

Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England proposals for new electoral arrangements for Leeds City Council

This is the Leeds Liberal Democrat response to the Draft Recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for New electoral arrangements for Leeds City Council

As we indicated in our original response, we support the general thrust and approach of the official Leeds City Council submission (which in very large part has been adopted in these draft recommendations). Most of the existing wards which were first contested in 2004 remain viable and meet the criteria of electoral equality, community identity and effective local government.

Similarly, the draft recommendations produce wards which fall within the +/- 10% tolerance allowed for in the statutory guidance, and for the most part support community identity and effective local government. We would argue that this is not the case in respect of three proposed wards:

- Little London and Woodhouse
- Hunslet and Riverside
- Beeston and Holbeck

We would therefore like to propose a number of amendments to these proposals.

1) The Boundary between the proposed Little London and Woodhouse Ward and Hunslet and Riverside ward.

Leeds City Council's proposal (which has been adopted by in the draft recommendations), proposes a boundary between these two wards comprising the railway line, Wellington Street and Boar Lane. The Council provided the following argument/evidence to justify arrangements for the city centre

"There is a band formed of the office, retail, market and quarry hill that aren't as heavily residential as the north and south so there is a natural split between Whitehall Road / the Calls and Leeds (Clarence) Dock and the Park Square / North Street and more student flats around the arena in the north. Using Wellington Street, Boar Lane and the railway provides a solid quality boundary. People living in The Calls area have told councillors they view that area as an identified community outside the city."

Aside from the fact that the paragraph is rather unclear and ambiguous, there is no specific evidence provided (other than stating that it provides a strong boundary) to justify this arrangement.

By contrast, the Liberal Democrat proposals provided the following evidence to justify concluding that a boundary which largely comprises the railway line, following consideration (in turn) of each of the options:

"It seems to us that if a clear and unambiguous boundary can be identified – one which is unlikely to alter (for example due to development), this is particularly desirable in a densely populated city location. We therefore considered what we felt

were the three main options: a) a boundary based using prominent highways, b) a boundary using the river and/or canal c) a boundary using the railway line.

“Using roads as a potential boundary proves to be difficult in the city centre. We have looked at a number of potential options but it is our view that there is no obvious road or adjoining roads running East to West that both provide for an unambiguous delineation between two halves of the city centre and also effectively address warding criteria. The most obvious potential boundary to the south of the city centre (Water Lane, Hunslet Lane, Hunslet Road) is too far south to provide for good electoral equality, would also divide the Holbeck Urban Village between two wards and does not provide a particularly effective way of addressing community identity. The most obvious boundary north of the river and station would be to use Wellington Street and Boar Lane as a boundary. It is considered that this would not provide for good community identity nor would it provide for efficient and convenient local government; it would divide the shopping area of the city centre into two wards – with shops on the southern side of Boar Lane in a different ward from those on the northern side. It would also mean that the railway station – a key gateway to the city for shoppers and tourists, would not be in the same ward [as the bulk of the city centre].

Using the river as a potential boundary was considered. This is a clear boundary and delineates the “north bank” and “south bank” areas of Leeds City centre. It also has the advantage of keeping the whole of the retail core of the city centre. However it has one distinct disadvantage. It would divide the South Bank Leeds initiative into two wards. The Leeds South Bank Framework is a Council-led initiative to regenerate this southern part of central Leeds. It aims, amongst other things, to create 35,000 new jobs and 4,000 new homes. Although the South Bank suggests an area immediately south of the river, the Framework area also includes a small sliver of land between Leeds city station and the river (<https://southbankleeds.co.uk/map>). It thus seems desirable to include the whole of the Leeds South Bank area in a single ward. Our conclusion is that using the southern-most railway line provides a solution that best meets the warding criteria. It keeps the whole of the retail, civic, leisure and cultural core and the central railway station in a single ward but it also keeps the largest regeneration initiative (Leeds South Bank) intact in a ward to the south of the city. Our proposals for the city centre and its environs flow from this decision.”

Thus, it remains our view that the ward boundary which most effectively reflects warding criteria is one which largely uses the railway line (at its most southerly extremity where it becomes Leeds Railway station). The southern side of Boar Lane (and the Call Lane/Corn Exchange area) is very similar in character to its northerly side. It includes shops, hotels, restaurants, bars and offices. This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that The Trinity Shopping Centre is on the northerly side of Boar Lane whereas the multi-storey car park associated with it is on its southerly side. Equally, Wellington Street is characterised in the main as an area of the city that is office-led. This applies to both sides of Wellington Road and the Whitehall Road area. It makes sense to keep this part of the city within the same ward.

We suggest that the Council’s proposed boundaries for the Little London and Woodhouse Ward are thus adopted with the amendment that the southerly boundary of the ward “hugs” the railway line (at its southern most extremity) from the east of

the city centre to the west until it crosses Whitehall Road, where the boundary would be as per the existing boundary for CHD.

If this additional sliver of land is added to the Council's proposed Little London and Woodhouse Ward, it would add c. 500 to the electorate. This would still leave the ward within the +/- 10% tolerance considered by the Boundary Commission. In our submission, we proposed moving part of CHI (the area bounded by Regent Street and Skinner Lane) into Burmantofts and Richmond Hill to reunite this area with the rest of the Burmantofts community. We estimate that this would involve the transfer of 637 voters, thus more than off-setting the increase in size of the ward proposed by shifting the boundary to the railway line

As an aside, we note that the Boundary Commission has adopted the names Little London and Woodhouse and Hunslet and Riverside. Neither of these titles reflect the fact that both wards contain significant parts of the city centre. Whilst the use of the term "riverside" might be considered shorthand for city centre, the Little London and Woodhouse Ward includes (most of the commercial city centre – in the draft proposals, or all of it in our proposals) and yet does not reflect this in its name. A name such as Little London, Woodhouse and City or simply "City and Woodhouse" may be a more accurate description of this ward.

2) The Boundary between the Hunslet and Riverside and Beeston and Holbeck wards

We note that in the draft recommendations, the Boundary Commission proposes to adopt the Council's proposals for this part of Leeds. This will create a Beeston and Holbeck Ward that stretches from beyond the Leeds outer ring road as far as Leeds City Station, incorporating two areas divided by motorways (with little permeability). It is also a solution that continues to divide the Beeston Hill community into two separate wards. It also divides the South Bank Framework area into two separate wards. In its submission, the Council provided the following evidence to justify this arrangement:

"Transfer land and proposed developments south of the train station in CHD to BHB as this area is more closely associated with Holbeck. Transfer New Hall from MIH to BHE as this area is more closely associated with Beeston."

We provided the following evidence and argumentation to justify this proposal:

"The current southerly boundary of the City and Hunslet Ward incorporates part of Holbeck (the so-called Holbeck Urban Village), but excludes the rest of Holbeck which is currently part of Beeston and Holbeck Ward. Although the Holbeck Urban village is different in nature from the rest of Holbeck - it is an industrial and post-industrial setting which is in the process of redevelopment) whereas the area around Holbeck Moor is a more settled community and is characterised by high rise blocks, social housing and brick back to backs, the Holbeck Moor area is only 15 minutes away from Leeds City Station on foot and it has always been an aspiration of the city to use this proximity to encourage regeneration across the area. Bringing the whole of Holbeck into a single ward, makes sense in terms of community but also makes sense in terms of governance. At present, the three Holbeck polling districts that (BHA, BHG and BHJ) that make up Beeston and Holbeck Ward, are physically

separated from the rest of the ward – predominantly the settlement of Beeston - by the M621. This creates a significant physical barrier and thus permeability between the two communities is poor. We therefore consider that statutory objectives in terms of both community and geography would be better met by including these Holbeck polling districts together with the Holbeck Urban Village polling district in a new City Centre South Holbeck and Hunslet Ward. It should also be noted that prior to 2004, Holbeck formed part of the then City and Holbeck Ward. We also consider that Hunslet (essentially the area to the East of Dewsbury Road), has a defined identity and should continue to be in this ward. We also include the part of CHF that lies to the north of the motorway. This is very different in character from the rest of the polling district (essentially industrial) and is thus a better fit with the rest of this ward. The Liberal Democrat proposal thus incorporates the following polling districts to create this new ward (CHA-part, CHD-part, CHE-part, CHF-part, CHH, CHJ, CHK, BHA, BHB, BHJ)

Beeston: A consequence of moving the Holbeck polling districts into the proposed City Centre South Ward is that Beeston becomes too small. This is addressed by reuniting Beeston Hill with rest of Beeston Ward (polling districts CHB, CHG and the part of CHF that lies to the south of the motorway). This area is the location of the Beeston Hill PFI housing scheme, it is part of the Beeston Hill 20mph traffic calming zone, residents here use facilities (GP surgeries, Health Centre, Mosques, Churches and Schools) that are located within the existing Beeston and Holbeck Ward, and they use shopping facilities further along Dewsbury Road and on Beeston Town Street. Including this area within a revised Beeston Ward therefore makes sense in terms of community identity. It also removes the large physical barrier of the motorway which divide these polling districts from the rest of the current City and Hunslet Ward by encompassing the whole of Beeston Hill (i.e. the area south of the M621). The Liberal Democrat proposal incorporates the following polling districts to create the revised ward (BHC, BHD, BHE, BHF, BHG, BHH, BHI, CHB, CHG, CHF-part)

It remains our view that a solution of this nature more effectively meets the criteria. It is interesting that the City Council has now concluded its consultation on the South Bank Framework. In this document, reference is made to the development of a site that will expand the city centre by 50%. This fact alone would suggest that it is not sensible to include a significant part of this area considered city centre in a ward that stretches beyond the outer ring road.

For the avoidance of doubt our proposals were (and are) as follows:

- A northerly border for both of these wards that follows the railway line as described above (we do not propose to alter any boundaries with Farnley and Wortley, Middleton Park or Burmantofts and Richmond Hill)
- A new Beeston Ward which gains the whole of CHG and CHB and the part of CHF that is located to the south of the motorway, loses BHA, BHB and BHJ and retains all other polling districts from the existing Beeston and Holbeck Ward (note that our calculations estimated that this ward was within the +/- 10% margin of error)
- A new City South Holbeck and Hunslet Ward that gains the part of CHD located to the south of the railway line and the part of CHA located to the south of the railway line, the part of CHF located to the north of the motorway and the whole of CHE, CHJ, CHK, BHA, BHB and BHJ.

It remains our view that, given the evidence provided, these options offer the best solution to this part of the city

Leeds Liberal Democrats
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