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Categories: Submissions

Comments of Scotforth Parish Council regarding Ward Boundary Review for Lancaster District – April 2021

Background to Scotforth Parish and local issues.

Scotforth Civil Parish lies south east of the urban edge of south Lancaster. It is bounded to the east by the river Condor, to the south by Lancaster University and to the west by Burrow Beck. The M6 and A6 run north-south through the parish. The parish consists of two detached wards separated by a narrow strip of Lancaster City Council (LCC) and University land on the east verge of the A6 which we believe was carved out for potential university expansion when the University was built in the 1960's.

The parish forms part of the University and Scotforth Rural Ward for LCC but over 95% of the ward electorate are students residing on the campus.

The LCC Local Plan, approved in 2020, includes plans for a garden village and a target of 3,500 new houses by 2031 and associated infrastructure within the 'Board Location of Growth' south of Lancaster and is described in LCC planning DPD SG1. The recent master-planning consultation regarding the garden village (provisionally named Bailrigg Garden Village) proposed a location between the A6 and A588 for c.3,500 houses that encompasses the Burrow Heights ward of Scotforth Parish and parts of wards in three adjacent parishes. LCC are developing an Area Action Plan (AAP) by 2022 that sets out the detailed land allocation and infrastructure that delivers the Local Plan – this will include the conclusions of the garden village masterplan and all other developments described below.

In addition to the garden village, various national land developers have submitted (or are talking to LCC about submitting) separate outline planning applications to build up to a further 1,500 houses at Whinney Carr and Bailrigg which would consume most of the remaining greenspace between south Lancaster and the garden village and the university. The Gladman proposals cover 680 houses surrounding Bailrigg Village within Scotforth Parish. The Parish Council has opposed these developments on various ground including the fact that they are not needed to meet the Local Plan housing requirements. Nevertheless, the developers are vigorously pursuing their applications on the basis that they can be delivered faster than the garden village and such applications may be permitted by clauses in policy SG1. It is therefore not clear how many houses will be built in the area, their precise location nor their timing.

Comments upon LCC Ward boundaries

1. There is no logic in having a ward consisting of scattered permanent residents of the rural parish with the concentrated mass of transitory university students (most of whom only live on campus for their first year). The Ward elections are essentially a competition between the various student political societies and our Ward councillors are therefore invariably young inexperienced people who have little understanding of the local community and who resign before they complete their three year term of

office as soon as they complete their university courses. The Parish Council believes that the current composition of the ward militates against the principles of community identity and representation. We understand why the political parties put forward student candidates in order to be attractive to the vast majority of voters, i.e. fellow students, but it marginalises the local residents who care for and maintain the vast majority of physical footprint of the ward. We ask that our parish is aligned to a rural ward where we share common interests and understanding; This would be a better implementation of the guidance set out in para 4.37 to 4.44 of the technical guidance. The logical existing ward to be included in is Ellel.

2. The planned garden village is styled on being a rural rather than urban community and therefore there is logic in it being in a rural ward. However, given the scale of the garden village and the importance of fostering and sustaining community identity it would be appropriate to establish it as a separate district ward. Whilst Burrow Heights parish ward would wholly reside within such a garden village district ward we assume that some adjoining parishes may need to create new parish wards to coincide with the new district ward in accordance with para 3.18 of the technical guidance.

3. The uncertainty regarding whether the Gladman proposals for Bailrigg will go ahead (or in part) and whether its final nature (if approved) is as a distinct semi-rural community or merely an urban extension of south Lancaster makes it difficult to comment on the Boundary Review. It is compounded by the fact that the parish boundary (which is immovable per para 3.24) bisects the Gladman development land with approximately two thirds of the land being in the parish and by implication up to 400 houses. According to para 3.18 if any approved Gladman development straddled the parish boundary and if it is an (undesirable) urban extension then logically a new parish ward would have to be created for those (up to) 400 houses. Such a ward should not include Bailrigg Village which is the hamlet that would be surrounded on three sides because planning document DPD EN6 (Areas of Separation) specifically states that the Village/hamlet should be kept separate from other developments. This would mean that either (i) the Village/hamlet was egregiously included in the new parish ward which would be contrary to the guidelines regarding community identity (and that its 30 households could be marginalised by the 400) or (ii) the Village/hamlet would have to be a separate parish ward but that may be too small to be allowed, but if created it could be either aligned to Ellel Ward or a new garden village ward.

Given that the Gladman proposals include, as yet, no community facilities or infrastructure, it appears that they intend it to be an urban extension, in which case the above points stand in their entirety. If however, the development turns out to be a semi-rural community (which is entirely possible because the planning application is for Outline only) then it would be then more appropriate to incorporate it (in whole or part) into a rural district ward (Ellel or a new garden village ward) although the implications for parish wards described above would still apply.

The above discussion may appear based on conjecture and “if’s and maybe’s” but it is difficult to be more precise because no decisions have been made and we are unaware of what information Lancaster City Council has provided in fulfilment of para 6.2. This makes it extremely difficult for the Boundary Commission to make any sound recommendations. The most sensible course of action would be to wait until the Area Action Plan is concluded but this is beyond the timescales set out in para 4.4 and it is not clear that derogations can be applied but they should be explored.

Conclusion

The joining of Scotforth Parish with Lancaster University into the current district ward is inappropriate and illogical and results in poor community cohesion and identity. The Parish should be included in a rural district ward, the most logical being Ellel.

Bailrigg Garden Village should become a separate ward or else be included in the rural district ward of Ellel.

It is unwise to make any final decisions about wards in the (Local Plan DPD SG1) Broad Location of Growth until the Area Action Plan is complete. This is because the competing, overlapping and conflicting development proposals need to be resolved before there is clarity on what new communities will emerge and what identity and characteristics they will have.


Chair, Scotforth Parish Council



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