

STAINDROP PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Judith Mashiter, [REDACTED]

Email: clerk@staindropparishcouncil.gov.uk

Dear Sir

1. Staindrop Parish Council wishes to object to the Commission's recommendations relating to the proposed new boundary between the proposed Barnard Castle and Evenwood divisions. We regret these views were not made known to you earlier in the process.
2. We believe the proposed inclusion of the parishes of Ingleton, Headlam, Langton, Bolam, Morton Tinmouth, Hilton, Wackerfield, Staindrop, Raby and Langleydale in the new Evenwood division is flawed and would result in a misapplication of the Commission's review criteria, particularly in relation to community identity and effective local government.
3. Our reasons are as follows. We believe the characteristics and proposed boundaries of the new Barnard Castle division are in essence a reflection of what is generally recognised informally as Teesdale. We would argue that the parishes mentioned above are a fundamental part of that Teesdale entity and while the need to satisfy electoral equality may lie behind their inclusion in the new large Evenwood division, the new boundary would result in an entirely artificial separation from other Teesdale villages with similar identities and cultural heritage to the south.
4. The Commission mentions a visit to the area and a consideration of road links in the proposed Evenwood division. We believe that a drive south west along the A688 from the Sun Inn at Wackerfield to Keverstone Grange with superb open views across the vale to the left demonstrates in the clearest way where the natural northern boundary of Teesdale lies – along the escarpment running roughly east/west from Wackerfield through Keverstone along the northern edge of Raby Park towards Langleydale, in effect defining the southern edge of the Durham coalfield. There is a distinct change in the landscape from the top of Keverstone Bank, with Raby Castle and the patchwork of fields of lower Teesdale laid out below. (This is the viewpoint of JMW Turner's painting of *Raby Castle, the Seat of the Earl of Darlington (1817)*.) There is a distinct sense of passing through a psychological gateway at this point. We invite the Commission to accept that the existing boundary of the Barnard Castle East division reflects this natural boundary.
5. The **County Durham Landscape Character Assessment** adopted by the County Council in 2008 is a detailed assessment of the character of the county. It works within the framework of Countryside Character Areas and Natural Areas, identifying variations in landscape character at a sub-regional and local level. The discrete Character Area covering the extensive stretch of land to the south of the current Barnard Castle East boundary, (and which the new boundary would sever) is classified as Tees Lowland and Dales Fringe. (See two maps from the document annexed).

6. The distinct area of Tees Lowland in the maps is described as '*A broad lowland plain of gently undulating, occasionally flat terrain*' ... '*The landscape has a long history of settlement and a nucleated pattern of small green villages, most of Saxon or later medieval origins. Buildings are of local sandstone with roofs of clay pan tile or slate, and are set around a central village green. Between the villages lie scattered farms. Farms and farm buildings of the Raby Estate, which covers much of the northern vale, are painted white. Villages are connected by a network of narrow hedged lanes. There are occasional very small abandoned limestone and sandstone quarries worked in the past for building stone and lime.*'
7. We argue that all the parishes mentioned in paragraph 2 above share the characteristics included in the above description in precisely the same way as those parishes the Commission is proposing to include in the new Barnard Castle division, such as Gainford, Whorlton and Winston, often with the same shared association with Raby Estate. The landscape and cultural heritage of the area to the north of the existing boundary is entirely different, reflecting a different past.
8. The County Council's **Staindrop Conservation Area Appraisal** adopted in 2016 says of Staindrop '*The settlement lies within the county landscape character area of the Tees Lowlands, although much of the ornamental parkland around Raby Castle sits with the Dales Fringe ... The approach into Staindrop from the east looks down on to Raby castle and its grounds with magnificent views that are the gateway into Teesdale. Staindrop itself is quite hidden from view, however, by a combination of topography and tree cover. To the north are the projecting galleries and towers of Raby Castle set within its moat and ornamental deer park. To the south Teesdale opens out with the river running through patchwork of arable and pasture fields surrounded by hedgerows and the Yorkshire Dales beyond.* Staindrop is a Tees Lowland village, just like Gainford Winston and Whorlton.
9. Another anomalous aspect of the Commission's proposal is the detachment, in electoral terms, of Raby Castle and Park as well as a substantial part of the eastern, lowland, area of Raby Estate from the rest of Teesdale. In the popular imagination and certainly in national tourist terms the Castle and Park are as much an integral part of Teesdale as are High Force and Bowes Museum. It surely makes sense to keep such similar, related areas together for electoral purposes. We can see no connection, within the statutory criteria, between Raby Castle and Staindrop on the one hand and Evenwood, Witton Park and Hamsterley Forest on the other.
10. On the question of effective local government generally, we query the benefit of such a large three-member division as proposed for Evenwood. We find that single member divisions tend to have the benefit of greater accountability and better connection between electorate and councillor. In the case of the current proposals, we believe there would be a risk of the attention of members of the new division naturally being directed northwards towards the more populous urban areas of the division, possibly to the detriment of the somewhat alien parishes on the periphery - south of the Keverstone escarpment and the 'gateway'.
11. In short, the Parish Council contends that the present proposals fail in terms of geography, community interests, identities and cultural links. The proposed boundary between the Barnard Castle and Evenwood divisions seems to be entirely artificial and arbitrary, reflecting

neither community links nor natural landscape realities. As mentioned above, the current boundary between Barnard Castle East and Evenwood much better fulfils the statutory criteria the Commission must follow.

12. We contend that Staindrop looks west towards Barnard Castle and the rest of Teesdale, and shares the characteristics and interests of the remainder of the lowland villages in the new Barnard Castle division, i.e., informally, Teesdale. The difficulty of the Commission's task in securing electoral equality, particularly in a predominantly rural area like our own, is acknowledged, but we strongly urge the Commission to reconsider its current proposals, with a view to securing that Staindrop, Raby Park and the other parishes involved are not separated from the rest of Teesdale, possibly through some formula for their inclusion within a modified Barnard Castle Division, or, preferably, by constructing a single-member division based perhaps on the totality of Lowland Teesdale together with the relevant part of the Landscape Character Assessment's Dales Fringe. (Please refer to the maps).

Submitted on behalf of Staindrop Parish Council
By Clerk, Judith Mashiter

3 July 2023

Annex.

