

Darlington

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Comment text:

Please find attached file.

Attached Documents:

- electoral-review-2027-warding-proposal-labour-group-comment-on-draft-recommendations.pdf

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Electoral Review of Darlington Borough Council
Implementation May 2027

Comment on draft LGBCE proposal

Darlington Borough Council Labour Group

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1. Overview

The Labour Group welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft recommendations.

We are pleased that a number of the draft recommendations reflect points made in our original submission. We also recognise that the Commission has had to manage significant population change, particularly from new housing developments on the edge of the urban area.

However, we remain concerned that the draft proposal leaves a number of less affluent and higher-need communities with comparatively higher elector-to-councillor ratios. While individual wards may fall within the accepted tolerance, the cumulative effect is important. Wards with higher levels of deprivation, have higher casework demand, more transient populations, and greater reliance on public services require arrangements that support effective representation. Electoral equality should not be considered only arithmetically; it should also be considered alongside the practical reality of councillor workload and community need.

We therefore ask the Commission to consider whether the final recommendations can better avoid a pattern in which less affluent communities are generally under-represented by councillors when compared with more affluent or lower-demand areas.

2. Draft warding arrangements

2.1. Park East

We are content with the suggestion that the ward name remains the same – it is long standing and therefore familiar name.

However, we ask the Commission to reconsider some of the boundaries around Park East, the town centre, Borough Road and adjoining areas.

Overall our draft proposal within the constraints of a reduction in the number of councillors attempted to retain current boundaries where possible – to maintain established understanding of ward boundaries rather than disrupt. Park East was one such ward that required little change. You have note that each of the submissions had a similar view for Park East.

We are concerned about the treatment of the town centre. The argument put forward by LGBCE is not strong. On the basis of a single resident, paragraph 47 suggests moving the town centre from Park East on the grounds that the adjoining area (Park West) does not have clear centre. A town centre is not a community centre for a single ward – it is a resource used by all parts of the borough, and, any adjacent ward could make the same claim of community ties.

It is further argued that the A167/River Skerne is a natural boundary, and yet this has four road and as many pedestrian crossings, enabling easy means of traversing by vehicle or as a pedestrian. Elsewhere in the draft proposal LGBCE have argued the Tornado Way – which LGBCE described themselves as “busy, with limited crossing points” does not hinder community ties (despite all five schemes that were submitted suggested the contrary). The A167/River Skerne is far more permeable than Tornado way.

We conclude that moving the town centre from its current ward to another does not result in better governance, and is therefore is change for no purpose.

At the northern boundary, LGBCE have suggested a boundary along Yarm Road, moving the both area between Yarm Road and Haughton Road (Borough Road and streets off), and the streets around Eastmount Road into North Road.

Dealing with each area separately. Eastmount Road, and surrounding streets are in the current Northgate Ward. To their north is the railway line, which is a very obvious hard boundary, and so these houses should either be part of the draft Pierremont ward, or the draft Park East – neither is perfect, but both are better connected than to the draft North Road. In our proposal we suggested including these houses in Park East – as to their west there is a large commercial/industrial area before reaching Northgate / High Northgate where the residential area of the draft Pierremont ward begins in earnest; this too conveniently results in a better elector ratio for Pierremont and Park East.

The area including Borough Road and surrounding streets are better suited remaining in Park East. This area is a considerable distance to the main areas of housing in LGCBE's proposed draft North Road, including a both Haughton Road and the railway line as physical boundaries – compared to the short distance to the streets to the south of Yarm Road.

The suggestion of leaving Park East as our original proposal would give Park East 3 seats, and the proposed College and Blackwell 2 seats.

2.2. College and Blackwell

If the LGCBE is minded to create the draft College & Blackwell ward, we would ask that the naming properly reflects the communities within it. There is a case for retaining Park West as part of the name, given the disappearance of the existing Park West ward and the continuing identity of that area.

2.3. Mowden

We ask the Commission to look carefully at the proposed Mowden boundary around Milbank Road.

A cleaner and more coherent approach would be to use the whole of the existing polling district boundary (COC) along the whole length of Milbank Road, with consideration given to including Milbank Court, along with the houses on the South side of Milbank Road up to Elton Road / Pierremont Crescent roundabout. Milbank Court in particular has its only practical exit onto Milbank Road, and therefore has a clearer relationship with that street than with areas from which it is physically or practically separated.

Whilst this is not ideal it works and most residents in this area will be patients are Carmel Medical practice on Nunnery Lane. It is a boundary that follows how people actually move in and out of their streets is preferable to one that creates technically neat but less practical arrangements.

Hence the suggestion to include of the current polling district COC, plus the addition of Milbank Court. The final boundary should therefore either keep these streets with the community to

which they most clearly relate, or include a sufficiently coherent block within Mowden so that residents can reasonably feel part of that ward.

2.4. Pierremont

The draft recommendations broadly reflect the argument made in our original submission: that the wider Pierremont and Northgate area is connected by The Denes, North Lodge Park, local schools, walking routes, and shared community facilities. The Denes in particular is a strong linear community feature rather than simply an open-space boundary. It draws together the streets around it and provides a recognisable shared identity.

However we suggest that the eastern boundary would give better community ties, if the boundary followed the railway line and High Northgate / Northgate – in contrast to your proposal of these houses being included in the draft North Road.

We also accept the proposed ward name Pierremont. While Pierremont & Northgate would also be reasonable, we recognise that Pierremont is a clear and familiar name for the wider area and are content for the Commission to proceed on that basis.

2.5. Branksome & Cockerton, and Brinkburn

We are content with the proposed names in this area.

However, we suggest that the boundary along the West Auckland Road is modified slightly from the draft proposal. As with elsewhere along the West Auckland Road, the boundary should follow the centre line of the road, and not behind some of the houses that front onto West Auckland Road. Uniformity would aid clarity.

This approach would also be consistent with the Commission's treatment where boundaries follow a road, and the boundary more typically follows the centre line of the road. This creates a more easily understandable boundary.

This change will have no significant effect on the overall electorate numbers.

2.6. Albert Hill, Hundens and Red Hall & Haughton and Whinfield

We are concerned that the proposed Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall ward does not reflect a clearly connected community. The proposed name alone suggests that this would not be a connected community.

The proposed ward brings together areas that are distinct in character, layout and identity. Albert Hill, Hundens, Lingfield and Red Hall may share some broad urban characteristics, but that is not the same as forming one coherent ward community. The connections between them are not strong, and are broken by Tornado Way, a brutal busy arterial route with no housing near, let alone facing onto the road, as there are with other arterial routes into town.

The Labour Group's original submission set out why Tornado Way is a real boundary with only a single crossing point; it should be recognised for what it is – a spur off the A66 bringing traffic into and out the town centre. It is not a road that at the same time connects local communities, and certainly isn't a pedestrian route either along or across.

Haughton Green is widely understood as being the focal point for the area within the Haughton le Skerne ward we proposed, and of all the changes suggested by LGCB E it's this that has created most emails to current ward Councillors for the area expressing incredulity over the draft proposals. We therefore ask the Commission to revisit the eastern area bounded by the mainline railway, Yarm Road to the south, and Whinfield/Salters Lane North to the North.

The river Skerne is a shared facility used by communities to its north and south thereby bringing communities together rather than acting as a boundary. The historic name of the area – Haughton le Skerne – reflects the longstanding community that has grown around the river and village centre, that remains even today despite being subsumed into the wider town. Second only to Cockerton Village, Haughton Green remains a place with a strong identity as the focal centre of all around it.

Red Hall in particular has a distinct estate identity. It is separated from other areas by road layout, open land and the way residents move in and out of the estate. It should not simply be joined to other areas because the arithmetic works. Historically, it has more typically formed part of Haughton wards – its recent time as part of Red Hall and Lingfield has been a departure from its more natural home of being a part of Haughton.

The same concern applies to combining Albert Hill and Hundens in a way that does not reflect residents' day-to-day use of shops, parks, schools, healthcare and transport routes. Many Albert Hill residents despite being in Stephenson ward believe they are in Haughton because of the proximity of Haughton Road, in a way that residents in Hundens area do not.

Within the constraints of LGCB E proposals for the area south of Yarm Road, there is still scope to create a 2 seater ward bounded by Yarm Road and Tornado way (this could be called Lingfield, reflecting previous successful warding for this area); and the area between Tornado Way and Whinfield/Salters Lane North as a 3 seater following our original proposal called Haughton le Skerne.