boundaries to better align with borough ward structures; or

o Introducing alternative governance arrangements that ensure equitable community representation across the whole ward. Embedding this expectation now would help ensure that the electoral arrangements remain compatible with future statutory neighbourhood governance frameworks, and would support coherent, inclusive, and effective local decision-making.

Attached Documents:

None attached