



House of Commons

London

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Natascha Engel

Member for North East Derbyshire

The Review Officer (Derbyshire)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
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Our ref: NE/MR/BCR/DCC/2012

6 June 2012

Dear Sir

Response to Electoral Review 2012 for Derbyshire County Council

I wish to make the following submission in response to the Local Government Boundary Review for Derbyshire County Council in respect of the North East Derbyshire area.

Introduction

As the Member of Parliament for North East Derbyshire since 2005 I welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft proposals put forward by the Commission.

I am mindful of the Commission's efforts in this Review to meet the criteria of providing electoral equality and have noted the Commission's intention to propose a 64-member authority for Derbyshire instead of the original 65 with the loss of one member from North East Derbyshire.

In the search for electoral equality the draft proposals have not taken into account the unique identities of the communities affected in this Review or the very strong links that bind communities together.

Through representations I have received, I am very much aware of the widespread concern that the draft proposals have generated throughout local communities in North East Derbyshire and in particular where the proposals split parish council areas between different divisions resulting in a re-warding of those parish councils.

In order to provide a solution to prevent the division of communities I am proposing the creation of two multi-member divisions. This would result in communities being encompassed within a common boundary and would produce divisions with electorates that are closer to the county average than the draft proposals.

North East Derbyshire District

The draft proposals do not reflect the strong community identities and interests within this district and as such they would lead to poorer local government.

The Commission acknowledges that parish council areas are a good indication of communities and recognises that North East Derbyshire is a wholly-parished, largely rural area. Yet the draft proposals divide six parishes (Eckington, Dronfield, Wingerworth, Clay Cross, Grassmoor and North Wingfield) between different divisions. Each of these communities are distinct villages/towns, separated from the next community by open fields. Each has its own parish church, local primary school, shopping centre, community/village hall, park and doctors surgery. Residents in each of these communities tend to use facilities within their own village rather than travelling to neighbouring villages and see themselves as coming from that village. These are ex-mining communities that identify strongly with the villages into which they were born.

In Eckington, the Commission is proposing to create a new Southgate parish council ward. Under the draft proposals this ward will take in Eckington town centre including its main shopping area, library, community centre and leisure centre. This part of Eckington will then be placed into the Killamarsh and Spinkhill division with none of the facilities in Eckington, with the exception of the swimming pool, being used by the residents of Killamarsh.

The main residential estates in Eckington, with a population of over 5,000 adults who use the facilities in Eckington town centre are, however, included in the proposed Apperknowle division.

The Commission gives no explanation as to why it believes this proposal reflects the identity and interests of this community. Everyone effected by these proposals is baffled and believes that the Commission cannot possibly have come to the area to see for itself the devastating impact this would have on local communities.

A similar outcome is proposed for the community of Clay Cross where the Commission's proposals to split the village in two with the village centre, including its main shopping centre, community hall, leisure centre, doctors and dentist in the Clay Cross North division while the predominantly residential area of the Clay Cross South district ward is included in the proposed Clay Cross South division.

The Commission's commentary contained in its draft fails to recognise either of these two consequences or provide any indication of the Commission's thinking for having the

residential areas of a community in one division and the communal facilities of that community in another.

The Commission's technical guidance expresses a preference for achieving common boundaries, not just with parish council boundaries but also with district council ward boundaries. Coterminosity is seen as a prima facie means of complying with the statutory criteria of securing effective and efficient local government although the guidance does state that these electoral boundaries can be split where it is necessary to comply with the two other statutory criteria.

The Commission's draft proposals split six district council wards (Eckington South, Coal Aston, Dronfield Woodhouse, Gosforth Valley, North Wingfield and Grassmoor) and also results in the need to create additional parish council wards with some, such as the Bowshaw ward and the Coal Aston West ward in Dronfield, being particularly small in size when compared to the remaining town council wards in Dronfield.

This lack of coterminosity with district council wards together with the need to divide so many civic parish council areas between different divisions is in itself evidence of the inherent weakness of the draft proposal in achieving effective and efficient local government and securing divisions that reflect community identity and interests.

Another problem with the proposals are the communication links between two of the proposed divisions, Wingerworth and Shirland. The villages of Wingerworth and Shirland sit along the A61. Whilst this road links the two communities it is not possible to travel from one of these villages to the other using the A61 without leaving the division and passing through the divisions of Clay Cross North and Clay Cross South. The fact is that Wingerworth and Shirland have no connection with one another.

A similar problem exists with the proposed Clay Cross South division which splits in half the village of North Wingfield linking the southern half with the Clay Cross South district council ward. Access between the villages of North Wingfield and Clay Cross is via the A6175. However, this road leads into the Clay Cross North district council ward which is included in the proposed Clay Cross North division and so communication links within this division would be by unclassified roads and involve a route that no local resident would use.

The Commission's proposal to create multi-member divisions in other district council areas is an opportunity to look afresh at the proposed boundaries for North East Derbyshire.

I therefore propose the creation of two multi-member divisions and four single member divisions for the North East Derbyshire District Council area.

The consequence of this proposal is that all but two of the proposed divisions are coterminous with district council boundaries with only the Gosforth Valley ward and the Brampton and Walton ward not being coterminous. The only parish/town council not to be included within a single division would be Dronfield and the only consequential change to town/parish council wards being the Commission's proposed split of the Gosforth Valley ward in the Dronfield Town Council area.

Whereas the Commission draft proposals have three divisions varying from the county average by more than 10% my proposals achieve a greater electoral equality with only two divisions, the Dronfield West and Walton division at 11% above the county average and the proposed Grassmoor, Tupton and Wingerworth division at 12%, deviating from the average by more than 10%.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Member of Parliament.

Member of Parliament for North East Derbyshire