

# County Durham

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## Comment text:

**Related subject:** Consett North

After reading the plans (and after realising that these are serious proposals and not a belated April Fool's) I felt I have to comment. I have lived and worked in Consett North all my life and have strong connections and sense of personal identity here. In my time I have worked in community development in this ward, the Blackhill ward, Shotley Bridge, Benfieldside, Bridgehill and Consett South (Moorside, The Grove, Catleside). Like myself, the people in these wards have strong community association and see themselves as belonging to their area and feel their identity is part of their ward. The outlook and sense of self of someone living in Consett North is different to that of someone in Leadgate or Medomsley or Hamsterley. Redrawing the boundaries as proposed will erode community belonging and diminish neighbourhood identity. The proposed areas affected score badly in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and part of addressing the mental health aspect of these is to strengthen and bolster a sense of community and home - something that can only suffer if the boundary increases over such a large area of differing needs and people. Consett North comprises the town centre and the heart of the town - it has its own distinct needs and community. Town Centre development and businesses rely on focused support from its elected officials. Neighbouring wards such as Leadgate, Medomsley and - even further afield - Maiden Law have their own priorities and cultural identity. There is no way that any elected official could possibly represent such a large area with such a range of requirements adequately.

Considering that councillors and MPs are often labelled as being too far removed from the grass roots electorate this set of proposals would only work to make this situation worse. Representing the people would be never-ending frustration - councillors couldn't hope to work effectively with requests from people and businesses with so many disparate aims. Nearly 15 years ago our local district council (Derwentside) was abolished and local government resided in Durham - a situation that left many Consett North inhabitants feeling isolated as a 'them-and-us' atmosphere

descended. No longer did we have as much say in funding for our area and we had less focused representation in the greater scheme. Part of the government's aims is apparently to give local people more agency and stake in their community and sense of pride - this isn't achieved by diluting neighbourhoods and becoming more arm's-length. Concerns over housing developments on greenfield are far removed from issues of bus services or parking or anti-social behaviour deserve and require their own approach and, in my opinion, it's unreasonable to think that this is achievable by such a small pool of elected councillors. The other issue of a greatly increased area is the practical ability of travel for councillors to visit and get satisfactorily involved with issues at opposite ends of the boundary.

If you take a look at community groups operating in the affected wards you'll see how many are named after their locality or cultural heritage, not larger areas. For example: Delves Lane and Crookhall Residents' Association, Leadgate Cricket Club, Consett RFC, numerous clubs, historical groups, sports, young people, arts and crafts societies and so on bear their neighbourhood names with pride.

In summary I strongly believe that to extend the boundary of Consett North will be a major detriment to the wellbeing, community feel and prosperity of our area and to those areas that will be subsumed within it. Thanks for your time in reading this far.

## **Attached Documents:**

*None attached*