

Northumberland

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: Seaton Valley Community Council (Parish or town councillor)

Comment text:

Related subject: Seaton Valley, particularly Hartley Ward.

I am strongly opposed to the proposed new boundaries affecting the Hartley Ward and the Parish Council of Seaton Valley.

Whilst, I accept that the proposals do meet the electoral equality criteria, they do so at the expense of the other two criteria and actively work against the good pattern of divisions, as described in the LGBCE own terms of reference.

The current Hartley Division represents two villages with a long communal history, strong community links and shared identity and yet the proposed new divisions of Seaton Sluice and New Hartley North and New Delaval and New Hartley do not seem to take this into account at all.

In order to demonstrate this, I will deal with each of the LGBCE proposals separately.

Electoral equality:

The proposed new divisions do meet this criteria, but present a confusing situation for residents of New Hartley. Currently they are all represented by the same one county councillor and three parish councillors, but the proposals would mean that the village would be split between 2 county councillors and one side of the village would have 2 parish councillors and the other side would have a different one.

Community identity:

New Hartley is a very small, easily identifiable village, with a long and proud history. It has natural boundaries, separated from the other villages in

Seaton Valley by farmers' fields, it nonetheless has strong historic and community ties with the other villages, particularly Seaton Sluice.

New Hartley has its own shops, pub, café, Post Office, community centre, working men's club, First School, CoE and Catholic Churches and open spaces, including the Hester Pit Memorial Garden. It is a village with a very strong community identity and the residents are fiercely protective of this. Regular community events are held, including summer, Easter and Christmas village fairs and the annual remembrance events for the New Hartley Pit Disaster in 1852.

Local children graduate from the village first school to Seaton Sluice Middle School and then Astley High School. New Hartley maintains a 3 tier education system, along with the rest of Seaton Valley and there is a very strong Seaton Valley Schools Partnership.

The Church of England Delaval Parish covers St Michael and All Angels Church in New Hartley, St Paul's Church in Seaton Sluice and the historic Parish Church, the Church of Our Lady, which is situated between the two villages next to Seaton Delaval Hall.

Community cohesion between New Hartley and Seaton Sluice is strengthened by these educational and religious links, as well as familial ties and strong partnership working between the community associations and community groups.

There is no natural division along Bristol Street, with residents on both sides accessing all the facilities and services and seeing themselves as one community.

There are good public transport links, including roads and pavements, cycle lanes and bus services between New Hartley, Seaton Sluice and Seaton Delaval, including school bus services.

In contrast, there is absolutely no shared community identity between New Hartley and the area of Blyth proposed to be in the new division of New Delaval and New Hartley.

There are no shared historic or contemporary community links, nor shared religious or community buildings and not only are there no educational links, but Blyth operates a different 2 tier educational system, as opposed to the 3 tier system in Seaton Valley.

There are no natural boundaries that would indicate that these communities belong together, in fact they are separated by farmland and a busy road (Laverick Hall Road) with no cycle routes or pavements connecting them. There are no public transport links, indeed the only way to even walk between this area of Blyth and New Hartley is via a footpath through woods and fields. The new rail line will not serve New Hartley.

Effective and convenient local government:

As I have stated, the residents of New Hartley are currently all represented by the same one county councillor and three parish councillors.

Residents know that their services are provided by Northumberland County Council and Seaton Valley Community Council and they know that they can approach any of the four councillors for help, wherever they live in the village.

However, the proposals would split responsibility for this tiny village between 2 county councillors and one side of the village would have 2 parish councillors and the other side would have a different one.

Following the recent review of Parliamentary boundaries, the proposed New Delaval and New Hartley Division would also cross Parliamentary as well as Parish boundaries.

The changes resulting from these proposals would be confusing for the councillors as well as the residents and could well disrupt the existing effective, convenient and logical form of operation of local government that they know and understand. These proposals would not help the councils or Members of Parliament discharge their duties and responsibilities effectively.

In conclusion, whilst this review does meet the criteria to balance the numbers of electors per councillor across Northumberland County Council, it does so at the expense of community identity and effective and convenient local government. As such, it does not reflect the community interests and identities, is not based on any identifiable boundaries and will not help deliver effective and convenient governance at any level for Seaton Valley Community Council, Northumberland County Council for Parliamentary representation.

This contradiction is demonstrated in the actual LGBCE report in the following paragraphs:

140. We adopt the Council's suggestion to add the streets to the south of Amersham Road to Plessey division which we consider unites a community currently divided between Plessey and South Blyth divisions. We propose to adopt the Council's suggested South Blyth division, including the revised boundary with Wensleydale, which we also consider reflects our three statutory criteria.

145. We propose to amend the existing Seghill with Seaton Delaval to move all electors lying to the north and west of the railway line in our New Delaval and New Hartley division. This division will also include the rest of the existing Newsham division which consists of the settlement of New Delaval, as well as the area of New Hartley to the north of a boundary along Bristol Street, Lysdon Avenue and Hastings Terrace. The remainder of New Hartley will remain in Hartley division.

It is obvious that this review has been driven by a need to equalise the numbers of electors represented by a pre-determined number of councillors at Northumberland County level and doing so in the way proposed would be to the detriment of the residents of New Hartley in particular and Seaton Valley generally. It is not in line with the LGBCE commitment to create good patterns of divisions.

I would urge you to consider the following proposals put forward by New Hartley Community Association:

Do nothing and accept the representative inequalities but keep the communities integrated and identifiable with the existing consistent local government

The review report accepts that the current Seaton Valley divisions of Hartley, Holywell and Seghill with Seaton Delaval have a collective variance of +13%. This is only 76 electors above the 10% maximum and has shown to work effectively and efficiently with 3 county councillor and 9 parish councillors across the 3 divisions.

It has implications for New Delaval which loses the 707 electors from New Hartley North (difference between existing Hartley 4371 and proposed Hartley 3664) and sets this division outside +/- 10% range. New Delaval is then left with 3419 electors and needs a minimum of 3470 electors. A difference of only 51. New Delaval division boundary could easily be adjusted with the adjacent division of Isabella, Plessey and/or South Blyth to equalise this representation and maintain more identifiable community boundaries.

Whilst the Commission has already rejected this option, I would urge you to reconsider this as the least bad alternative to balancing the three statutory requirements.

Alternatively, there is an opportunity to rebalance internal divisions within Seaton Valley to re-establish historic communities and include a whole division of East Cramlington.

The electoral population of Seaton Valley in 2028 is projected to be 13,091. To be equally represented by 4 councillors it needs an electoral population of 15,560, and to be within 10% variance it needs between 14,004 and 17,116.

The electoral population of East Cramlington is projected to be 3,244 by 2028. Adding this to Seaton Valley gives a 4 councillor population of 16,335 or +4% variance. It is difficult to be precise over where the boundaries would occur, without detailed identification of numbers, particularly in Seaton Delaval.

It is suggested that:

Holywell is reduced to -4% variance by moving the northern boundary with Seaton Delaval southwards.

Seghill and Seaton Delaval are separated again with the Seaton Delaval boundary modified southwards and new boundary with Seghill west of the Blyth/Tyne rail line Seaton Delaval Population estimated at +9% variance.

Seghill with Cramlington East (or part) +8% variance.

This would restore the two historic divisions of Seaton Delaval and Seghill.

Attached Documents:

None attached