

Belmont Parish Council

1. Belmont Parish Council has formally considered documentation associated with the review of Durham County Council electoral divisions. At a meeting on 12 January 2023 the council agreed to submit evidence supporting the retention of the current divisional boundaries and three county councillors.
2. The Belmont electoral division currently has 10,184 electors and in addition to the civil parish, includes an unparished area between Belmont civil parish and the City of Durham parish council. As a consequence of recent housing developments, planning applications in the pipeline and the completion of a new estate comprising 450 dwellings, the number of electors is expected to exceed 12000 by 2025
3. Geographically the Belmont electoral division is compact and rectangular in nature. The civil parish and unparished area are inexplicably linked in terms of history, economy and the provision of educational, social and recreational facilities. Residents from both areas share governance responsibilities on school governing bodies and voluntary organisations.
4. As a consequence of this, local residents have embarked on the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. The present electoral division is coterminous with the Neighbourhood Plan Area, formally designated as such in November 2022.
5. The five neighbourhoods – Belmont, Carrville, Gilesgate Moor, Sherburn Road and Sunderland Road - are closely interlinked by public transport routes and well established walking routes. The Neighbourhood Plan area is quite distinct and separate from neighbouring electoral divisions to the east, south and north by countryside and the River Wear, To the west there is a natural break with the centre of Durham city.
6. Given both the current number of electors and increase by 2025, the parish council is clear the area needs no less than the three current county councillor positions, one for approximately 4000 electors. Socio economic data shows, that while in parts of the Neighbourhood Plan area there may be comparative affluence, the division also has significant pockets of income and social deprivation. Consequently casework loads are high and growing for county councillors.
7. Modern day delivery of public and community services involves an ever widening number of agencies from the private, voluntary and independent sectors, as well as local government. The community leadership role for councillors in brokering and sustaining partnerships is time consuming. This is of course in addition to their traditional responsibilities and accountability for public services.
8. Elections for county councillors in the Belmont electoral division are well contested with between eight and ten candidates seeking the support of residents. Overall, turn out at local elections regularly exceeds 35% with some parts of the division topping 40%.
9. Prior to the creation of the unitary authority the current electoral division had nine or ten democratically elected councillors in the former two tier structure. In an era where there is a degree of cynicism towards public bodies and politicians, it is important opportunities for local people to put themselves forward for election are maintained
- 10 The parish council therefore recommends the present Belmont electoral division remains with three county councillors.

