

Ward Boundary Review
Darlington Borough Council
Submission
December 2013

Background

1. Following the announcement by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) that the recommended council size for Darlington will be 50 members, we met to discuss a joint submission in relation to the ward boundary element of the Further Electoral Review. The following submission and the appended maps set out our proposal for a revised pattern of wards for the Borough.

Introduction

2. Darlington Borough comprises a traditional market town with several rural centres. It covers an area of 197 km² and has a population of 105,600 (ONS mid-2011 estimate) with 85% living in the compact urban core. The population has increased by nearly 7,700 (97,900, ONS mid-2001 estimate) since mid-2001. As at mid-2011 Darlington's population represents 15.9% of the Tees Valley total of 663,100 and 17.1% of the historic County of Durham population of 618,600.
3. The Council's proposed vision is based on three key changes that will need to be brought about to enable the vision to be delivered:
 - a) Building Strong Communities
 - b) Every Public Pound Well Spent
 - c) Economic Growth
4. To deliver the vision the Council is engaging in significant public engagement with communities, supporting volunteering, personal responsibility and making the most of social capital. We are working with our partners particularly in the health sector to use our money jointly to maximise the reduced resources available across the public sector. The Council and the wider partnership have also placed a strong emphasis on economic growth. The Council has supported this by proposing a restructure specifically designed to support the

attraction of new businesses to the Borough, the growth and support to existing businesses, the creation of new jobs and the building of additional houses. We therefore anticipate that there will be further growth in the population across the Borough, that there will be house building in specific areas which will increase the population. The majority of the proposed areas for development have been captured within the proposed electorate variants set out within the LGBCE consultation documents. However there is a likelihood that existing development proposals may be accelerated and new areas identified for development may come to fruition in a shorter timescale than has been the case previously, to reflect the drive for increased house building.

The Electorate

5. The projected electorate for 2019 for the Borough is 82,541 (including 21 overseas electors) (please note that our own figures based on the electorate for each area is 67 less than this figure). Figures are necessarily based on a mix of the two sets ie total electorate of 82,541 and individual ward electorate figures based on our own calculations. It is our submission that 11,098 of the electorate live in the rural wards and 71,443 in the urban wards. Each Councillor is required to represent approximately the same number of electors which based on the population above is 1651.
6. We have prepared the submission on the basis that the variances should not be more than 10% but as far as possible variances should be lower than 5%. Where the variances are over 5% we have provided reasoned arguments as to why this is the case.

Rural Area

7. As a starting point we divided the Borough up into a Rural area and five urban areas. Whilst there are borders on the existing urban areas which could arguably be moved to accommodate future possible urban growth or to use

the outer ring road as a boundary we did not feel these arguments were compelling enough and have chosen to continue with existing boundaries for simplicity.

8. It should also be noted that the Parliamentary Constituency for the rural wards are different and by altering these boundaries it can create confusion for electorate who are in the same ward as their neighbours but have a different parliamentary constituency. The proposals seek to avoid this confusion in every area except the area to the south of the current Park East ward where a new development has resulted in urban spread over into the current Hurworth ward boundary. The whole estate forms one community and in this instance it is appropriate to move the houses into the Park East ward alongside their neighbours.
9. In general it is more difficult to find appropriate boundaries within the rural areas because of the more defined nature of the settlements and communities and therefore the variances are higher in the rural areas to reflect that. For the most part moving urban boundaries would exacerbate rather than ease the issue of rural variances.

Heighington and Coniscliffe

10. The ward is the second largest ward geographically stretching from the west end of urban Darlington to the edge of the Borough west along the A67 incorporating the settlements of Merrybent, High Coniscliffe, Carlbury and Piercebridge. The ward also incorporates a stretch of the B6279 heading North West to Summerhouse. A further route heading North West out of the urban area takes in the Parish of Archdeacon Newton and the Walworth area. The ward is divided by the main A68 road heading North West and reaches as far as Royal Oak along this road. These various roads like bicycle spokes out of the urban hub all cross the main A1M Motorway which crosses the Ward South West to North East. The A68 splits forming the A6072 which

leads to the main settlement of the ward in Heighington and also on to Redworth.

11. The total electorate of the ward is currently 2990 which is forecast to reduce to 2965 in 2019. It is a two member ward currently with a 1% over representation. However with the reduction in members and an average across the Borough of 1651 electors per member there would be 337 electors short of a two member ward at 3302 this increases to a 10.21% variance which is over the tolerance.

12. The ward difference is not sufficient to make a one member ward without creating a variance of around 80%. The ward is a rural ward which makes it difficult to combine with adjacent urban wards. Because of its size combining it with the adjacent one member rural ward of Sadberge and Whessoe would create a very large ward circling virtually all of the Borough. The options are therefore to retain the variance or seek to minimise the variance by increasing the size of the ward. The options for increasing the electorate are limited given that the ward boundary is also the Borough boundary to the North, West and South of the ward. Otherwise the ward is tight up against the urban boundary in the south east of the ward. Whilst it is possible to cross between a rural and urban boundary it would create a split between the natural communities of Mowden and Hummersknot in the West End of Darlington if these were moved into the rural ward. If anything a more natural boundary would be the main A1 M which would reduce rather than increase the rural area. It would also create a difference in boundary with the Parliamentary boundary as Heighington and Coniscliffe are currently in the Sedgefield Parliamentary constituency.

13. The preferable area for additional electors is therefore in the North of the Ward where it abuts the Sadberge and Whessoe ward. Consideration of alternative natural boundaries and communities would allow for some transfer in this area. It is therefore suggested that the area to the west of the A1M up to the railway line and just beyond can as much be a part of Heighington and

Coniscliffe as Sadberge and Whessoe as the parish is already split between the urban area of Harrowgate Hill and the rural area. It is therefore proposed to move the XL polling district into the ward of Heighington. This produces a total electorate including projections of 3146 and produces a variance of -4.72%.

Sadberge

14. The current ward of Sadberge and Whessoe is a single member ward. The ward is the largest geographically stretching from the A67 west round the North East of the Borough to the A1M and near the settlement of Coatham Mundeville. The ward is currently underrepresented with a 10% variance with the existing number of members. This is predicted to change with the proposed reduction of members to 3.63% based on the electorate in 2019. However if the changes above to Heighington are made this will become over representation at 6.36%. This ward cannot be changed from a single member ward without combination with an adjacent ward. If it were combined with either of its neighbours it would make a geographically very large ward stretching round the Borough. The boundary of the current Sadberge and Whessoe ward borders almost directly on the settlement of Middleton St George making it difficult to take any more of the territory to the south of Sadberge and Whessoe without dividing the community of Middleton St George. It is therefore recommended that to accommodate the specific nature of the rural wards around Darlington and the settlements within the wards the variances should exceed the recommended 5% to this extent within the proposed Sadberge ward.

Middleton St George

15. Middleton St George is the smallest of the rural wards but contains the most significant settlement outside the urban spread of Darlington. It has seen growth in electorate and further building is likely as it continues to be the subject of planning applications from developers. The ward itself is focused around the settlement other than extending to the South East beyond the village, and to the South West into Dinsdale. The ward also contains the Durham Tees Valley airport.
16. The division of the settlement of Middleton St George itself would create an unnatural division in the community. The ward currently has under representation of 18% however with the change in the number of members this improves to 7%. As explained above changes to the border with Sadberge and Whessoe are difficult due to the proximity of the settlement of Middleton St George to that boundary, however the adjacent ward to the west of Hurworth has over representation and there is limited scope for transferring the area to the South West of the ward which would result in a transfer of 94 electors into the Hurworth ward. The proposals will transfer the area of the Middleton St George ward along the existing polling district boundary as far as Neasham Road and then along Neasham Road. This will result in a revised population of 3411 and a variance of +3.3%.

Hurworth

17. This ward contains the settlements of Hurworth, Hurworth Place and Neasham. The ward stretches from Blackwell in the North West to the southern tip of Sockburn in the South east. It is currently very slightly under represented with a 1% variance but with the reduction in members this changes to -6% overrepresentation. The ward contains a small section to the north of the A66 which includes an extension from the Skerne Park area of Park East Ward. The residents of this area form a natural community with

the residents in the rest of the urban residential area. These residents are currently in the Hurworth ward and Sedgefield Parliamentary Constituency and are recommended to move into the urban ward of Park East alongside their neighbours although this exacerbates the variances is clearly dictated by the community to the north. The removal of this area (228 electors) would create a variance of -13%. If the proposed transfer from Middleton St George of 94 residents occurs this variance is reduced to 9.6%. Whilst this is at the outside of a recommended variance without splitting urban and rural wards or creating artificial splits in the communities of Neasham or Middleton St George it is difficult to identify an alternative which suits the communities of the rural areas.

The Rural Area Summary

18. The summary of the rural areas is therefore as follows:

- a) Heighington & Coniscliffe : $2965 + 205$ (from polling district XL) = 3170 including projections this becomes 3146 with a variance of $- 4.72\%$.
- b) Sadberge and Whessoe : $1711 - 205$ (polling district XL to H & C Ward) = 1506 with projections this is 1546 Variance - 6.36%.
- c) Middleton St. George : $3539 - 94$ (part of polling district WA to Huworth) = 3445 with projections this is 3411 with a Variance + 3.3%
- d) Hurworth : $2883 - 228$ (move the pastures from Hurworth to Park East Ward) + 94 (part of polling district WA to Hurworth Ward) = 2977 with projections 2985 and a variance of -9.6%.

The Rural Urban Split

19. The proposal above for the rural wards provides a slight over representation to provide a round number of Councillors for the rural area as follows. The electorate would require 6.726 councillors which when rounded up to 7 Councillors aligns with the proposals above for the rural area. The urban area therefore requires 43.3 which is rounded down to 43 Councillors which is a slight underrepresentation based on 2019 projected electorate.

The Urban Wards

20. The 43 Councillors representing the urban wards need to be distributed as far as possible with reference to the overall variances whilst reflecting communities and natural boundaries. Urban wards have been divided into wards consisting of between 1 and 3 councillors.

21. To assist in achieving an overall balance and to reflect significant boundaries within the town it has been divided into five quadrants and the number of Councillors required to represent each of these areas is detailed below:-

- a) Quadrant 1 (North East) (7) Councillors
- b) Quadrant 2 (South East) (9) Councillors
- c) Quadrant 3 (South West) (8) Councillors
- d) Quadrant 4 (North West) (9) Councillors
- e) Quadrant 5 (Central) (10) Councillors

Quadrant 1

22. There is a natural boundary through the centre of the Town which is reflected to a large extent in existing ward boundaries and this has been strengthened to avoid wards which straddle the main railway line between London and

Edinburgh which goes through the centre of Darlington. This has been used as a natural boundary to divide the Eastern part of the town from the central and western areas.

23. The Eastern side can be further divided by the new Eastern Transport Corridor road which travels East/West through the centre of the Eastern area creating a natural split and communities reflect that split.

24. In the North East there are a number of wards in a cluster which have the natural boundary of the Eastern Transport Corridor to the south and the North East Rail line to the West. This quadrant represents the community of Haughton with the three existing wards in this area bearing the name of Haughton East, Haughton West and Haughton North. Current variances show slight over representation in North and West with the East slightly underrepresented. With the reduction in members the overrepresentation increases to provide variances in excess of the 10%. The existing boundary leaves the community of Albert Hill which is on the Eastern side of the North East railway line in the current Central Ward which is predominantly on the other side of the railway line. A more natural split would move this area of the town into Haughton. This new area has a total electorate of 11,196. This divides into 7 Members with an average elector number of 1599. Even distribution of this variation can be achieved with further changes to the boundaries within this area to reflect communities. This would produce three wards and 7 Councillors with variances which reflect very slightly fewer electors than the average as shown below.

- a) Haughton East (proposed) 3233 - 2 Members Variance -2.09%
- b) Haughton West (proposed) 4766 – 3 members Variance -3.78%
- c) Haughton North (proposed) 3203 – 2 Members Variance -3%

Quadrant 2

25. This quadrant represents the area in the South East of Darlington. This area has the natural Western boundary of the North East railway line with the Eastern Transport Corridor to the North of the area. This area currently has four wards with 9 members. The Ward of Lingfield is proposed to see significant development with the completion of the Central Park development. With these projections the total electorate for the area is 14663 with an average of 1629 electors per member. The proposal reconfigures the existing four wards into three new wards to provide 9 Councillors with appropriate variances.

- a) Lingfield (proposed) 4818 - 3 Members Variance -2.78%
- b) BankTop (proposed) 4885 - 3 Members Variance -1.37%
- c) Eastbourne (proposed) 4960 - 3 Members Variance +0.14%

Quadrant 3

26. Quadrant 3 incorporates the current Mowden, Hummersknott, College and Park West wards which currently has 8 members. This area is commonly referred to in Darlington as the West End and is a recognised community area.

27. The total electorate of the existing wards was 12470 which when divided by 1651 should require 7.55 councillors. If this is rounded up to 8 councillors (as the nearest number) it produces an overall variance for this area of -5.53%. Until the last boundary review the area to the west of Park West beyond Grange Road to the line of the River Skerne was part of the Park West ward. It includes the area of Polam Hall School and a number of streets which might reasonably be regarded as part of the West End. By moving this area into the Park West ward the electorate rises to 13402 over the four wards. The proposals for the four wards based on minor changes to existing boundaries

and the inclusion of the new areas from Park East create the following four new wards:

- a) Hummersknott (proposed) 3325 – 2 Members Variance +0.7%
- b) Mowden (proposed) 3179 – 2 Members – Variance -3.73%
- c) College (proposed) 3433 – 2 Members – Variance +3.97%
- d) Park West (proposed) 3465 – 2 Members – Variance +4.93%

Quadrant 4

28. The North West quadrant includes the ward of Faverdale where increases in population prompted this boundary review. The combined electorate of the existing three wards of Faverdale, Cockerton East and Cockerton West provides a proposed electorate including latest projections of of 10067 with a 1651 electorate per member would give 6.09 Members. The proposed wards are based upon the areas of Cockerton and Faverdale being a discrete community. The main centre of Faverdale comprising the new development would provide a single member ward as is currently the case. The new area which stretches out along Edward Pease way and the areas proposed for development alongside West Park Hospital would form part of the communities immediately adjacent in Cockerton West and this would become a three member ward. There is a proposal to link Nickstream Lane and Edward Pease Way, with the construction of a new road, which will draw the two communities of Faverdale West and Cockerton West together, particularly as the development is completed. Cockerton East largely would remain as it currently is giving up a small section to Cockerton West which more naturally sits with that community and becoming a two member ward. This would produce the following electorate and variances.

- a) Faverdale (proposed) 1646 - 1 Member Variance –0.3%
- b) Cockerton East (proposed) 3362 - 2 Members Variance +1.82
- c) Cockerton West (proposed) 5059 - 3 Members Variance +2.14%

Quadrant 5

29. The central corridor of the Borough would then make up the final area. With a total electorate currently of 20650. However the proposals already suggested in relation to a reduction to Park East into the South Western quadrant, a reduction from Central into the North Eastern quadrant and the small number of additional properties in the south of Park East from the Hurworth ward create a new electorate of 22052 and 13 members. There are currently 16 members representing these wards and therefore a reduction in members will be required across this quadrant.
30. The ward of Harrowgate Hill to the north abuts the rural area of Sadberge and Whessoe. Encroachment on the rural area would provide a mixed urban and rural ward which these proposals have sought to avoid. The ward currently has a 6% variance but with the reduction in members has no significant variance from the average. This ward has therefore been retained largely as it is with three members. There is a slight change to the southern boundary to create a more natural boundary line at the rear of Thompson Street. The ward of North Road with the reduction in members will have an overrepresentation with a variance of -11%. The options are to take in additional areas or to reduce the number of members representing the ward.
31. The current Central ward is not representative of a community stretching over the railway line to the north and crossing over the Town Centre to the South. Proposals have attempted to rectify this by making Albert Hill part of Haughton, moving the southern area adjacent to town centre into Park East. A strong link has been created along North Road, and a second minor road to two areas that are both of significant electorate size. This proposed new ward combines Northgate and Central into one new more logical community based ward. The change brings a reduction of two members. This allows the current Pierremont ward nestling into the Cockerton area to stay as it is along its well established boundary to the south with the West End, and adjusting

only slightly the eastern boundary to accommodate the new Central Ward. The North Road ward is then reduced to bring about the third member reduction and represent the remainder of the North Road community into a two member ward. To the south Park East ward takes in the remainder of the area between the South Eastern and South Western quadrants and the Town Centre area from Central ward. The result is a number of wards based more neatly on the communities they represent which have relatively low variances and bring about the required reduction of three members necessitated by the reduction from 53 to 50 members required by the Council size review. The figures and variances are as follows:

- a) Harrowgate Hill (proposed) 5139 - 3 Members Variance +3.75%
- b) North Road (proposed) 3421 - 2 Members Variance +3.6%
- c) Pierremont (proposed) 5015 – 3 Members +1.25%
- d) Northgate (proposed) 3440 - 2 Members Variance +4.18
- e) Park East (proposed) 5037 - 3 Members +1.7%

Parish Implications

32. The ward of Heighington and Coniscliffe contains the parishes of Walworth, Heighington, Archdeacon Newton rural (this is split with the current ward of Faverdale), Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent, High Coniscliffe, Piercebridge, Denton, Summerhouse and Killerby. None of these are changed by the proposals.

33. The ward of Sadberge and Whessoe contains the parishes of Barmpton, Great Burdon, Morton Palms, Brafferton, Sadberge, East and West Newbiggin, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Coatham Mundeville and Whessoe rural.

34. The parish of Whessoe is already split between the urban ward of Harrowgate Hill and the Sadberge and Whessoe ward, it is proposed that the rural part of this parish should transfer to Heighington and Coniscliffe. This would not

require any review of parishes as it would continue to include the rural urban split of the Whessoe parish.

35. In the Middleton St George ward there are only two parishes that of Middleton St George itself and Low Dinsdale. The proposals will split the parish of Low Dinsdale along the existing polling district boundary as far as Neasham Road and then along Neasham Road. This may necessitate a Community Governance review. The existing parish includes two areas which form part of Middleton St George itself which contain the majority of the residents of the Low Dinsdale Parish.

36. The Hurworth ward contains the parishes of Hurworth/Hurworth Ward, Hurworth Place, Blackwell, Neasham, Sockburn. These parishes would remain unaffected by the proposals with the exception of Blackwell. The parish contains a small section to the north of the A66 which includes an extension from the Skerne Park area of Park East Ward. The residents of the this area form a natural community with the residents in the rest of the urban residential area. These residents are currently in the Hurworth ward and the parish of Blackwell and Sedgefield parliamentary Constituency. This anomaly is a key recommendation for change which may require a Community Governance review. The anomaly would also need to be addressed if and when a Parliamentary review is undertaken but for the time being would remain in the Sedgefield Constituency.

Variations

37. The projected electorate and variations for each of the new wards is attached at Annex 1.

Maps

38. The maps setting out the proposed boundaries for the proposed new pattern of wards in the rural and urban areas of the wards are attached at Annex 2 in support of this submission.

Councillor Bill Dixon, Leader of the Labour Group

Councillor Mrs Heather Scott, Leader of the Conservative Group