

To: Review Officer (York)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
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Email: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

Dear Review Officer

Re: City of York Council electoral review – objection to the proposed Heslington & University ward

I write as a resident of Heslington to object to the proposed Heslington & University ward in the City of York electoral review.

I understand that the Commission is required by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 to balance electoral equality, community identity and effective and convenient local government. My objection is that, even if the proposed ward achieves electoral equality on paper (which is not necessarily accepted), it does not represent the best balance of those statutory criteria for Heslington village.

In particular, Schedule 2 paragraph 2(3) of the 2009 Act requires the Commission, when making recommendations, to have regard not only to equality of representation but also to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government. The statutory scheme therefore requires a balanced evaluative judgment rather than a purely numerical one.

I therefore ask the Commission either to retain the existing Fulford & Heslington ward or, if that is not ultimately preferred, to model an alternative that places Heslington in a rural southern ward instead.

Executive Summary

I object to the proposed Heslington & University ward on the basis that it fails to strike the required statutory balance between electoral equality, community identity and effective local government.

While the proposal may achieve numerical equality, it does so at the expense of clear, evidence-based community ties and risks creating a material representational imbalance between a large, transient student population and a much smaller, long-term village community.

The existing Fulford & Heslington ward better reflects how residents actually live, access services and form community ties, and already performs within accepted electoral equality thresholds. If that arrangement is not retained, a rural southern ward

would more appropriately reflect Heslington's character and governance needs than a university-dominated ward.

1. Electoral equality is important, but it is not the only test

Clearly, electoral equality matters. The Commission's report states that all its proposed York wards are forecast to have good electoral equality by 2031, and the proposed Heslington & University ward is shown as having a -2% variance by 2031.

But the statutory scheme does not make electoral equality the sole criterion. The Commission's role is to achieve the best overall balance of the statutory criteria, not to prioritise one at the expense of the others.

Schedule 2 requires the Commission to have equal regard to community identity and effective and convenient local government. This is also reflected in the Commission's own technical guidance, which makes clear that electoral equality must be considered alongside qualitative evidence of community identity and governance effectiveness, and that no single criterion should be applied in isolation. In other words, a ward is not justified merely because its electoral arithmetic works if it produces a poorer fit in representational and community terms.

That point is particularly important here because the existing Fulford & Heslington ward already works satisfactorily in equality terms and, I understand, sits at around +5% variance, i.e. still within the Commission's own usual threshold for "good electoral equality".

Consequently, this is not a case where the law compels the village to be placed with the University; rather, it is a case where the Commission has a choice between different arrangements that may all be workable numerically, and should choose the one that better reflects the settled community identity and representational needs of Heslington residents.

In this case, an arrangement already exists which delivers acceptable electoral equality while better reflecting community identity.

2. The proposed ward does not reflect Heslington's real community identity

The Commission's own summary asks residents to explain where local people go for shops, medical services, leisure facilities and other amenities, what community groups represent them, whether there are transport links, and what issues bind the community together or separate it from others.

That is exactly why I object to the proposed ward. It simply does not reflect how we actually live day to day. The evidence of community identity in this area is consistent and based on established patterns of daily life.

My family and I use Heslington village facilities in the ordinary way that makes a real community: we attend the local church, use the meeting room, use the sportsfield (Outgang), both for organised activities (e.g. Heslington Cricket Club and Fulford Football Club) and informal use (including the playpark), use the post office, and the pubs - especially the Deramore Arms, which is an important local community hub.

It should be emphasised that my family and my children particularly use the sportsfield and local village amenities as part of everyday life, they are not occasional or theoretical links. These are the kinds of practical place-based connections the Commission itself says matter when assessing community identity.

Those links do not stop at the village boundary. My children's educational links run naturally from Lord Deramore's Primary School (in Heslington) to Fulford School (in Fulford), and our family uses Fulford frequently: we use the Fulford library because Heslington does not have one, we use facilities and grounds in Fulford as part of Fulford FC, we use the Co-Op, we use the playgrounds, and we use the post office in Fulford as well as the one in Heslington.

In short, the functional geography of our daily lives is Heslington-and-Fulford based. That is why the existing Fulford & Heslington alignment feels coherent in real life, whereas a University-focused ward does not.

These are strong and demonstrable community links of the type the Commission's guidance indicates should be given significant weight.

Furthermore, it cannot be over-emphasised – and it feels that the Heslington & University ward proposal overlooks – that Heslington is a village with a long-standing and distinct character.

The Commission's own report notes the importance of strong, easily identifiable boundaries and of not breaking local ties. The village's ties are not primarily shaped by the University's institutional life; they are shaped by settled residential patterns, parish life, village facilities, green space, conservation considerations, and shared use of amenities with Fulford.

To repeat, Heslington is a village with a long-standing and distinct character. The Commission's own framework - including Schedule 2 paragraph 2(3) and its technical guidance - places clear weight on avoiding the disruption of established community ties and on using boundaries that reflect how communities actually function. The village's ties are not primarily shaped by the University's institutional life; they are shaped by settled residential patterns, parish life, village facilities, green space, conservation considerations, and shared use of amenities with Fulford.

If the Commission is not persuaded to retain the existing Fulford & Heslington ward, then a rural southern option would more accurately reflect Heslington better than a

University-dominated ward because the issues that most affect long-term residents - green belt, traffic, development pressure, infrastructure and the protection of village character - are materially closer to the concerns of the rural parishes to the south than to those of a large university campus.

This would better align ward boundaries with shared interests, services and long-term community priorities.

3. The proposed ward would create a serious representational imbalance

My concern here is **not** that student interests are illegitimate. They plainly are legitimate, and they deserve proper representation. The problem is that the proposed ward brings together two communities of very different scale, nature and priorities in a way that risks making effective representation of the smaller settled village community much harder.

The real question is whether the proposed ward would support effective and convenient local government in practice.

The Commission's own report records that the University of York Students' Union argued that the University and student population generate a significant amount of casework, and the Commission itself accepted that a large number of students north of Hull Road share community interests with the University area. The Commission also adopted "University" into the ward name, which is itself telling: the proposed ward is, by design, a university-centred ward in which Heslington village would be the much smaller component community.

In practice, it is likely that councillor focus and casework would be disproportionately directed toward university-related matters.

My understanding is that records of the 2023 electoral roll figures show that Heslington parish had 1,622 registered voters, of whom 924 were at University college addresses, leaving 698 permanent residents. Separately, the University of York's own published 2024/25 student statistics show a very large student body, comprising 15,810 undergraduates, 210 other undergraduates, 4,890 taught postgraduates and 1,435 research postgraduates.

Even allowing for the distinction between total student numbers and registered electors, the scale imbalance between the permanent resident population and the student population is clear, and councillor workload and prioritisation are likely to be heavily influenced by university-related issues.

From a legal and governance perspective, this engages directly with Schedule 2 paragraph 2(3), in particular the requirement to secure effective and convenient local government. A ward structure in which one community's issues are likely to dominate councillor casework risks undermining the effective representation of the other

community. This is also recognised in the Commission's technical guidance, which acknowledges that patterns of casework, service demand and representational coherence are relevant to assessing whether a ward will function effectively in practice.

From a resident's perspective, that would feel unfair. Long-term residents live with the ongoing consequences of planning choices, traffic, conservation issues, parking pressure, infrastructure strain and changes to village character over many years. If dominated by the University, those decisions would be shaped by the tenure of the student voting population (typically around three years) or by institutional priorities associated with the University (which can change over relatively short periods e.g. as new strategies are set out, as will happen shortly given the change of Vice-Chancellor), rather than by the long-term interests of residents of the village of Heslington.

That is not a criticism of those interests, but it does highlight a structural imbalance in representation within the proposed ward.

A ward configuration in which the settled village community becomes a very small minority within a much larger university-oriented electorate risks diluting the village's voice, continuity and long-term interests, even without any ill intent on the part of students or the University.

I am therefore asking the Commission to treat this as a question of representational fit and fairness under the statutory criteria. This is not about whether the interests of short term students matter – they clearly do - but they are not the same as the interests of the settled village community. The Commission's own report recognises that the area is "unique" and that the University generates distinctive casework.

4. The Commission's own reasoning leaves room for a better alternative

I understand that the Commission sought to avoid splitting Heslington parish in a way that would create a parish ward with very few electors, and I appreciate that concern. I also understand that the Commission wished to keep all of Heslington parish together.

However, the statutory question under Schedule 2 paragraph 2(3) is not simply how to keep the parish intact, but how to do so in a way that best reflects community identity and supports effective governance.

The starting point should therefore be which configuration best reflects real communities, rather than which configuration most easily fits a preferred pattern.

The fact that the Commission wished to keep the parish intact does not mean the village must be placed in a University-focused ward if there are other ways of preserving the parish while better satisfying community identity and effective local government.

Indeed, the Commission's report notes that some alternative arrangements for Fulford were rejected because they were "incompatible" with its decisions on Heslington & University; that indicates the proposed Heslington & University ward has been treated as a premise driving other boundaries, when it should itself remain open to reconsideration.

It is important that no single ward proposal constrains the proper assessment of alternatives.

I also note that the Commission says it would welcome further evidence on the southern/rural pattern and whether the proposed rural arrangements best reflect community identity and effective representation.

That is important. It means the Commission remains open to evidence-based refinement in the wider south/east of York. If the Commission is not minded to retain the existing Fulford & Heslington ward, then I ask it at least to use its modelling capacity and electorate data to test a viable rural southern option that would place Heslington with communities sharing rural, conservation, access and development issues, rather than with a much larger university constituency whose priorities are different in kind and scale.

5. Requested outcome

For those reasons, I ask the Commission to reject the proposed Heslington & University ward.

My first preference is that the Commission should retain the existing Fulford & Heslington ward, which better reflects the actual lived links between Heslington residents and Fulford and already performs acceptably on electoral equality.

If the Commission is not minded to do that, then my alternative request is that it should model an option placing Heslington in a rural southern ward, in a way that better satisfies the combined requirements of Schedule 2 paragraph 2(3) and the Commission's technical guidance.

Both options would represent a better balance of the statutory criteria than the current proposal.

6. Conclusion

I hope the Commission will give significant weight to the evidence of settled village identity, daily functional links, and the risk of representational imbalance outlined above.

The Commission has expressly invited evidence-based representations, and this is such a case.

Heslington is a distinct village with its own long-standing voice. That voice should not be subsumed within a ward whose scale and focus are overwhelmingly shaped by the University.

Yours faithfully

Robert Stewart