

Northumberland County Council

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Please find the attached file 'Northumberland Division review Alnwick comments.doc' for my comments on the Alnwick Division.

Uploaded Documents:

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Northumberland County Electoral Division Boundary Review 2022/23

Comments on the proposal to create a single-member division structure for Northumberland with particular reference to the Alnwick Division

The two-member Alnwick Division created by the 2011 Northumberland Boundary Review is currently in operation. It is still in my opinion, essentially the most coherent boundary to retain community cohesion and provides efficient and convenient local government for the following reasons

1. Alnwick town is too large for a single-member division, but all options for splitting it (including the option put forward by Northumberland County Council in this consultation) would split the community along arbitrary boundaries. Alnwick having occupied the role of a traditional market town is gradually reinventing itself in the 21st century as a service centre, high-tech employment site and tourist destination. It is doing this using its unique charm combining a historic town centre with newer schools, leisure, retail, industry and tourism. The latter element is centred around both the traditional and more modern attractions including Alnwick Castle and Gardens, an evolving Heritage Railway, renowned Second-Hand Book Shop, Playhouse and expanding local Museum.
2. Alnwick has a very strong sense of both community and place. It is geographically isolated from the larger towns of Berwick (30miles north) and Morpeth (20miles south) and as such has developed its own employment, health, educational and cultural facilities which serve surrounding villages and smaller towns too.
3. Due to the size of the settlement and the division size proposed for Northumberland, any split of Alnwick must include other surrounding areas to make up the balance of elector numbers. The best attempt, as proposed by Northumberland County Council separates the historic heart of the town from a large part of the close community it serves. Alnwick is so sized and geographically laid out that it conveniently fits into the forward looking '20 minute neighbourhood model' which seeks to organise society around 20 minute active travel accessible areas with the majority of employment, education, services and facilities in close proximity to residents.
4. Splitting the town would always split primary school catchment areas, the shopping areas from residents, place the GP surgery and leisure facilities in one division only and risk taking coordinated effort away from preserving the vitality of the historic town centre.
5. A new community campus is shortly to open on the former Lindisfarne school site in Alnwick. This will host Council Customer Services (both Town and County Councils), Adult Learning and the Alnwick Food Bank and Citizens Advice Service. These are crucial to the whole of the Alnwick Community and also serve Lesbury and Alnmouth.

6. The Alnwick Cemetery is situated to the south east of the town, yet serves the whole Alnwick community including all the Alnwick churches.

7. Alnwick sits on the River Aln, within the Aln Valley. The river runs down the valley past Lesbury and then finally to Alnmouth where it reaches the sea. The historic communication has always been the A1068 road which joins the settlements and until the railway was closed in the late 1960's there was a rail link from Alnwick to Alnmouth Station on the East Coast mainline. In recent years an enthusiastic community railway group have established a new station near Alnwick to the east of the A1 road and have re-laid a heritage railway and cycle route towards Alnmouth Station. This has reached around the half way stage in terms of distance and there are plans to complete both projects in the not too distant future. The communities of Alnwick, Alnmouth and Lesbury are indeed becoming increasingly connected and the cycle route provides a safe and convenient active travel link.

8. Alnmouth and Lesbury have always looked to Alnwick as their community and service centre. Alnmouth is a thriving village with an regionally renowned arts festival, two famous golf courses, a boating club, a skiff rowing club, a thriving community hall and many community events throughout the year. This it combines with being a thriving tourist destination with pubs and restaurants / cafes. It is the place where Alnwick and Lesbury residents naturally visit the fantastic beach and dunes of the Northumberland Coast.

9. Lesbury with Hipsburn hosts the 'Alnmouth for Alnwick' railway station on the East Coast mainline used by Alnwick residents, but with less community facilities itself, looks to Alnwick (and Alnmouth) for shopping, health, secondary education, entertainment and other services. The Hipsburn primary school feeds into the Duchess Community High School in Alnwick.

10. Alnwick has active Beaver Scout, Cub Scout and Scout groups, but the Explorer Scouts they progress to, meet in Alnmouth. The active Alnmouth Boat and Skiff Rowing Club's are naturally located on the River Aln Estuary / beachfront and both draw numerous members from Alnwick and Lesbury as their nearest harbour and 'seaside destination'.

11. When the Boundary Commission was last tasked with a division review for Northumberland in 2011, again with a direction from the County Council of the day to 'create single-member divisions', it decided upon a two-member division for Alnwick (with Alnmouth and Lesbury). It concluded that this was the ***'best balance between reflecting community identities and interests and providing convenient local government'*** and it ***'avoided the arbitrary split of Alnwick Town'***.

12. If Denwick Village is moved into Longhoughton Division as proposed by the NCC submission, then the resulting Alnwick Division falls within (plus) 10% elector size of the average across the county if it is a two-member division. For the reasons stated, this should be the preferred option again in 2023.

Cllr Martin Swinbank - Division Councillor for Alnwick