

Darlington

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Comment text:

Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission's Draft Proposals

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in response to the Commission's draft proposals concerning the future electoral arrangements within the Borough of Darlington. As a resident of Blackwell, I was both surprised and disappointed that the proposals appear to underestimate the strength, coherence and historical significance of this community.

In particular, I wish to challenge the assertion, attributed within the Commission's consultation documents to a local respondent, that the existing Park West ward "lacks a clear centre, shared facilities or established identities." Such a conclusion is, in my view, inconsistent with both the historical record and the lived experience of those who call Blackwell home.

Blackwell is not an artificial or recently constructed suburb but a settlement with a long history. Originating as an independent Anglo-Saxon village, it long pre-dates the expansion of Darlington and has retained a distinct identity despite the town's subsequent growth around it. Its historic core continues to provide a focal point for the surrounding neighbourhood, while its heritage remains deeply embedded in the character and consciousness of local residents.

This identity is reinforced by a range of well-established community institutions and amenities that serve as both practical assets and important

social anchors. These include Blackwell Post Office, New Blackwell Lawn Tennis Club, All Saints' Church, Blackwell Meadows Rugby Football Club and Blackwell Heritage Parkland. Collectively, these facilities provide compelling evidence of an active and cohesive community whose shared institutions foster both civic engagement and a strong sense of place.

The draft proposals also appear to understate the close relationship between Blackwell and the neighbouring community of Hummersknott. The two areas are connected not merely by geographical proximity but by longstanding social, educational and environmental ties. Shared green spaces, including Broken Scar Riverside Walk, the surroundings of West Cemetery and the area served by Elm Ridge Church, create a continuous community landscape rather than a meaningful boundary.

Educational links further reinforce these connections. Many families within Blackwell naturally progress through school catchment arrangements that include Hummersknott Academy and Carmel College, creating enduring relationships across both communities. These educational pathways contribute significantly to the shared identity of residents and should not be overlooked when considering appropriate ward boundaries.

Equally important are the transport and communication links that unite these neighbourhoods. Coniscliffe Road provides a direct and well-used corridor between Blackwell and Hummersknott, while public transport services connect residents with shared facilities, employment opportunities and Darlington town centre. These patterns of everyday movement reflect genuine community interaction rather than arbitrary administrative divisions.

I am also concerned that the draft recommendations fail to give sufficient consideration to the importance of preserving effective representation for Darlington's town centre. At a time when many high streets continue to experience significant economic challenges, coherent and focused local government representation has never been more important. While I appreciate that the town centre may not possess sufficient electorate to justify a standalone electoral ward, the surrounding communities—particularly those within Park West and College wards adjacent to Southend Avenue and Abbey Road—share common interests arising from their close relationship with the commercial centre. Issues such as parking provision, traffic congestion, public realm improvements and support for local businesses are matters of mutual concern that would benefit from unified representation.

The Commission's statutory objective is to secure electoral arrangements that reflect the identities and interests of local communities. In my respectful submission, the current draft proposals fall short of that objective in relation to Blackwell. They do not adequately recognise either the area's rich historical heritage or the strength of its contemporary community identity. Nor do they fully acknowledge the natural social and functional relationships that exist between Blackwell, Hummersknott and the adjoining areas of the town.

I therefore urge the Commission to revisit its assessment of Park West before finalising its recommendations. Any revised warding arrangements should properly reflect the longstanding historical character of Blackwell, the community institutions that continue to define it, and the genuine social, educational and transport links that bind it to its neighbouring communities.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

Resident Blackwell

[REDACTED]

Attached Documents:

None attached