

Bolton North East Conservative Association

Local Government Boundary Commission for England Draft Proposal Response

09/10/21

INTRODUCTION

Following recent proposals as laid out by the Boundary Commission for a review of the electoral ward boundaries for the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton, we are submitting some recommendations that we believe retain the following aspects:

- Shared interests
- Community groups
- Transport links
- Facilities

The determinations that we have established will focus on the key areas above. However, they will also be punctuated via local knowledge, namely of residents and local elected officials. With the constituency of Bolton North East being represented by half of councillors elected as Conservatives, we feel our experience on the ground and dealing with casework and community issues will play a vital role in the Commission's review.

As the Conservative Association for the parliamentary constituency of Bolton North East (based on current parliamentary boundaries), our recommendations will focus on the following seven wards:

1. Astley Bridge
2. Bradshaw (*proposed as Bradshaw & Bromley Cross*)
3. Brightmet
4. Bromley Cross (*proposed as South Turton*)
5. Crompton (*proposed as Queens Park*)
6. Halliwell
7. Tonge with the Haulgh

To aid in the assessment of these wards, we will not only respond directly to the draft proposals as set out by the Boundary Commission but also make reference to the submissions by other political groups and also residents. It must be stressed that our recommendations are supportive in some cases of the views put forward by others. However, we will ensure that the strength of any future proposed ward boundary has at its foundation the four key aspects highlighted above and as set out by the Commission itself.

All of our recommendations support those as proposed by the Conservative Group on Bolton Council, for which their submission should be referred to for specific street/elector movements.

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Chairman, Bolton North East Conservative Association

ASTLEY BRIDGE

The ward of Astley Bridge lies north of Bolton Town Centre. It is a ward that has had a sense of community created since its most recent inception. Under the draft proposals, this community will become fragmented. Additionally, the proposals remove a key part of the existing ward (discussed later in the South Turton proposal) which would mean a whole estate would be isolated from any community. Furthermore, existing transport and highways links are negated in the new proposals, due to the nature of travel being complicated through the ward. Additionally, the local amenities used by many are not reflected in the proposed boundaries and do not bear true to reality.

Shared Interests

As it stands, Astley Bridge has, under existing boundaries, become a place of a multicultural community. There are many places of worship, including Astley Bridge Baptist and St Paul's CofE. Also, currently in development, is a mosque and community centre along Blackburn Road, which will help represent more residents but also expand facilities to more local residents with a community centre that will be open to all, regardless of faith. There is also a mosque on Ramsey Street, which many residents will now be moved out of the ward into South Turton under the current proposals.

Moreover, one of only a few parks is Astley Bridge Park and Andrew Lane Park. To deprive Astley Bridge of the latter under the current proposals risks leaving Astley Bridge without any community focal point in the north of the ward. This would be deeply devastating to the residents as in recent years, it has played host to numerous community events, as discussed below.

There are also strong links for residents under existing boundaries to benefit from Bar Lane Bowling Club and Astley Bridge Bowling Club. These are mainly accessed via Blackburn and Belmont roads. However, the current proposals will strip residents of the Templecombe estate of these, in addition to them being isolated from the rest of their proposed ward, South Turton.

Belmont Road also provides a unifying point for residents on either side of the road. The proposals to split this between two wards is damaging to any future work by local councillors to tackle speeding along the road. Residents currently have a good working relationship with local councillors and agencies, such as Greater Manchester Police and Bolton Council, because of the work they have undertaken together to address the speeding concerns on Belmont Road.

Further to the above, the Templecombe estate residents also currently benefit from a local children's nursery and High Lawn Primary School in their existing ward. The current proposals will leave these residents with no local school in their ward, unless they were to take a two-five mile journey, depending on whether they went north or south out of their ward to come back in. This not only makes it difficult for residents but also for local councillors to address the needs of their residents in regards to their children's educational needs.

As for residents of Hall-i'th-wood, there is very little, if anything, that ties them to the proposed new boundaries of Astley Bridge. Due to its location, residents consider themselves to be part of Tonge Moor. This is backed up by the use of local amenities, such as the The Bolton Castle pub, the Co-op and Heron Foods for their local shopping, as well as the Bolton at Home Ucan centre on Tonge Moor Road. The distance it would find itself from the rest of the ward would be seem unusually far and additionally, there are no community links to the rest of the ward.

With residents of Eagley Bank, they share an affinity to the work of the community in Astley Bridge. Residents of this area, covering roads such as Andrew Lane and its offshoots, regularly use local schools and shops in the Astley Bridge ward. If they were to be moved into the proposed South

Turton, they would have little connection to the new ward and would in fact have to enter Astley Bridge to access a viable road that would then take them back into South Turton. This would have a negative impact on any sense of community. Given that these residents partake in local community events, as detailed below, they would be left with a sense of isolation from their ward and any community they believed they were a part of in Astley Bridge.

It is worth noting that we agree that residents north of Eagley Way should belong to South Turton, as they are connected via the development of that area and the local mills which are now residential. Under existing boundaries, residents of Bromley Cross must leave the ward, enter Astley Bridge, then come back into the ward to vote or visit local amenities by car, as Hough Lane has been closed by Bolton Council for many years. This aspect of the draft proposals would rectify this issue.

Community Groups

The residents of Astley Bridge currently benefit from a sense of togetherness. Under the current proposals, many of the residents will be displaced in a way that does not serve them any benefit. Through local initiatives, local councillors and groups such as the Friends of Astley Bridge organise events such as the very popular Christmas Light Switch-on at Andrew Lane Park, one of only a few parks in the ward. The removal of this park into South Turton (which currently includes a number of parks) would see Astley Bridge become bereft of local play areas and a community focal point.

Under the current proposals, a sense of community will be lost and not felt by residents in the Templecombe estate, Eagley Bank and Hall-i'th-wood. These are distinct areas and for each of them, will lose out in some way. Templecombe will become isolated and inaccessible via the rest of the ward or borough, Eagley Bank would share no affinity or local connections (other than a historic name) with the proposed South Turton ward, and Hall-i'th-wood becomes an distant outlier with no connection to rest of the ward by geography or community.

In addition, there are a number of community activities that currently take place within what is the existing Astley Bridge ward. These include community involvement in roadside flower troughs, poppy on the lamppost campaigns along Blackburn Road, Christmas Light Switch-ons, etc. By removing/adding the above mentioned areas from Astley Bridge, there will be a negative and incoherent impact on the local residents.

Transport Links

Under the current proposals, there are a number of contradictions when considered alongside the 'transport links' criteria as set out by the LGBCE. We seek to highlight these below in more detail so to bring the final proposals not only in line with the LGBCE criteria but also the needs of residents in the areas mentioned below. Namely, these included reference to "proposals would have no internal access to" and "this area would have limited road access to the rest of the ward" as mentioned in other areas of the draft recommendations.

One of the most concerning suggestions in the draft recommendations includes the removal of Templecombe estate from Astley Bridge and into South Turton. This is flawed for a number of reasons, as highlighted above but chiefly due to the isolation the estate would face. Under the current proposals, residents would be unable to access the rest of South Turton via any other means than car. Even in doing so, residents would have two options that would result in leaving the ward. Firstly, they could head south down Belmont Road into Astley Bridge before performing an effective u-turn to get onto Blackburn Road and heading north through Astley Bridge before re-entering South Turton - a journey of at least two miles. Secondly, residents of Templecombe could head north

up Belmont Road but this would see them leave the borough of Bolton entirely before making their way across a narrow country road to rejoin South Turton through a narrow residential street - a journey of more than five miles. Under the original planning arrangements for the Templecombe estate, it was detailed that there should be no access from any other road than Belmont Road. It would therefore be perverse to suggest this should be joined with South Turton, where it would become an isolated estate. As it stands, it currently has strong transport and community links to the ward of Astley Bridge.

Another outlier is the proposed movement of the Hall-i'th-wood estate into Astley Bridge. This area currently only has major access to Astley Bridge via a busy ring road. Therefore, residents would either need to travel via car or pedestrians would need to walk over 30 minutes from Danesbury Road. Additionally, there is only one hourly bus service through Astley Bridge for residents of Hall-i'th-wood which would first travel to Smithills before Bolton town centre. Residents would more likely use the train station in their or get a direct and frequent bus from Tonge Moor Road outside the Bolton Castle pub. In reality, residents of this area tend to utilise the amenities along Tonge Moor Road, namely the local Co-op and Heron Foods, the Bolton at Home Ucan centre, the local health centre, as well as the Castle Hill site owned by Bolton Council.

For Eagley Bank, the current proposals seek to contradict guidance for new boundaries. Residents of this area, which we've already have established have no existing meaningful links to the proposed South Turton ward, would have to leave South Turton into Astley Bridge before re-entering South Turton, involving an effective u-turn via Blackburn Road. This is unworkable due to the nature of traffic along Blackburn Road moving at a fast and frequent pace and risk reducing voter turnout as residents would have to travel a considerable distance to any future polling station. Additionally, there are no direct bus services into the heart of South Turton (around the Co-op on Darwen Road), so residents would be alienated from any local community events. If a pedestrian was to walk from The Gardens via Dunscar War Memorial, it would take nearly 40 minutes, whereas a walk to ASDA on Moss Bank Way would take less than half the time. This is backed up by a direct bus and also the reality of residents.

Facilities

The existing ward of Astley Bridge centres itself on the district centre around ASDA on Moss Bank way, as it is easily accessible by all residents of the ward. This centre around the junction of Blackburn Road/Crompton Way/Moss Bank Way also plays host to a number of local small businesses, such as a pub, restaurants, hairdressers, places of worship, etc but importantly primary schools and high schools. Few residents travel outside of Astley Bridge to utilise these kinds of facilities. Therefore, under the draft recommendations, the removal of the Templecombe estate and Eagley Bank excludes these residents but also brings in Hall-i'th-wood, of which residents do not use these facilities, opting for those along Tonge Moor Road instead.

As mentioned above, the residents in the existing ward of Astley Bridge benefit recreational from Astley Bridge Park, the park at Andrew Lane, and the Astley Bridge Bowling Club and Bar Lane Bowling Club. These are lifelines to the residents of the current Astley Bridge but again, the changes proposed in the draft recommendation work to disenfranchise residents of these community assets.

Finally, local councillors would struggle to host monthly surgeries in either Astley Bridge or South Turton under the draft recommendations. Astley Bridge councillors often use Drummond Street Community Centre and there would be no local meeting place for councillors of South Turton to meet with residents on the Templecombe estate, should that be moved across.

BRADSHAW (PROPOSED AS BRADSHAW & BROMLEY CROSS)

The proposal of Bradshaw & Bromley Cross (B&BC) has two specific areas that we believe do not constitute a fair representation of how residents utilise the amenities of the local area. Additionally, transport links within the proposed boundaries do not match with how residents currently get around the existing ward. Communities have well established links to their existing wards of Bradshaw and Bromley Cross, as we will highlight below. The Bradshaw named should be retained.

Shared Interest

Under the current draft proposals, there is a boundary proposed of the railway line however, this does not reflect the reality of how residents move and live in these communities. Residents on the west side of Turton Road affiliate more to the existing Bromley Cross ward, rather than the newly proposed B&BC ward. This is due to the links they have with the two secondary schools, Canon Slade and Turton High School, as well as the proposed development behind their homes, of a new Lidl site, with four football pitches and an assisted living facility. This community is also linked to the rest of the existing Bromley Cross ward through community and recreational activities on the land behind their houses and the local schools.

By using Turton Road as a strong identifiable boundary, it will mean that residents on the east of the road will be linked into what we would keep named Bradshaw, alongside the cricket club, a key community asset. To give further credence to this argument, two parts of the east side of Turton Road are already linked to Bradshaw by footpaths, one via Rigby Lane and the other via Printers Lane.

We agree with the draft recommendations to include Timberbottom into Bradshaw as residents here will either travel north-west into Harwood for local amenities or head south towards Bolton town centre. They also utilise Longsight Park for recreational purposes.

The area which consists of north of Winchester Way - Top o' th' Brow - that currently sits within the existing Bradshaw ward, is one that residents already have a strong connection too. Residents of this area tend to travel into Harwood for their local amenities. This includes the large supermarket of Morrisons, as well as Harwood Library and local primary schools, such as Harwood Meadows and Hardy Mill. While the majority of this area is of social housing, this does not necessarily mean, as suggested by other parties, that it should be put together with other social housing estates. The road of New Lane provides a clear link into Harwood via South Drive and residents access Longsight Park via Longsight Lane. A clear boundary is already in place which follows the river until the bridge on Thicketford Road.

Community Groups

As highlighted above, the communities that currently exist are a natural reflection of current boundaries, particularly those on either side of Turton Road. With the cricket club being a focal community hub for those on the east of Turton Road, it makes sense for these residents to become part of a future Bradshaw ward. Additionally, they also benefit from the use of St Maxentius primary school and church, located in the proximity of Bolton Road. Conversely, those on the west of Turton Road have strong links with the Eagley Primary and Eagley Junior schools along Chapeltown Road.

Residents along New Lane and its offshoots up to Winchester Way, and those off Timberbottom, currently benefit from the community group Friends of Longsight Park which lies between these two estates. This group hosts a number of activities within the park which residents and their families

can benefit from throughout the year. Under the draft recommendations, this link will be broken. Moreover, those living within the Top o' th' Brow area will cease to have their strong links to the poppy on the lamppost campaign which runs through the Bradshaw ward, as well as they play activities that are organised via local councillors and are extremely popular.

Transport Links

Our recommendations work to keep the transport links as simple as possible for the residents of Bradshaw ward. Along Turton Road, those on the east of the road will benefit from access of their ward via Turton Road into Bolton Road or by foot via Printers Lane or Rigby Lane. Additionally, those on Timberbottom will be able to access their ward fully either through Longsight Park on foot or via car down Bradshaw Brow onto Bolton Road. Finally, those within Top o' th' Brow will still continue to access the ward via New Lane onto South Drive and Stitch-mi-Lane but also through Longsight Lane and into Longsight Park. All these residents will be served via bus routes in and out of the ward and through into Bolton town centre and the neighbouring town of Bury.

Facilities

Through our recommendations detailed above, it is clear that the majority of facilities lie within the Harwood part of Bradshaw ward. Residents namely access Morrisons as their main supermarket, regardless of whether they live in the north, east, south or west of the ward. This focal point is also supported by the Harwood Library. Both of these also allow local councillors to conduct ward surgeries within the centre of the ward, providing fairness to all residents when travelling and partake in local democracy. Area Forums are also often held at the community centre on Longsight Lane, which is easily accessible for those in the Top o' th' Brow area of the existing Bradshaw ward.

For children, there is Longsight Park which helps bring the communities on Timberbottom and Top o' th' Brow together and their shared use of local primary and nursery provision within the ward. As they suitably meet the needs of residents, there is little need to change existing boundaries except to include the east side of Turton Road, so they can benefit from the community hub of Bradshaw cricket club.

BREIGHTMET

We have nothing further to add to the recommendations for Brightmet other than what has been mentioned above and also in the submission previously made to the LGBCE in the original consultation by the Conservative Group on Bolton Council and to be made as part of their response to the draft recommendations.

However, we would clarify the Group's previous submission by stating that our original proposals were to include the estate east of Raikes Road along Radcliffe Road into Brightmet, as Raikes Road could provide a clear and identifiable boundary for residents who use the community facilities at Leverhulme Park. The draft recommendations do not seem to identify this area in its conclusions, rather speaking of Snowhill Lane etc (though these could be included if the variance was too little/great in a finalised Brightmet ward).

BROMLEY CROSS (*PROPOSED AS SOUTH TURTON*)

The majority of our view for this proposal can be found contained within the comments made about the proposed wards of Astley Bridge and Bradshaw & Bromley Cross. Given the recommendations we have made above, we would suggest that the ward name of Bromley Cross is retained.

However, we do believe that the Hall-i'th-wood area could be incorporated into Bromley Cross, as has been the case in previously. Belmont Brook would provide a clear and identifiable boundary up to Eagley Way to the west of the ward and to its east, run north along Tonge Moor Road, to Bradshaw Brow, then up Turton Road, linking in with the rest of our recommendations. This would also be supported by the use of rail, car and foot (either via main roads or footpath alongside the railway line) to the rest of the ward.

CROMPTON (*PROPOSED AS QUEENS PARK*)

We have no further comment to make on the proposed Queens Park ward.

HALLIWELL

We generally accept the proposals made by the LGBCE in their draft recommendations.

However, we agree with the Conservative Group on Bolton Council that that some areas that are currently being considered for Astley Bridge, namely the areas of the current Crompton ward bounded by Crompton Way, Blackburn Road and Astley Brook as well as the properties in the Valley down Waters Meeting Road, should become part of the proposed Halliwell ward. This is achieved by access through Waters Meeting Road which would follow the draft recommendations boundary of Halliwell, so residents can access the ward whether travelling north or south.

The Conservative Group on Bolton Council offer further suggestions to offset any increase in electors in their draft response submission.

TONGE WITH THE HAULGH

We have nothing further to add to the recommendations for Tonge with the Haulgh other than what has been mentioned above and also in the submission previously made to the LGBCE in the original consultation by the Conservative Group on Bolton Council and to be made as part of their response to the draft recommendations.

CONCLUSION

What we have hoped to offer is a set of further recommendations that we believe tie together some loose connections but also openly acknowledges and accepts many of the recommendations set out by the LGBCE's draft recommendations. Given the view that little change should be made and communities maintained, our recommendations seek to maintain existing ward names while enhancing and bringing together communities at the same time.

Any drastic changes to the boundaries risk alienating many residents from communities of which they have become attached. Our proposals have been created with communities in mind but also reflect the nature of local government, ensuring that residents can be equally and fairly represented by their local councillors.