

York

Personal Details:

Name: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]
Postcode: [REDACTED]
Organisation Name: (Member of the public)

Comment text:

Related subject: Fishergate (and Fulford)

I am a resident of the southern end of Fishergate ward. I'm am very concerned by the proposals to merge our ward with the Fulford parish and even a massive rural area. This seems entirely contradictory to the claimed aims of the commission (electoral equality, community identity and effective local government)

For a start, the difference in community identity between Fishergate and Fulford could hardly be starker. Fishergate is a community of primarily young professionals and students, with the majority of residents living in rented accommodation either as single adults or in houses in multiple occupation. According to the census, the median age is 29, just over 50% of us are either single person households or live in HMOs, and similarly over 50% of us are renters. The area comprises almost entirely of terraced housing and purpose built student flats, and it's very dense and urban.

Fulford on the other hand is a completely different community with different character. It is significantly older with a median age closer to 40, almost entirely owner-occupiers (over 70% according to the census) and either married couples with families or retired. Most of the houses are detached with large gardens and are much larger (and much more expensive) than those in Fishergate.

The difference in character that occurs when walking south from the Barracks to and past Broadway is incredibly stark and apparent and it's bizarre that the commissioners didn't pick up on this when they visited the area - it's very clear that you're leaving the terraces and moving into a suburban area, and then as you pass Broadway into Fulford the area suddenly turns into a place that looks and feels more like rural villages like Pocklington or Ampleforth than it does like York.

The inclusion of a massive expanse of open countryside outside the city in a ward that goes all the way up to the medieval city walls is even more bizarre. There is no way anyone can consider those areas as having similar identity! Avoiding a small parish ward doesn't seem sufficient grounds to merge rural areas that should be in a rural ward with the edge of the city centre, surely the answer is that the parish as a whole should be in a different ward.

On a personal level, I almost never go to Fulford - the only times I do is to travel straight through it to the York outlet centre. I have never shopped there and never go to any pubs or cafes there, instead I either go to the shops at Wenlock terrace or into the city centre. My GP is in the city centre and my pharmacy on Bishopthorpe road. Nor does anyone I know who lives around here ever go to Fulford, and residents further north than me (I live near the barracks) almost certainly would never travel south of here but would walk straight to the city centre for their needs. Fulford residents similarly almost never come into Fishergate except to drive through it to the city centre, the only time they'd stop in the proposed ward is to go to the Barbican.

The entire basis for merging the two wards seems to come down to the naming of the Fulford Arms and the Fulford conservative club. The commission seems to completely misunderstand what the Fulford Arms is, calling it a pub. It's actually a music concert venue, and while it's great it doesn't serve the local community - events are entirely ticketed and must be purchased online, and attendees come from far and wide - I know people from as far as Whitby and Wakefield who attend regularly. I live almost opposite and would never go there for a drink. The conservative club meanwhile is a political club and similarly doesn't serve a community function (especially as mentioned local residents are all students and young professionals and none of us are supporting the conservatives)

It seems very odd that the commission sees these areas as being so similar during this review that they feel the two areas can be represented as one ward on the local council, but only a couple of years ago decided that the two areas were so different that they needed to be split into separate constituencies to have different MPs representing them in Parliament.

Electoral equality is also a significant issue given the proposed 3 member ward. It's hard to see how anyone will be elected unless they represent one of the two larger parties in such a large ward (and given Reform are almost non-existent in the city, that means just Labour, so it's no wonder they were suggesting this). This is a significant issue because the Fishergate and Fulford wards have historically elected councillors from different minority parties - Fishergate has been represented by the Greens and Fulford by the Lib Dems (again due to the sharp difference in the communities). Merging the two therefore seems to disenfranchise voters in both wards, but no doubt residents in Fulford in particular being the smaller area will be up in arms about this constantly.

Lastly there is the issue of effective governance - how on earth is a councillor supposed to represent this huge ward with such completely different areas. Residents in the Fishergate area are going to have completely different needs and issues to residents of Fulford and especially the rural areas. How is a councillor supposed to represent both of them when on a number of critical issues residents of these areas might have diametrically opposed views. Take traffic for one example - residents of Fulford primarily drive everywhere and their driving into the city centre

causes congestion, noise and air pollution that has negative effects on the residents of Fishergate. Fishergate residents tend to walk, cycle or take the bus with a third of households not even having a car (and over half of the single adult households). Fishergate residents will be broadly in favour of measures that reduce traffic and promote bus priority, walking and cycling as they will directly benefit, while Fulford residents will be heavily opposed. How are the councillors meant to vote on these matters? It's a bit unrealistic to think that just because there are 3 councillors all areas are going to be equally represented, that would require the councillors to agree that one of them is going to vote against the interests of the majority of their residents. Equally take the issue of parks, allotments and greenspace - in Fulford the Parish council looks after these and raises a precept to do so, in Fishergate they are the responsibility of the city council. Changes to parks policy are going to affect the different halves of the ward very differently.

The other significant issue is the sheer logistical challenge being a councillor of such a large ward is going to present. How is a councillor meant to respond to and understand the view of such a large and varied area, visit residents and see issues being raised to them first-hand, especially the concerns of residents in the rural parts where public transport is completely non-existent, unless the expectation is that they will be driving everywhere. If that's the case, is the expectation that the nearly half the population of the urban Fishergate area who don't have constant access to a car just shouldn't be councillors? While the reality is likely to be that a high proportion of the candidates will come from the settled families and retired communities in Fulford as these demographics are normally over-represented on councils anyway, but to intentionally create a ward such that most of the population of Fishergate couldn't practically attempt to effectively represent it seems borderline discriminatory. Keeping the two areas in separate wards will ensure that councillors elected in Fishergate are likely to be actual residents of the area (rather than living out in Fulford and having little understanding of the lives of the people in Fishergate they represent), have an area they can effectively represent and practically travel around, and will actually be representative of the population there.

Lastly on the issue of effective governance is the issue of mixed lines of communication and different representation structures in the different areas of the ward. I was briefly a councillor in Bath previously, and my first-hand experience is that residents tend to contact either their councillor or MP with issues without much knowledge of which representative is best placed to address the issue they are raising, with the result that we and the MP had to constantly refer issues to the other. We were a two-member ward represented by a single MP and no Parish, and this was already enough complexity to make things quite challenging. In this proposed ward however there will be three councillors, two MPs and a parish covering part of the ward. Residents will be raising issues to the wrong people all over the place and it will be a communications nightmare for members and MPs to be constantly having to figure out who is best placed to handle things (especially when residents don't give their full address so it's hard to know which constituency they live in), with the result that a significant amount of issues are going to fall through the cracks. This is going to be extremely infuriating to residents and representatives alike.

Overall, the merging of the two wards seems very problematic. It's hard to see why this is necessary, Fulford is already its own ward and with the new housing being built there is perfectly large enough to stay its own ward, even with Heslington split off to join the university. The commission's own published elector numbers support this. If the commissioners didn't feel the boundary was quite in the right place then move it up or down by a street or just make it match the constituency boundary, don't get rid of it entirely. There are ward boundaries in the city that separate areas with

far less distinction between them than the completely completely different areas of dense urban Fishergate and sparse rural Fulford. Overall this seems to be creating no end of problems for no good reason.

On a more minor point, the northern end of the ward seems to contain the whole of Heslington road and the area north of it up to Hull Rd, even though the eastern half past Fairfax house or the old St Joseph monastery is effectively an offshoot of the university campus with purpose-build student flats and university-owned facilities. Given a specific university ward is being created, why have these not been included in that ward? The boundary is clearly visible on satellite imagery.

Attached Documents:

None attached