Sheffield

Personal Details:

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

Comment text:

Related subject: Sheffield City Council: Stocksbridge and Upper Don, Stannington, East Ecclesfield, West Ecclesfield, Shiregreen, and the relevant boundary issues with neighbouring wards

-- Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England consultation on Sheffield ward boundaries --

This submission responds to the initial consultation on new electoral arrangements for Sheffield City Council. It focuses particularly on those wards identified earlier: Stocksbridge and Upper Don, Stannington, East Ecclesfield, West Ecclesfield, Shiregreen, and the relevant boundary issues with neighbouring wards.

I welcome the review. Sheffield’s current ward pattern was designed to achieve electoral equality under the 2015 review, and in that respect it largely served its purpose at the time. However, the present review is an opportunity not only to rebalance electorates, but to produce a ward map that better reflects the communities people in Sheffield actually recognise, name and use in everyday life.

The central argument of this submission is that the new warding pattern should be built from recognised neighbourhoods upwards. Electoral equality is a necessary constraint, but it shouldn’t be pursued by cutting through coherent neighbourhoods or using fragments of communities as arithmetic balancing units where more coherent alternatives are available.

The most important evidence base for this submission is the neighbourhood mapping work undertaken by Data for Action and Citizen Network Research. This work is especially valuable because it’s rooted in residents’ own accounts of Sheffield’s neighbourhoods, rather than in inherited

administrative geographies. It therefore provides a stronger starting point for understanding community identity than existing ward boundaries, polling districts or historical compromises, all of which may reflect previous attempts to balance electorates rather than residents' own sense of place.

The relevant project page is here: https://dataforaction.notion.site/Mapping-the-neighbourhoods-of-Sheffield-the-story-so-far-ab89bda30d934cceb5fb3695b611a911

Of particular relevance is the project's map of draft neighbourhood boundaries against existing Council ward boundaries, which illustrate my point clearly: many Sheffield neighbourhoods are currently split between wards, or grouped with neighbouring areas in ways that appear weakly connected to how residents themselves describe their communities.

I do not suggest that each mapped neighbourhood can or should become a ward. Sheffield's neighbourhoods are too numerous and too varied in size for that to be possible, especially under a council size of 84 councillors and a likely pattern of three-member wards (though this itself should be reviewed, in the cause of giving people representation which correlates with their lived experience). However, I do suggest that resident-mapped neighbourhoods should be treated as the starting point for a new warding pattern. Where a ward boundary cuts through a neighbourhood identified through this work, the Commission should ask whether that split is genuinely necessary for electoral equality or effective local government. Where neighbourhoods need to be combined, they should be combined with places with which they share clear local ties, such as local centres, transport routes, schools, shopping areas, parks, community organisations, parish or town council structures, and shared local issues.

-- Suggested principles for the North Sheffield warding pattern --

First, the Commission should avoid splitting recognised neighbourhoods wherever a reasonable alternative exists. If a resident-mapped neighbourhood is divided between two or more wards, the draft recommendations should explain why that split is necessary.

Second, where neighbourhoods must be grouped, they should be grouped according to real local ties rather than simple geographic proximity. Adjoining places may still have weak community links if they face in different directions for transport, shopping, schools, parish governance or local services.

Third, parish and town council boundaries should be treated as important supporting evidence of community identity, particularly in the north-west and north of the city where they remain. They shouldn't mechanically determine ward boundaries, but they're highly relevant where they align with residents' own sense of place - such as Stocksbridge Town Council, Ecclesfield Parish Council, or Bradfield Parish Council.

Fourth, ward boundaries should use clear, legible features where possible. Major roads, railway lines, valleys, rivers, parks and open land can

either connect or divide communities depending on local circumstances. The key question is how residents actually use those features.

Fifth, the Commission should avoid using small fragments of neighbourhoods simply to make up numbers in neighbouring wards. This is one of the recurring weaknesses of the current map - it undermines residents' ability to understand which ward they're in and why, thus weakening the "working with, not doing to" approach Sheffield City Council is seeking to take.

-- Stocksbridge and Upper Don --

The present Stocksbridge and Upper Don ward combines two related but distinct geographies. On the one hand, it includes Stocksbridge, Deepcar, Bolsterstone and Ewden, which are associated with Stocksbridge Town Council and with Stocksbridge and Deepcar as the main local centre. On the other hand, it also includes communities such as Oughtibridge, Wharncliffe Side, and Midhopestones, which sit within Bradfield Parish Council and have stronger connections to both the wider Bradfield and Stannington rural geography (which they share a Parish with) or the nearby villages of Grenoside and Ecclesfield (which they were historically associated with as part of the Wortley rural district area.)

The current ward name partly recognises this tension by joining two distinct identities: Stocksbridge and Upper Don. That shouldn't automatically be treated as a problem, but it does indicate that the ward is an artificial composite area rather than a single coherent community. The Commission's 2015 final recommendations described the ward as comprising Stocksbridge parish and village, together with "the rural area to the north-west of the city". That description remains a useful indication of the issue: the current ward joins a town-centred community with a wider rural-parish geography which historically associates with somewhere else.

In the new review, I ask the Commission to test whether a more coherent north-west pattern could better distinguish between the Stocksbridge/Deepcar/Bolsterstone/Ewden community and the Upper Don/Bradfield/Stannington/historical Wortley rural communities. In particular, the Commission should consider whether Stocksbridge Town Council territory can be kept as intact as possible within one warding arrangement, while Bradfield Parish communities are grouped in a way that better reflects their parish, rural and valley connections.

I recognise that the exact electorate numbers may mean that a perfectly clean separation isn't possible. However, the starting point should be that Stocksbridge-facing communities and the more rural Bradfield/Wortley-facing communities are different kinds of places, and that the ward map should avoid blending them unnecessarily.

-- Stannington and the rural west --

The current Stannington ward combines suburban Stannington with a large rural hinterland to the west of Sheffield. This may be defensible to some extent, because suburban Stannington, Loxley, Worrall, Dungworth and other Bradfield Parish communities do have geographic and practical connections. However, the Commission should be careful not to treat the rural west simply as spare territory for balancing neighbouring

wards.

The Data for Action mapping, alongside parish structures, should be used to distinguish between communities that look towards Stannington, those that look towards Bradfield and Loxley, and those that look more naturally towards the Upper Don valley (such as Worral). Where possible, Bradfield Parish communities should be kept in coherent groupings rather than split between wards in ways that make councillor representation less convenient and less legible. For example, a large part of Rivelin and the Rivelin Valley is currently included in Stannington ward in spite of not belonging to Stannington Parish, whereas the aforementioned Upper Don villages are in a different ward altogether. In normative terms, this indicates a flaw in either the Parish boundary or the ward boundaries.

-- East Ecclesfield and West Ecclesfield --

The current East Ecclesfield and West Ecclesfield wards are among the clearest examples of inherited ward boundaries that don’t map well onto residents’ own sense of place.

The problem is that the present East/West split is not a meaningful community distinction. It divides the Chapeltown/High Green/Burncross/Thorncliffe conurbation in ways that many residents don’t recognise, while also producing awkward groupings with Grenoside and Ecclesfield villages, and parts of Colley and Birley Edge, which are entirely separate to the wider Ecclesfield Parish area and are more closely associated with Sheffield proper.

A more community-centred pattern would start from the actual settlement geography of the north of the city. Chapeltown, High Green, Burncross and Thorncliffe have strong practical and spatial relationships, including shared local centres, transport corridors and everyday movement. Ecclesfield and Grenoside are also significant and recognisable communities with a degree of interlink through the surrounding Whitley and Wood Seats area, and they shouldn’t simply be attached to whichever side of an East/West split happens to require additional electorate. A North/South split would arguably be more credible purely from a normative perspective, and closer to the historical 'Chapel Green' and 'South Wortley' wards which used to enable representation of these areas.

I therefore ask the Commission to redraw the Ecclesfield area from first principles rather than preserving the East Ecclesfield and West Ecclesfield distinction with marginal changes. The combined electorate of the current East and West Ecclesfield wards should give the Commission room to produce two three-member wards in this area while drawing a more sensible internal boundary, keeping the Chapeltown/High Green/Burncross/Thorncliffe conurbation as coherent as possible, and to avoid splitting Birley Edge or Colley (which are more naturally associated with the neighbouring Southey ward), or Grenoside or Ecclesfield in ways that residents don’t recognise.

-- Shiregreen & Brightside, Firth Park, Southey, and Burngreave --

The current Shiregreen and Brightside ward combines distinct communities and includes several boundary problems around its edges. Shiregreen and Brightside are both real places, but they're not the same place, nor are they closely linked - at present, they're grouped largely due to their proximity to Concord Park. The current ward also raises questions around Wincobank, Lane Top and Grimesthorpe, where existing boundaries appear to divide communities in ways that are difficult to justify from a resident-centred standpoint.

The Commission's 2015 final recommendations described Shiregreen and Brightside ward as comprising Shire Green, Low Wincobank and Wincobank. In practice, however, the surrounding boundary pattern means that parts of both the broader Upper Wincobank and Sheffield Lane Top areas relate awkwardly to Firth Park, a large part of Parson Cross sits awkwardly between Firth Park and Southey, and Grimesthorpe is divided in two through its relationship with Burngreave and Shiregreen & Brightside.

In particular, the inclusion in Firth Park of Jacobs Drive, Shiregreen Lane, and the 'Flowers' estate centred on Upper Wincobank Chapel, rather than Shiregreen and Brightside, represents a break in how Wincobank organises itself as a community. Similarly, the use of Upwell Street to divide Grimesthorpe in two does not map onto how residents see their community.

I ask the Commission to review this whole north-east Sheffield boundary pattern together, rather than treating Shiregreen and Brightside, Firth Park, Southey and Burngreave as separate self-contained units in need of tweaking at the margins. The Data for Action mapping is useful here because it shows that residents' neighbourhood geographies largely do not follow current ward lines. In particular, the Commission should test whether Lane Top can be treated more coherently rather than being divided between Firth Park and Shiregreen, whether Wincobank can be represented as part of one ward rather than two, and whether Grimesthorpe is currently split in a way that weakens community representation.

I recognise that these four wards may not be the most numerically imbalanced wards on the forecast figures. The case for change here is therefore principally about community identity and effective representation, rather than a need to correct a large electoral variance. However, the purpose of a citywide review is to produce a better overall settlement. If surrounding wards are being redrawn - particularly the neighbouring Hillsborough and City wards, both of which are at the upper limits of forecast electorate variance and which border Southey and Burngreave - then this is the right moment to reduce avoidable community splits in north-east Sheffield.

-- Conclusion --

The new Sheffield ward map should not simply rebalance numbers on the existing geography. It should take the opportunity to create a settlement that is easier for residents to understand and that better reflects the city's lived neighbourhoods.

The Data for Action and Citizen Network mapping work gives the Commission an unusually strong evidence base for this task. It doesn't remove the need to meet electoral equality requirements, and it doesn't mean every neighbourhood can become its own ward. However, it does provide a credible resident-led baseline for identifying where communities begin and end, and where current ward boundaries cut across those

communities.

In North Sheffield, I ask the Commission to give particular attention to:

1. Whether Stocksbridge-facing communities and Upper Don/Bradfield/Stannington-facing communities can be grouped more coherently.

2. Whether the East Ecclesfield and West Ecclesfield split can be replaced with a more recognisable pattern based on Chapeltown, High Green, Burncross, Thorncliffe, Ecclesfield and Grenoside.

3. Whether Shiregreen & Brightside, Firth Park, Southey, and Burngreave can be reorganised in a way that reduces avoidable community splits and keeps named neighbourhoods together wherever possible.

The guiding principle should be simple: where electoral equality can be achieved in more than one way, the Commission should choose the pattern that keeps resident-reported neighbourhoods intact and groups communities according to real local ties rather than inherited administrative convenience.

Attached Documents:

None attached