

# North Yorkshire

## Personal Details:

Name: [REDACTED]  
Email: [REDACTED]  
Postcode: [REDACTED]  
Organisation Name: (Member of the public)

## Comment text:

**Related subject:** Nidderdale

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## Attached Documents:

- [REDACTED]comments.docx

## **COMMENTS ON THE BOUNDARY REVIEW OF ELECTORAL DIVISIONS IN NORTH YORKSHIRE**

I am an elector in the current Pateley Bridge and Nidderdale division. I have lived in Nidderdale for over 12 years.

### **Scope of my comments**

These are my comments relating to the electoral divisions in Nidderdale, i.e. the upper valley of the River Nidd. The limits of the dale are generally taken to be the watershed of the Nidd and its tributaries from Hampsthwaite upstream to the head of the valley around Great Whernside. The dale is currently covered by these electoral divisions:

- Pateley Bridge & Nidderdale, which covers most of the dale, including Pateley Bridge, the only town in the dale and its main commercial centre, but not Summerbridge, the second largest settlement in the dale. It also includes the upper Washburn valley.
- Washburn & Birstwith, which includes the villages of Summerbridge, Birstwith and Kettlesing
- Masham & Fountains, which includes Clint and Burnt Yates
- Killinghall, Hampsthwaite and Saltergate: Hampsthwaite

### **Nidderdale's sense of identity and common interests**

The dale has a strong sense of identity, both among long-term residents whose forebears have lived in the dale for generations, and among more recent arrivals (locally known as "offcumdens"). This is partly a matter of geography. Communications up and down the main river valley are easy. Communications up and over the watershed to other dales are less easy, often involving steep climbs. Most community activity in the dale takes place in Pateley Bridge, where there is:

- Nidderdale High School, the only secondary school in the dale
- Nidderdale Show, which takes place every September and attracts about 20,000 people
- The doctors' surgery (Nidderdale Group Practice), which also has surgeries in Dacre Banks and Birstwith
- the library
- Nidderdale Plus, community hub supporting Nidderdale businesses and organisations
- Nidderdale Museum, entirely staffed by volunteers from up and down the dale
- Nidderdale Playhouse
- the only livestock market in the dale
- a variety of shops and eating establishments, including the only fish and chip shop in the dale, two butchers' shops, and the only estate agents, accountants and dentist in the dale

Some of these facilities (the High School, the Show ground, the livestock market and also Pateley Bridge post office) are actually on the west side of the River Nidd in Bewerley parish, but they are within the Pateley Bridge Built-up Area, as defined by the ONS for census purposes, and are locally considered as in Pateley.

Most of the dale looks to Pateley Bridge as the main social and commercial centre. This is less pronounced in the villages nearest to Harrogate (Hampsthwaite and Birstwith), where there are more commuters to Harrogate. The only daily bus service in the dale runs between Harrogate and Pateley Bridge via Hampsthwaite, Darley and Summerbridge.

## **Issues with current arrangements**

The current electoral divisions do not respect this sense of community of the dale as a whole, or the identities and interests of individual settlements within the dale. A particular example is the area around Summerbridge, which shares facilities with Dacre Banks, the adjacent village across the Nidd. The doctors' surgery used by Summerbridge residents is in Dacre Banks. The villages' joint village hall is in Dacre Banks. The post office and larger shops are in Summerbridge. But Summerbridge is in Washburn & Birstwith division, whereas Dacre Banks is in Pateley Bridge & Nidderdale.

Your review should be an opportunity to address these anomalies, and bring more of the dale into a single electoral division.

## **North Yorkshire Council's proposals**

I was disappointed to read North Yorkshire Council's proposal to you, which would reunite Summerbridge (parish of Hartwith) and Dacre in the same division, but introduce new and more serious anomalies. The NYC proposes that Bewerley, Upper Nidderdale (i.e. the parishes of Fountains Earth, Stonebeck Down and Stonebeck Up), and part of High and Low Bishopside should be transferred to the division of Wharfedale. That proposal does not have adequate regard to two of the three main statutory criteria which you are required to have regard to:

- the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- the need to secure effective and convenient local government

1. The residents of the upper Nidderdale parishes have little in common with Wharfedale. They look to Harrogate, or perhaps Ripon, for major shopping. They would rarely, if ever, have any need to shop in Wharfedale. I have never heard of anyone from Nidderdale going to school or the doctors in Wharfedale (or Skipton, which is the main service centre for upper Wharfedale).

2. Upper Nidderdale is only connected directly with Wharfedale by a single road, the B6265. It is a difficult drive, with a steep hill exiting Pateley and a dangerous section at Dibbles Bridge, the scene in 1975 of the worst ever road accident in the UK by number of fatalities (per Wikipedia). Even connections by public footpath are difficult. Only two public rights of way connect upper Nidderdale and Wharfedale. Both PROWs are strenuous walks through remote country. One has a distance of 12.8 km in completely uninhabited country (Scar House to Kettlewell), and the other has a distance of 13.4 km in uninhabited country (Low Riggs Farm to Conistone).

3. There is no bus service between Pateley and Wharfedale, except for the Dalesbus service on summer Sundays, which is timed to meet the needs of residents of York and West Yorkshire making day trips to the Dales, rather than local residents.

4. The "Nidderdale" division would not include the main commercial centre and only town in Nidderdale.

5. The council proposes to split the area served by Pateley Bridge Town Council (the parish council for High and Low Bishopside) between the "Wharfedale" division (Pateley Bridge itself and Wath), and the "Nidderdale" division (Glasshouses, Wilsill and presumably Blazefield). This proposal raises these issues:

- the division of High and Low Bishopside into wards (Technical Guidance, paras 1.7ff).  
There are at present no wards within the parish, so this would be a novel idea, and involve

arguments over ward boundaries. There are currently 5 councillors on PBTC (including the Mayor of Pateley Bridge) who live in Glasshouses, 4 councillors who live in Pateley Bridge, and 2 councillors who live elsewhere. How many councillors would the new wards have? What would they be called? “Pateley Bridge” or “Pateley Bridge Town” are hardly suitable names for a ward of Pateley Bridge Town Council.

- Would the county councillors for both divisions feel obliged to attend PBTC meetings? Pateley Bridge would be the largest settlement in both Nidderdale (the dale) and the “Wharfedale” division.
- There is no shop in Glasshouses (or Wilsill). Glasshouses residents do their local shopping in Pateley.
- Glasshouses has a primary school, but it is in a federation with St Cuthbert’s school in Pateley. Which councillor would deal with matters relating to the federation?

North Yorkshire Council have framed their proposal by dividing the whole county into parliamentary constituencies. That is because the Council has chosen to devolve certain decisions (particularly planning) to “area committees” based on parliamentary constituencies. How the Council chooses to devolve decisions is not a matter for the Boundary Commission. But the Council’s approach to the boundary review *is* a matter for the Commission. The effect of the Council’s approach is to aim for electoral equality by parliamentary constituency, which is an inflexible approach which can be to the detriment of the other criteria to which the Commission must have regard. It is very possible that the statutory criteria of the review could best be met in particular locations by electoral divisions which cross the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies, which are not within the remit of your review (Technical Guidance, page 35).

Most, but not all, of Nidderdale is within the Skipton and Ripon constituency. The Council’s methodology means that in the Council’s proposal no division crosses the boundary of the Skipton and Ripon constituency. That creates a problem, because the Skipton and Ripon constituency does not match the identities and interests of local communities. Skipton is about 50 minutes drive from Ripon (and even that is by a route outside the constituency, via the edge of Harrogate), and it is a further 45 minutes drive to the western edge of the constituency. Skipton’s main communications are with Bradford and Leeds. Ripon and Nidderdale look more to Harrogate.

Generally people in the Yorkshire Dales tend to identify with their own dales. I do not know enough about Wharfedale to know for certain, but I suspect that electors there would also prefer not to share a councillor with Nidderdale. They do not shop much in the other dale, their children do not go to school in the other dale or use doctors in the other dale. Upper Wharfedale is in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, where NYC has limited planning responsibilities. Nidderdale is part of the Nidderdale National Landscape, where NYC is the sole planning authority.

### **My suggestions**

To reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government, I submit that as far as possible (i.e. consistently with the guidelines for the projected number of electors in each new division), as much as possible of Nidderdale (the dale) should be included in a single division.

So I would suggest that (referring to the names and areas of divisions proposed by NYC):

1. Pateley Bridge, Upper Nidderdale and Bewerley should be added to the new Nidderdale division

2. To rebalance the Nidderdale division, parishes further from Pateley should be moved to other divisions. Dacre, Darley, Hartwith, the rest of High and Low Bishopside, and Birstwith should remain in Nidderdale division.

This would require more rebalancing outside Nidderdale. I do not know enough about the interests of residents of other dales to make firm suggestions, but these are some adjustments might be considered:

1. To rebalance the Wharfedale division, parishes in upper Wharfedale which the NYC proposal would put in the new Skipton North & Embsay-with-Eastby division, might remain in the Wharfedale division (Beamsley, Barden, Bolton Abbey, Hazlewood with Storiths, and possibly Halton East)

2. Parishes in Wharfedale (the dale) which NYC proposes to put in the Pannal and Lower Wharfedale division (which would cover a large and diverse area) might also be added to Wharfedale division.

3. The Washburn Valley parishes (Thornthwaite, Thruscross and possibly Felliscliffe) might be moved from “Nidderdale” division to Pannal and Lower Wharfedale. That would put all the Washburn Valley in the same electoral division.

4. Adjustments would be needed to the divisions north of Harrogate. Perhaps Clint, which I understand has close connections with Hampsthwaite, could be moved from “Nidderdale” to “Lower Nidderdale” division. South Stainley, Nidd and Ripley would need to be moved from “Lower Nidderdale” to other divisions, and Bishop Thornton and Warsill would need to be moved from “Nidderdale” to other divisions. I cannot make specific suggestions, because I do not know enough about those places. But I note that the proposed Masham & Fountains division is already very large, because it includes an urban ward of Ripon. The two proposed wards solely within Ripon are also large. On the other hand, the proposed two wards in Knaresborough are both relatively small, which might give some scope for rebalancing in the area of Ripon and Knaresborough.

  
9 December 2024