

# North Yorkshire

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## Comment text:

Dear Sir or Madam,


Please find attached my submission to the LGBCE Review for the electoral arrangements for North Yorkshire Council.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

## Attached Documents:

- nyc-boundary-review-submission-[REDACTED].docx



Review Officer (North Yorkshire)  
LGBCE  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
3 Bunhill Row  
London  
EC1Y 8YZ

30<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Draft Electoral Arrangements for North Yorkshire Council**

I was the Member of Parliament for Harrogate and Knaresborough from 2010 to 2024 so have significant experience of the communities, services, issues and governance within the constituency area. This knowledge is supported by my also serving two terms as a councillor on Harrogate Borough Council representing the High Harrogate ward and serving as Cabinet Member for Resources handling issues across the Borough.

I am submitting comments on the draft electoral arrangements for North Yorkshire Council to share some of that knowledge and experience.

In reviewing the boundary proposals, I was pleased to see there has been a cross-party team working at the local authority to produce the Council's proposals and then agree them. This initiative has brought together representatives from the different political parties and that suggests the Council's proposals will better reflect the real-world experience and geography of the issues that councillors encounter. It also suggests that the proposals are more likely to secure public support than those submitted by a single political party. Indeed, it was positive that the political parties have worked together and agreed the proposals but very disappointing and surprising that some parties then sought to undermine that work with their own individual submissions.

In light of this I have, therefore, given particular weight to the Council's proposals in my comments.

If I could start with a general but important comment. Harrogate has a new town council. For the sake of simplicity for the electorate, the town council area should be coterminous with the area of the ten divisions making Harrogate town, with no division split across the town council boundary. I recognise coterminosity has long been a principle of the Boundary Commission and think that principle should be applied in this review. That can be achieved within the parameters of this review with compliance to the target electors per division.

Looking at the individual divisions, I will comment on them in turn:

**Bilton and Nidd Gorge and Bilton Grange** – The Bilton community is very established. Two divisions that keep Bilton together and recognise its history as a community is positive. Residents identify with Bilton and it has been a community for so long it is mentioned in the Domesday Book. It has churches, primary schools and a library.

The Commission's draft proposal uses the Skipton Road and Ripon Road as boundaries. This is a mistake. They are not boundaries but the arteries that run through the community. Evidence to show they are not boundaries can be seen in the primary school catchments which cross the roads, for example New Park Primary School catchment crosses both the Skipton and Ripon Roads, Bilton Grange Primary School crosses the Skipton Road and Coppice Valley Primary School crosses the Ripon Road. A further example is the local bus service, where the Transdev Harrogate – Bilton service (the Number 2) crosses the Skipton Road as it serves Bilton.

The cross-party Council proposal for the two divisions better reflects the area as residents live and use it, whether it is for local public services or transport.

**Birstwith and Pannal** – This proposal combines very disparate communities and is the most problematic of all the draft arrangements for the Harrogate and Knaresborough area. The largest community is Pannal, which is very much a commuter area because of its access to Leeds, but has been linked with villages in Nidderdale which are totally different in character and activity and concerns.

Pannal and the area of lower Wharfedale around the A61, the major highway that links Harrogate and Leeds, are linked by their proximity and ease of access to Leeds. The evidence for this can be seen in Census data. In the Census of 2011 10,000 people left the Harrogate area every day to work in Leeds. The A61, the Transdev Number 36 bus and the York-Harrogate-Leeds railway line and Pannal Station are all very busy as a result. The transport connections are a significant factor in residents choosing to live in that corridor and on house prices too. Transport issues affecting this corridor were a major source of casework for me as Member of Parliament.

The area of Nidderdale is rural in nature and does not look south to West Yorkshire. Pannal should be linked with the villages of lower Wharfedale. Alongside work patterns and transport links, the area of Pannal and lower Wharfedale have been linked electorally in the past. Changing that is unnecessary disruption, particularly so when bringing together such disparate areas.

A Pannal and lower Wharfedale solution should be sought and the Council's proposal reflects that for the reasons above.

**Duchy and Valley Gardens and Harrogate Central** – The linking of Duchy and Valley Gardens, two areas that have not been linked before electorally, is very problematic. The areas have not been linked in the past for good reason. The Duchy in Harrogate is very much its own area and it is not part of the town centre. The Valley Gardens area is seen as town centre, and the Cold Bath Road shops are both an extension of the retail hub of the centre and local shops for its strong community.

The Duchy area has historically had electoral links to the north, not south. That has enabled a full town centre division to be created, as in the existing arrangements, and that has proved successful.

The cross-party work in the Council proposal recognised this. Their suggestion of two divisions, Oakdale plus Central and Valley Gardens is a good one. The core of their proposal for Harrogate

Central is the joining together of the HKMA and HKMB polling districts. This is simple, clear and works to keep like communities together.

The proposal to form a **Jennyfield** division would cross the boundaries of the new Town Council. The rationale detailed is that the Harrogate/Killinghall parish boundary is not clearly defined. That is incorrect. The boundary is well defined, for example the old parish wall is still there and is a physical manifestation. The boundary is recognised in place names, with residents describing their living in Jennyfield or Killinghall Moor. The residents of Killinghall Moor pay a parish precept to Killinghall Parish Council and those in Jennyfield do not. This is a boundary which is clearly understood by the lived experience of the residents. I represented it at parliamentary level, and casework, regular survey work and door step canvassing made that abundantly clear.

The LGBCE report talks of keeping the Jennyfield and King Edwin Park communities together in one division due to community links identified from a virtual tour. The lived experience in both areas reveals them to be different communities with limited links. Evidence for this is as follows. The King Edwin Park estate accesses Harrogate centre via Penny Pot Lane and through the Duchy estate; the Jennyfield estate feeds onto the A59 Skipton Road and accesses Harrogate centre via a totally different route. There are no roads connecting the estates, however, if you leave King Edwin Park and go down Penny Pot Lane into the Queen Ethelburga's estate there are footpaths connecting across Killinghall Moor. The Harrogate – Jennyfield bus service is the number 3; the Harrogate – King Edwin bus service is the number 4. The King Edwin estate is in the Western Primary School catchment; the Jennyfield estate is in the Saltergate Community Junior School catchment. They are communities separated by Killinghall Moor Community Park, not joined by it.

The best reason for the boundary being recognised as well defined is one which will grow in significance. That is the new Harrogate Town Council boundary. As the Town Council becomes more and more established its boundary will be ever more obvious. The principle of coterminous boundaries applies here too, with its clarity, simplicity and desirability for residents.

**Lower Nidderdale** – applying significance to coterminous boundaries and the rationale above, the draft Lower Nidderdale division should change to respect the old parish boundaries of Killinghall, Knaresborough and the Harrogate Town Council. The LGBCE draft has been created using rationale rejected elsewhere in the North Yorkshire review. The Liberal Democrat proposal on which the LGBCE have based their proposal would see one division of the new council with areas taken from *three* lower tier councils, Harrogate, Killinghall and Knaresborough. That is far from the tidy description used. It would be complex, not least for the councillor representing it. Such situations inevitably occur when dealing with small villages with parish councils but should not when dealing with large councils representing tens of thousands of people.

The LGBCE draft also breaks and separates the contiguous urbanised area of Knaresborough, with the estates on the Ripley Road and the estates on the Farnham Road taken from Knaresborough and placed in the Lower Nidderdale division. This breaks one of the important principles of this review and all reviews, which is keeping communities together.

The villages listed in the draft division, Brearton, Farnham, Ferrensby, Scriven and Scotton, have been incorrectly assessed. The LGBCE reports community interests are not closely aligned with the Knaresborough divisions. That is factually wrong and significantly so. These villages look to Knaresborough, not least because of proximity. The largest village is Scotton and that is 2.1 miles from the centre of Knaresborough. Not having any medical facilities they use Knaresborough primary care services. The nearest pharmacies are in Knaresborough. The main transport links feed into the

centre of Knaresborough, whether it is the A6055 or the B6165 or the bus service number 182. The prospectus for the secondary school in Knaresborough, King James School, details the parishes in its catchment and these include Scriven, Scotton, Farnham and Brearton. These villages look to Knaresborough.

The Council proposal keeps the Killinghall parish intact. It combines the villages to the north of Harrogate that look towards Harrogate, evidence being that Killinghall and Hampsthwaite are part of the Harrogate Rural secondary school catchment and not Knaresborough's (see above). The LGBCE draft conflates the villages that look to Harrogate with those that look to Knaresborough.

I support the Council's proposal for the reasons detailed above.

**Granby** – I support the LGBCE proposals for a Granby ward. Indeed, they are a big improvement on the current arrangements and for the reasons detailed in the LGBCE report. It is correct that the A59 is not a boundary but the artery that links the communities on both sides of it. I received similar types of MP casework from the communities on both sides of the A59. The proposal is close to the cross-party proposal from the Council.

**Harlow** – I support the LGBCE proposal. It is very similar to the current arrangements which have worked well and I agree with the reasons detailed.

**Oatlands and Rossett** – I support the LGBCE proposal. There are major similarities in the areas brought together in this new arrangement.

**Stray and Woodlands** – I support the LGBCE proposal. The existing arrangements have worked well and the draft proposal is very similar to them.

**Starbeck** – The LGBCE proposal is very similar to the Council proposal and to the former Starbeck division of North Yorkshire County Council. There is a strong sense of community spirit and identity in Starbeck and that has been consistently recognised in the political arrangements over many years. The current councillor for Starbeck played a significant role in the cross-party working to produce the Council proposal, so I support the Council proposal.

In the Council's submission a **High Harrogate** division is proposed. Harrogate town was for centuries two villages, High Harrogate and Low Harrogate. High Harrogate was a recognised political entity because it was a ward on Harrogate Borough Council. Indeed, I represented it for two terms. It was a consistent and established area then and still is from a community perspective.

The Council proposed recognising the historic community by recreating a council division by combining areas that have previously been linked and communities which would describe themselves as High Harrogate. I support the Council's proposal for **High Harrogate**. The areas combined have historic links, similarity in communities and the issues they face. The areas use the same public services, such as the Mowbray Square medical centre or Harrogate High School.

## **Knaresborough**

Creating the draft arrangements for Knaresborough is difficult while remaining within the numerical parameters of the review. Knaresborough as a town is too big for two divisions yet too small for three solely urban divisions. The core of two urban divisions is surely correct. The **Knaresborough East** and **Knaresborough West** divisions proposed by the LGBCE are a very good start. There have historically been Knaresborough East and Knaresborough West divisions, and the proposal would be recognised by residents. That does leave a part of contiguous urban Knaresborough outside the urban divisions, but there is a way of dealing with that (below).

**Knaresborough East** – I support the LGBCE proposal. The Liberal Democrat proposal to put Calcutt and Thistle Hill into the same division as the Stray in central Harrogate was bizarre and I agree with the LGBCE rejecting it for the reasons detailed. Calcutt and Thistle Hill have historically been part of Knaresborough's electoral arrangements. They are part of Knaresborough parish.

**Knaresborough West** – The core of the proposed division is correct, as it comprises the old Scriven Park ward and part of the town centre in the old Castle ward. To provide for the remaining part of urban Knaresborough, I join others in suggesting a third Knaresborough division is created, perhaps called **Knaresborough North West and Villages**.

This division would include a part of urban Knaresborough and the villages that look to Knaresborough in the old Claro ward. This creates a division which meets the community and numerical requirements of the review. The parts of Knaresborough to be included should be the urban areas in the LGBCE proposed Lower Nidderdale division (the Ripley Road and Farnham Road estates) together with the area off the Boroughbridge Road to the north west side of the road (to the left when travelling towards Boroughbridge).

The old Claro ward villages are linked to Knaresborough in many ways. This was recognised by the Boundary Commission in its recent parliamentary boundary review, which details the evidence for that decision. The main villages are Scriven, Brearton, Burton Leonard, Farnham, Ferrensby, Scotton, Staveley, Goldsborough, Flaxy and Arkendale. I detailed the community links to Knaresborough for some of the villages in my comments on the proposed Lower Nidderdale division above.

In addition to the comments on the Lower Nidderdale villages, I would highlight that the Claro villages also in the catchment area for Knaresborough's secondary school, King James School, are Allerton Mauleverer with Hopperton, Coneythorpe with Clareton, Flaxby and Goldsborough. The bus services that exist for these villages connect into Knaresborough, specifically the Harrogate Bus Company Number 21 and the Connexions service Number X10. This evidence confirms the strong links with Knaresborough.

The advantage of creating a third Knaresborough division is that three divisions reflects the size and the importance of Knaresborough in North Yorkshire, and incorporates the villages that are in immediate proximity and community. They allow for urban growth, as we are seeing at present and will see more of in future. The urban core of two divisions, Knaresborough East and Knaresborough West, is maintained but the third division reflects the lived reality of the Claro villages and keeps the remainder of urban Knaresborough in a Knaresborough division.

I have sought to share my experience of twenty years of political representation in the area and use the cross-party Council work as the base for my comments. Critical factors such as community links, public service usage especially schools and transport connections which all influence the lived experience of the areas have been central to my comments.

Creating a set of electoral arrangements is a very difficult task and a change in one area has consequences elsewhere. These comments address all the areas and all consequential changes. Where I have made suggestions, they are within the numerical parameters of the Review and strongly fulfil the community criteria. I believe they will improve and strengthen the electoral arrangements for the area and that is why I submit them to the Review.

Yours sincerely,

