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From: Rob Boden [REDACTED]

Sent: 18 July 2016 13:12

To: reviews <reviews@lgbce.org.uk>

Subject: Boundary review - South Lakeland District Council

I attach our submission to this, consultation ends today.

Many thanks

Rob Boden

LGBCE Boundary review, South Lakeland

We are writing this as the Management Committee of the Hallgarth Community Centre. Hallgarth is a large estate on the north side of Kendal, originally built by the Council but with more recent Housing Association additions. We are not a Residents Association, but through running community events we are aware of the views of the local community.

Our main interest in the Review is to create a structure that better represents the interests of this community at District and Parish Council levels than we currently have. We believe that having one representative for the whole estate would provide more effective local government with a clear local champion. Currently the estate is divided between two wards, but as its electorate numbers about 1500 people, by including some adjoining roads it would be of an average current ward size.

We think three member wards, necessitated by the District Council's decision to perpetuate the annual elections model, would obfuscate issues amongst the three councillors. Having a single identified Councillor is best. We are sure many other communities feel the same, as outside the towns South Lakeland is a rural area with small communities in a large geographic area.

Therefore our suggestion is that the Review balances out the existing anomalies in size amongst wards, and then groups these well-established wards in threes into larger "super-wards". By using a more localised, known and community based structure, Councillors could identify with one of the traditional ward more easily so that electors would know who to contact, and expect that Councillor to be involved in community based events and issues.

This also makes it easier for the Council to change its mind as we hope that it does, and as preferred by central Government, and move to "all-up" elections across the District, as the ward structure will be in place to enable this.

So in summary we ask that

- the Review keeps ward boundaries the same as currently as far as possible, while sorting out the 5 existing variations +/- 10% in as straightforward a way as possible.
- these traditional wards are then grouped into three-ward "super-wards" as is required.
- basing 3 member wards on the existing single member ones would create a framework for each Councillor to lead within a recognised geographic entity – the old wards - increasing effectiveness in the view of the electorate by continuing the concept of a local councillor.
- but we would like the whole of Hallgarth estate to be within one traditional sized ward in order to have an identifiable key Councillor and to reflect the community.
- the Review should ignore the land allocation plan-based estimated population figures for 2021 and work simply on current actuals/knowns. This would be in line with the ONS's forecasts of a slight fall in population locally over the next 20 years
- if the Council switches to "all-up" elections the wards are there for this to happen smoothly
- future reviews might be needed if the ONS are wrong and the population grows, pushing some wards beyond the 10% +/- margin

Council size, election pattern and ward size

The Electoral Commission in its report “The cycle of local government elections in England, 2004” (3) recommended that all local authorities should hold whole council elections once every four years. It is of course for the District Council to set its electoral pattern, but the enormity of perpetuating their old system I suspect was not realised in July 2015 when they voted to keep the annual elections was taken before this Review started work, and while the consequences were indeed stated at the time, the full implications only became clear with the publication of the proposal. However, I note that at the same time the Council was also told it could change its decision in the future, to all-up elections.

There is also a political dimension to this, as the most likely result is that the same political party will hold all three seats in a super ward, reducing local democracy in some communities. It also makes it disproportionately difficult for smaller political parties – though they gained over 15% of the vote in the general election - to campaign across the much larger super-wards, and to campaign every year throughout the District. It also makes it almost impossible for an independent candidate to stand, because of having to cover such a large area with canvassing and delivering leaflets and the costs involved, and who has probably made their name in one community within the super-ward.

We also note that the average population per councillor in England is 1:1853. If this was applied to SLDC (it's currently only 1:1632) we would need only 45 Councillors. That the LDNPA and YDNPA take on some of the responsibilities of a District Council suggests that at some point this will need to be addressed by the Commission. It is also ironic that some of the smallest wards are in the Lake District National Parks area.

Electoral equality

Currently, with five ward exceptions, there is an acceptable degree of equality (+/- 10% of average). Against this the future population forecasts used by the LG BCE proposals are estimates based on what is a land allocation plan which defines where any new large estates could be built, but also assumes all houses will be built, and then occupied by newcomers from outside the District. Thus this 9% growth figure is actually an estimate, and other indicators go against any growth.

The Local Plan uses out-of date population forecasts which assumed growth across the UK spread evenly, while the latest ONS figures show most growth in the south-east, and a slight decline in South Lakes over the next 20 years. Using ONS figures, ward electorate numbers are most likely to be the same as now (1). In fact, Invest in South Lakeland says the population has fallen by 941 (1%) since a high in 2005. (2)

The ONS forecast says:

- low inwards migration is balanced by outward migration i.e. no net migration
- there will be a substantial fall in the number of families needing the sort of family housing on large estates envisaged in the SLDC Local Plan
- but a growth in older adults needing a variety of smaller developments of sheltered housing etc which may not be part of the Plan because of their small scale – the plan only looks at sites over 1/3rd hectare.

Not enough jobs planned to attract extra inward migration or raised retirement age

The Local Plan identifies land for up to 6,000 new houses – perhaps 9,000 more adults - but crucially does not in itself build any houses. Yet the Council is only aiming to create 1,000 new jobs with land allocation and financial incentives to attract inward migration beyond the ONS level. With the rising retirement age this is not even enough to provide continuing employment for existing workers let alone bring additional inward migration. In 2011 the working population was 62,600. Divided by 45 years (working lifetime), this needs 1,391 extra jobs for existing people to work one year longer. SLDC's plan to enable inward migration falls short of this.

Population effect of referendum on EU membership

Following the referendum on leaving the EU, it is likely that there will be less inward migration, while it might be that even people already here move away.

Dealing with the current imbalance

There remains a current imbalance in 5 wards which could be resolved by minor changes:

- Coniston (-19%) is bordered by Broughton (+14%)
- Grange North (+16%) is next to Grange South (-6%)
- Crooklands (+11%) is next to Burton (-6%) (but a double ward)
- Lyth Valley (+13%) is next to Holker (-2%)

The proposal based on the guesstimate population figures could have meant 16 existing wards being +/- 10% of the norm. However, 9 of these wards are within multi-ward conurbations (Grange, Ulverston and Kendal) and five of the others are dealt with above.

Effective and convenient local government

We worry that large “super-wards” will break the link between electorate and councillor. One advantage of the proposed three-member ward locally would be that the Hallgarth estate falls entirely into one super-ward, whereas at the moment it is split between two wards on a 4/5ths 1/5th basis. Therefore currently there is no one clear voice speaking for the estate at Parish or District levels.

However, unless these “super-wards” are based on the existing single member wards there are more risks with them than the present arrangement:

- There could be 3 different voices speaking for Hallgarth estate especially if different parties held the three seats; or conversely no councillor spoke for the estate as it is only a quarter of the ward. For example, one Town Councillor said he did not attend a meeting about youth facilities because it is only a part of his ward.
- Over the last few years, most Councillors have lived within the ward or within a short distance from it – the exception is the current Councillor who lives over two miles away and is rarely seen. This experience makes us wary that the estate could be left unrepresented in actuality if not technically if all 3 Councillors lived elsewhere in the super-ward. Presumably this could apply more in a large rural super-ward covering a large geographic area, a range of communities, and several parish

councils. This would make these difficult to represent unless the super-ward area was subsequently spilt into smaller areas.

- It is disingenuous to say that the ratio between councillor and electorate will be 1:1746. It will be one to 5,238. This is a large number of people for councillors to work with and would reduce the effectiveness of local government. However, using the existing wards as building blocks for the “super wards” would create a framework to help Councillors to relate to a particular area within the super-ward.

We conclude therefore that three member wards will reduce the effectiveness and convenience of local government as seen from the electorate's perspective and in representing local communities, and will press the District Council to switch to all-up four yearly elections.

This would also cost a lot less. Without EU elections, the proposed system would cost SLDC £1,059,167 or £50,000 a year more than all-up. We also understood that there could not be three elections held at the same time, which would happen in Kendal, with the Town Council elections, 5 out of the 12 years.

Community identity

There is little common identity across the proposed Kendal North super-ward. The river forms an effective barrier (to drive between the two necessitates going through another super-ward – just, at the railway bridge), bus routes are different, arterial roads are different, primary schools are separate though the secondary school used by most children is the same (there are only two secondaries), the Church of England parishes are different.

In fact, the north-west of Kendal has more in common with Burneside – a shared bus route, major arterial road, and now the primary school is the County Council's option for any additional children on Hallgarth. Burneside Parish was part of the erstwhile Kendal Local Area Partnership.

To improve community identity, we would like the Review to consider switching boundaries to move areas of Hallgarth which are currently in Strickland ward into Underley, and conversely south eastern parts of Kendal Underley ward into Strickland ward. As we have argued above, this would help irrespective of a move to larger three person wards because at least one councillor could identify with this particular community, rather than this link being lost if shared between three councillors, while retaining flexibility to switch to “all-up” elections.

Rob Boden
Chair, Hallgarth Community Centre Management Committee

- (1) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinenglandtable2>
- (2) http://www.investinsouthlakeland.co.uk/downloads/Economic-Profile-of-South-Lakeland_v2.pdf
- (3) http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0015/1

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