

Lancaster City Council
Wards south of the River Lune
A response to the LGBCE Draft Recommendations

As the Secretary and Vice-Chair of the Lancaster & Fleetwood Constituency Labour Party ('L&F CLP'), we write with our response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations on new electoral arrangements for Lancaster City Council, published on 14 September 2021. As with our earlier submission to your review, dated 12 July 2021 ('the L&F CLP proposals'), we shall confine our scope to the wards to the south of the River Lune, and your draft proposals for these.

We also endorse the submissions to your review made by three of our elected representatives:

- Cllr Erica Lewis (John O'Gaunt ward and the Lancaster South East county division);
- Cllr Oliver Robinson (University & Scotforth Rural ward); and
- Cllr Anne Whitehead (Scotforth East ward).

While we are both local residents (both living in Castle ward), this submission is being made on behalf of the L&F CLP, and follows discussion with local residents and councillors.

[REDACTED]

23 November 2021

Summary of our response

The L&F CLP broadly accepts the LGBCE proposals for Bulk, Castle, Marsh and Lower Lune Valley wards, and is content with the proposed Ellel ward (with the exception of the recommendation to add Scotforth Parish to Ellel ward – see below).

However, we disagree entirely with the LGBCE's proposal to create a 'Scotforth East & University' ward, and its knock-on implications for Scotforth West and John O'Gaunt wards. The LGBCE is ignoring its stated aims that wards in South Lancaster should 'reflect community interests and identities', 'provide good electoral equality' and 'be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries'. Instead, when compared (for example) with the L&F CLP proposals, your proposals for Scotforth East & University, Scotforth West and John O'Gaunt are worse for electoral equality and the use of identifiable boundaries, and ignore the existence of an entire community, with distinct facilities and infrastructure, at the Lancaster University campus.

You have done this because you agree with the submission from Scotforth Parish Council, and have rejected any submission that does not allow you to follow Scotforth Parish Council's wishes. While we respect the Scotforth Parish Council, your draft proposals grant this organisation a completely disproportionate level of importance. No reasonable person could conclude that the claimed wishes of Scotforth Parish residents (estimated number of electors: 250) should

completely trump any consideration for the interests of Lancaster University campus residents (estimated number of electors: 2500), not to mention the entire population of South Lancaster, who would be placed in wards with relatively poor electoral equality as a result.

Instead, we believe that our previous proposals for Bowerham (2 seats), John O'Gaunt (2 seats), Scotforth East (2 seats), Scotforth West (2 seats) and University & Scotforth Rural (2 seats) form a better proposal – the LGBCE accepts that our proposals are better for electoral equality in this area, and we believe that they better reflect community interests and are based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries. We ask that the LGBCE scrap its draft proposals for Scotforth East & University, Scotforth West and John O'Gaunt.

Electoral equality and the use of identifiable boundaries

As the LGBCE draft recommendations acknowledge:

- The L&F CLP's proposed Scotforth East ward '*would have good electoral equality, with a forecast variance of 2% more electors than the district average by 2026*' (p8) - this would be significantly better than the LGBCE's proposed ward.
- The L&F CLP's proposed University & Scotforth Rural ward '*was forecast to have good electoral equality*' (p8).
- The L&F CLP's proposed Scotforth West ward '*provided for good electoral equality by 2026 and used identifiable boundaries*' (p11) – again, significantly better than the LGBCE's proposed ward.
- The L&F CLP's proposed John O'Gaunt and Bowerham wards '*would provide for good electoral equality by 2026*' (pp12-13).

While we agree that electoral equality cannot be the sole or even the most important determiner of ward boundaries, it seems irrational to reject our proposals for the sole reason that they would keep Scotforth Parish in the same ward as the Lancaster University campus.

Evidence of local communities

The LGBCE repeatedly criticises the L&F CLP for not including '*evidence of local communities*' in its proposals, on p8 (twice), p11, p12 and p14 – these are criticisms not made of any other submission, including those made by representatives of other parties, despite them not including evidence of local communities either.

We hope that our proposals would be judged on their merits, rather than criticised for what they do not contain (although, as an organisation with over 900 members, entirely run by local volunteers, we believe the L&F CLP is a significant voice of the communities within Lancaster).

We would, in any case, draw your attention to the submissions made by Cllr Erica Lewis, Cllr Oliver Robinson and Cllr Anne Whitehead, who all represent, and listen to the views of, their local ward residents.

We also draw your attention to the responses to a petition, organised by us, which seeks to preserve a distinct ward for the residential community at Lancaster University.

Retaining sensible boundaries in the vicinity of Lancaster University

As the LGBCE will be aware, Scotforth Parish has been included in the same ward as the Lancaster University campus since 2015. While the Scotforth Parish and campus communities have many differences, we think that keeping them together has clear advantages.

If one tries to separate the parished and non-parished communities, as the LGBCE proposes to do, then the resulting ward boundary is in places extraordinarily complicated, especially where the proposed Scotforth East & University ward bounds the two (*de facto* detached) portions of Scotforth Parish lying east of the A6 and west of the M6. These boundaries are largely historic and do not reflect modern geographical realities, especially with the opening of the Health Innovation Campus close to Bailrigg village. Moreover, the reality is that many residents of Scotforth Parish work on the Lancaster University campus, and Lancaster University owns a significant amount of land within Scotforth Parish.

The likely construction of a Bailrigg Garden Village over the next 20 years, largely on the current footprint of the University & Scotforth Rural ward, means that the character of the area is likely to change radically (here we agree with the points made by Scotforth Parish Council) – and creating a monstrously complicated border between the different parts of this area is unlikely to help.

In particular, we are appalled by your proposal to move the '*Bailrigg Student Living*' development out of the same ward as the rest of Scotforth Parish, and into the same ward as the university campus. This will create a triangular polling district of just 50m in width and 250m in length, containing *one* property. This property (current population: 0) has no connection to Lancaster University; residents there will not be paying rent or receiving any domestic services from Lancaster University. However, because you think the future residents are likely to be students, you are proposing to place this in the Scotforth East & University ward, and create an entirely unnecessary new ward within Scotforth Parish, despite it being located in Scotforth Parish, close to other properties in Burrow Heights. We know that a handful of other properties in Scotforth Parish are often occupied by young people and/or students – should these properties be moved into a separate ward also, via a suitably gerrymandered set of boundaries?

Given that the new *Bailrigg Student Living* development is likely to attract a young and ethnically diverse population to the Scotforth Parish community, your decision to move them unceremoniously from one ward to another (and so, possibly, reduce the diversity of the ward they've been moved from) strikes us as being potentially subject to a challenge under the Equality Act.

Scotforth East and the University – why these areas should be in different wards

The LGBCE proposals for South Lancaster would see Scotforth East divided into two, pairing one half with the University and one half with Scotforth West. This change would be in direct contradiction of the reasons given by the Boundary Commission for the creation of the University & Scotforth Rural ward in the first place – specifically to avoid dividing up the coherent communities of Scotforth East and Scotforth West.

The Lancaster University campus has its own amenities: places of worship, shops, cafes and restaurants, GP practice and a sports centre. It is a cohesive and self-contained community geographically and demographically distinct from Scotforth East which is largely comprised of

young families and older people. Joining the University with the very different community of Scotforth East would effectively remove representation of younger people on the council.

At a time when the importance of representation of younger people is ever more critical, to remove the only ward which regularly elects younger people (late teens and twenties) seems unjustified in a city which has a significantly higher than average number of young people (14% of the population of Lancaster is aged between 18 and 24, against a national average of around 9%). It's also a ward that elects women from ethnic minority groups more frequently than in other parts of the city.

Councillors elected in University and Scotforth Rural represent the views of campus residents as well as the 16,500 students (of both Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria) across the city who are often poorly represented by their own ward councillors.

The University population outweighs the rural population in the University and Scotforth Rural ward around 10 to 1. By accepting the argument of Scotforth Parish Council, the Local Government Boundary Commission is privileging older people within the electoral system, when they are already well represented by other councillors across the district.

Adopting more natural boundaries for the South Lancaster wards

The LGBCE only raised two objections to the L&F CLP's proposals for wards in South Lancaster – they were, apparently, not supported by evidence from local communities (we've addressed this issue above) and they are not compatible with the creation of a Scotforth East & University ward. We urge the LGBCE to drop its proposals to create a Scotforth East & University ward; once this has been done, the L&F CLP's proposals can stand or fall on their own merits, and we would ask that our proposals for the following wards, previously submitted in July 2021, be reconsidered and endorsed:

- Bowerham (2 seats)
- John O'Gaunt (2 seats)
- Scotforth East (2 seats)
- Scotforth West (2 seats)
- University & Scotforth Rural (2 seats)

We are pleased that the LGBCE has agreed with our proposals concerning the northern boundary of Scotforth West ward.

In the light of your draft proposals for Bulk and Castle, which we broadly accept, we will no longer push for a separate 'Standen' ward uniting the properties that used to be part of the Moor Hospital – we are content for this to be assigned to (your) Bulk ward and (our) John O'Gaunt ward.

Your proposals for Bulk, Castle and Marsh

We are largely content with these, and are pleased that the LGBCE has largely agreed with our proposals concerning the western boundary of Castle ward. We have some suggestions:

- We still believe that the part of the current BLKC polling district lying south of a line drawn along Moorgate should be moved out of Bulk ward and into John O'Gaunt ward – this better reflects community ties and, we think, should improve electoral equality.

- We are unconvinced that Dale Street or the Meadowside area should be added to Castle ward, and suggest that both this street, and the Meadowside area, should be placed in John O'Gaunt ward, as per our earlier proposals.
- We think that the railway line ought to be a firm boundary between Castle ward and Marsh ward (except, maybe, for the area containing the railway station itself), and thus do not agree that the properties at the western end of Carr House Lane should remain in Castle ward (we think the residents there, one of whom is co-author of this submission, would see themselves as part of the Fairfield community).

We would be happy to discuss our proposals with you in more detail.

Submitted on 23 November 2021