

Re: City of York Council Electoral Review – Draft Recommendations – Objection to Proposed Splitting of Derwenthorpe

I am writing in response to the draft recommendations published on 28th April 2026 for changes to the wards in the City of York. Some of the proposed changes would split the Derwenthorpe community across three separate council wards (**Tang Hall & Derwenthorpe** (ward 21), **Osbaldwick** (ward 17), and **Derwent** (ward 5)). In the image below the Derwenthorpe estate is shown bounded by the black dashed line, with the proposed ward boundaries in red.



The current proposal splits Derwenthorpe along the cycle path and around the ponds. The cycle track and ponds are features that were designed into the neighbourhood to support car free travel and to manage the rainfall runoff into the local streams, and both represent good examples of some of the community design features typical of Derwenthorpe.

Splitting the neighbourhood like this would be a very negative move for what was designed to be, and has developed as a single coherent residential community. I would request the Commission reconsider this proposal, on the grounds that it conflicts with the Commission's own statutory criteria.

Statutory criteria: The Commission's reviews are required to balance three statutory criteria: **electoral equality; reflection of community identity and interests;** and **facilitation of effective and convenient local government.** While agreeing that electoral equality is of course important, the Commission's own guidance makes clear that it must be balanced against the other two criteria and that communities should not be divided unnecessarily on solely numerical considerations.

Derwenthorpe is a coherent, planned community with a strong and distinct identity: Derwenthorpe is not an arbitrary patch of streets, but a purposefully designed neighbourhood developed by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) as one of the first large-scale low-carbon communities in Northern England. The development of around 500 homes was conceived as a whole from the outset, with a shared design, communal green spaces (that remain in JRHT ownership), restricted car access (there are, by design, no through roads across the development, to significantly reduce traffic and make Derwenthorpe a safe environment for all, but especially children), and a mixed-tenure model that integrates affordable and market-rate housing throughout the estate. The Super Sustainability Centre (SSC) provides both a central community facility used on a daily basis by residents, local schools, and community groups offering activities ranging from exercise classes to art and craft groups, and is the source of hot water which is piped around the neighbourhood as part of our district heating and hot water system. The physical layout of the development, with identifiable perimeter roads, distinct architectural design, and clear boundaries, constitutes exactly the kind of strong, easily identifiable boundary the Commission seeks when drawing ward lines.

Derwenthorpe's distinct identity is not merely architectural. It has its own very active Derwenthorpe Residents' Association (DRA) (see derwenthorpe.co.uk), which provides an organised, constitutionally-mandated representative voice for the community. (The Commission's own guidance cites the existence of a residents' association as one of the key indicators of community identity). In addition, Derwenthorpe is governed by the Derwenthorpe Governance Group (DGG), a partnership between the residents and JRHT, and we have a Derwenthorpe Community Interest Company to support and fund community events and activities.

There is a comprehensive range of Derwenthorpe community activities and events ranging from our book clubs, wine club, and film clubs, to a nature group and

activities for children. The community is brought together by a range of weekly, monthly and seasonal events and activities, and is noticeably cohesive. Splitting Derwenthorpe across three wards would mean that no single councillor holds primary responsibility for the community as a whole, diluting the effectiveness of that representation and complicating residents' ability to engage with their elected representatives on matters of shared concern.

Derwenthorpe residents share many common concerns that are distinctive to the development. The district heating scheme, a common source of internet and cable TV provision, our estate charges, etc., are all common concerns for all residents. Each of these is unusual and non-standard, and so requires additional effort by councillors to grasp the underlying details in order to represent Derwenthorpe residents.

The proposal conflicts with the 'community identity' criterion: The Commission's summary guidance asks whether a proposed ward reflects "where local people go for shops, medical services, leisure facilities", whether there are "community groups" representing the area, and whether there are "natural or constructed features which make strong boundaries". Derwenthorpe satisfies all three tests as a self-contained entity.

Placing parts of Derwenthorpe in different wards would group residents with communities whose interests, built environment, and history differ substantially from those of Derwenthorpe. It would create wards that do not correspond to any meaningful community unit, making them harder for residents to identify with and harder for councillors to represent coherently. This is precisely the outcome the community identity criterion is designed to prevent.

The proposal conflicts with the 'effective and convenient local government' criterion: Many of the issues that affect Derwenthorpe residents, including maintenance of shared communal spaces, the sustainability infrastructure of the estate, and JRHT's ongoing stewardship of the development, affect the community as a whole. Dividing responsibility for these matters across three ward councillors would make effective advocacy considerably more difficult, and would create uncertainty about which ward councillor residents should approach. The

Commission's guidance states that wards should be "coherent and use sensible and identifiable boundaries"; the proposed split is not in accord with this guidance.

I hope the body of evidence I have outlined that Derwenthorpe constitutes a distinct and coherent community is persuasive and that you will reconsider the proposal to fragment our community across wards.