

Northumberland

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Comment text:

Related subject: Morpeth and surrounding areas

please see my comments attached

Attached Documents:

- Submission by Cllr Richard Wearmouth.pdf

Comments by Cllr Richard Wearmouth

I submit the following comments as the local councillor for Kirkhill (both county and town councillor) and as a resident in the Hepscoth Parish for 40 years. My comments are shaped by my experience as the deputy leader of Northumberland County Council and a member of the NCC cabinet for 6 years.

My comments have been provided to Northumberland Conservatives and form part of their submission as the BC will no doubt note.

I have had sight of Morpeth Town Council (MTC) submission in draft at the time of writing. I have sympathy with the comments made regarding the establishment 4 divisions within an essentially MTC boundary. However, I feel that the consequences make this not practical for the rest of the surrounding county when constraints are factored in.

In making my representations I make an observation regarding the council more generally. The BC propose a two member division in Alnwick after some representations by the Green Party and the Alnwick Civic Society. Personally, I see no logic in this and I think it creates a disparity one way or another which is not necessary. I support the position of the Conservative Party and as I understand the Liberal Democrats that there should be only single member wards across Northumberland. This was the strongly established view of all county councillors also with the exception of the two Green Party county councillors when the council voted on the original NCC proposals for our boundaries.

Morpeth & Surroundings

Regarding the Pegswood Division I accept this proposal. However the name runs the risk of disenfranchising an area of Morpeth (St Georges) that will eventually house 1800 new homes under the local plan. For that reason, I feel it should be named **"Pegswood with Morpeth North East"**.

The **Longhirst Division** to me seems logical and is in fact is pretty much a recreation of a ward that used to exist and was called Ulgham up until 2013 as I recall. It functioned well at the time.

On the remaining Morpeth wards I observe that the outer boundary of the three Morpeth Wards does not change in the BC proposals other than in two places. A ward from Hepscoth Parish is added to Stobhill Division and the St Georges Estate is moved from Morpeth North into Pegswood Division.

I accept the moving of St Georges to create a Pegswood Division but I propose that the BC does not move the ward from Hepscoth Parish for reasons I expand on later.

The BC make a series of minor tweaks to the internal boundary of the town that I consider not to be necessary as my proposals retain the old boundaries in many places whilst solving the issue of the number of electors.

Morpeth Kirkhill – I accept there are limited options to redistribute the electors in the division due to the nature of its estates which form 2 cohesive blocks "Loansdean" (Polling district W20KIR) and Kirkhill (Polling District W19KIR).

The BC in their proposals remove Kendor Grove and Horseshoe way from Kirkhill division. I propose that Loansdean Wood, the Kylins and Sweethope Dean also are moved in to a newly defined Stobhill Division. In this block there are c. 320 electors. These electors have no more or less affinity with the rest of the ward than those residents at for example "Kendor Grove". There needs to be a line drawn

somewhere on a map and on balance there is logic in the changes being from the north east corner of W20KIR.

I make no amendments to W19KIR having achieved the necessary redistribution through amendment to just W20KIR. The BC repositioning of Castle Close is therefore avoided as this would have made a relatively illogical change for that community.

Under my proposals the final population of Kirkhill would therefore be as per the projection of the BC, 4,155 less electors in Loansdean Wood, the Kylins and Sweethope Dean; both then adding back in Castle Close leaving a total of c.4059, i.e. +5.2% over the ideal target number of electors of 3856. This is an improvement on the +8% under the boundary commission proposals.

Morpeth North – I accept there is no way that the St Georges Estate can remain in the Morpeth North Division. There are 1800 homes eventually being built in the St Georges Estate, many have already been completed leaving North at the risk of becoming far too large. Having examined the proposals from the BC carefully we can see no straightforward option but for this “St Georges” area to move into a revised “Pegswood” division. I note that 900 or so residents will move from Hebron Parish into Morpeth Town Council controlled area in 2025 as part of the 2021 local governance review. I note that the County Council has not previously advised the Commission of this, however I can see no straight forward way in which these residents could be brought into any Morpeth North division given all three core Morpeth divisions (Stobhill Kirkhill & North) even under the BC proposals are close to being oversized.

I propose as per the changes noted to Kirkhill that Castle Close does not move into Morpeth North. Given the later discussion pertaining to South Fields (Hepscott) and the impacts to the number of electors in Morpeth Stobhill I however propose a further change to Morpeth North removing those electors the BC proposed move from polling district W24MS. That would result in an electorate of c.3843 leaving Morpeth North -0.4% below the ideal target number of electors of 3856. This is an improvement on the +9% under the boundary commission proposals.

My proposals leave Morpeth North, other than the change I accept to relocate St Georges new estate unchanged. The area that remains is a cohesive area once the anomaly of Castle Close is removed.

Morpeth Stobhill - I propose more substantial changes to the BC proposals for Stobhill. Specifically, we highlight that the current boundary commission proposals for Stobhill add the new estate of “South Fields” to Stobhill. This is a parish council ward in its own right in the Parish of Hepscott. As part of the Morpeth & Hepscott Local Community Governance Review 2021 residents of this area rejected the opportunity to relocate the South Fields estate into Morpeth Town Council area. They noted that they identify with Hepscott Parish. By contrast 309 residents in the Hepscott Parish but in the current Stobhill electoral division (i.e. polling district W27HSM) elected to become part of Morpeth Town Council at the point of council elections in 2025.

Given this feedback relatively recently from residents of the Southfield estate and further noting that this is one of the only rural “Parish” councils split in half by the BC in their proposals we suggest that Hepscott Parish remains as a block and that South Fields moves into the Choppington Division along with the remainder of the Hepscott Parish. It is worth noting in making this suggestion that by 2028 the larger part of Hepscott Parish population wise will live in Southfields.

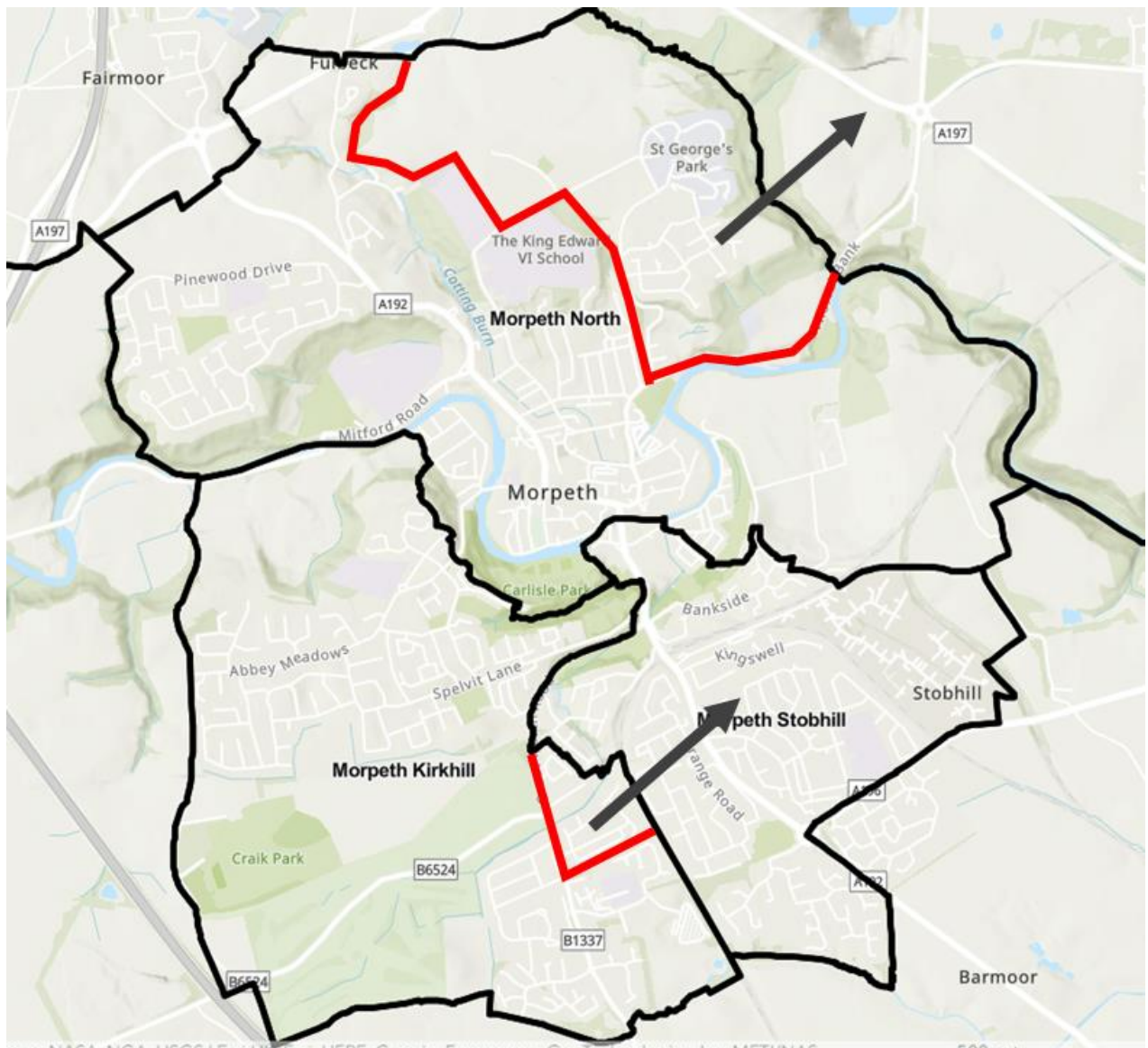
The total population of Hepscott Parish in 2028 is 1272 of which we estimate that c. 700 are residents of South Fields.

Currently there are some **3643** residents projected to live in the polling districts that make up the current Stobhill Ward, i.e. W24MS, W25MS, W26MS and W27HSM. The BC proposed to move Southfields into this area and then add Kendor Grove and Horseshoe way, whilst moving some parts of current Stobhill polling district W24MS into Morpeth North.

In my proposals for the other two Morpeth divisions I accept moving Kendor Grove and Horseshoe way into Morpeth Stobhill cannot be avoided. I also propose moving c. 236 electors in Loansdean Wood, the Kylins and Sweethope Dean.

By my calculation this is a total of the order of **4022** putting Morpeth Stobhill **+4.3% over** the ideal target number of electors of 3856. This is a significant improvement on the 10% over proposed by the BC and causes minimal changes to the existing boundary which is very settled and cohesive.

I present below a map of the proposed boundaries for the 3 Morpeth divisions. Please note the **black line boundaries shown revert back to the original (current) division boundaries**. This minimises administrative and community changes for all concerned whilst bringing the number of electors in line with the BC requirements.



Projected 2028 electorate figures: Morpeth

	2028 projected electorate	Variance from 2028 project average
Morpeth Kirkhill	c.4,059	5
Morpeth North	c.3,843	-0.4
Morpeth Stobhill	c.4,022	4.3
Pegswood	3,887	1

Bedlington and surrounding area

The result of the changes in Morpeth necessitate changes in Choppington. I suggest that the BC make other changes in the area to make for more logical boundaries and population distribution .

I believe that some of the maps may not have shown well in the Northumberland Conservatives submission. Therefore, I include maps in this document in case there is any confusion as to the proposals.

I note Bedlington West and Bedlington Central are predominately located within West Bedlington Parish. West Bedlington Parish is made up of 5 polling districts W3BEDC, W4BEDC, W6BPR, W7BEDW and W8BEDW with a total of 8338 electors in 2028. I feel therefore there is considerable merit from an administrative perspective for creating two wards of c. 4169 which would be c. 8% above the ideal division size. Currently the Bedlington West Division is 4270 electors (+10.7%) and Bedlington Central 3814 (-1.1%) as I understand.

Northumberland Conservatives would suggest changes to the commissions proposed boundaries for the following:

- **Bedlington Central** – I propose that the 254 electors in W6BPR move into the existing boundary of Bedlington Central (not the BC proposed version) which gives a total of 4068 electors (i.e. W3BEDC, W4BEDC & W6BPR) before any redistribution from Bedlington West to Central is considered. I then propose that the boundary between Bedlington Central and Bedlington West be amended to relocate some voters into Bedlington West from the boundary proposals proposed amendment. For the avoidance of doubt I propose the area that the BC proposed be moved into Bedlington East from Central remains in Central. The below map shows our proposed changes. The total number of electors would be c.4180.
- **Bedlington West** – I propose the estates of “The Wyndings” moves back into West Bedlington when compared to the BC proposals. I then propose Cumberland and Westmoorland Avenues potentially both move into Bedlington West from Bedlington Central albeit this may not ultimately be necessary. Other changes between the West and Central boundaries proposed by the BC I retain.

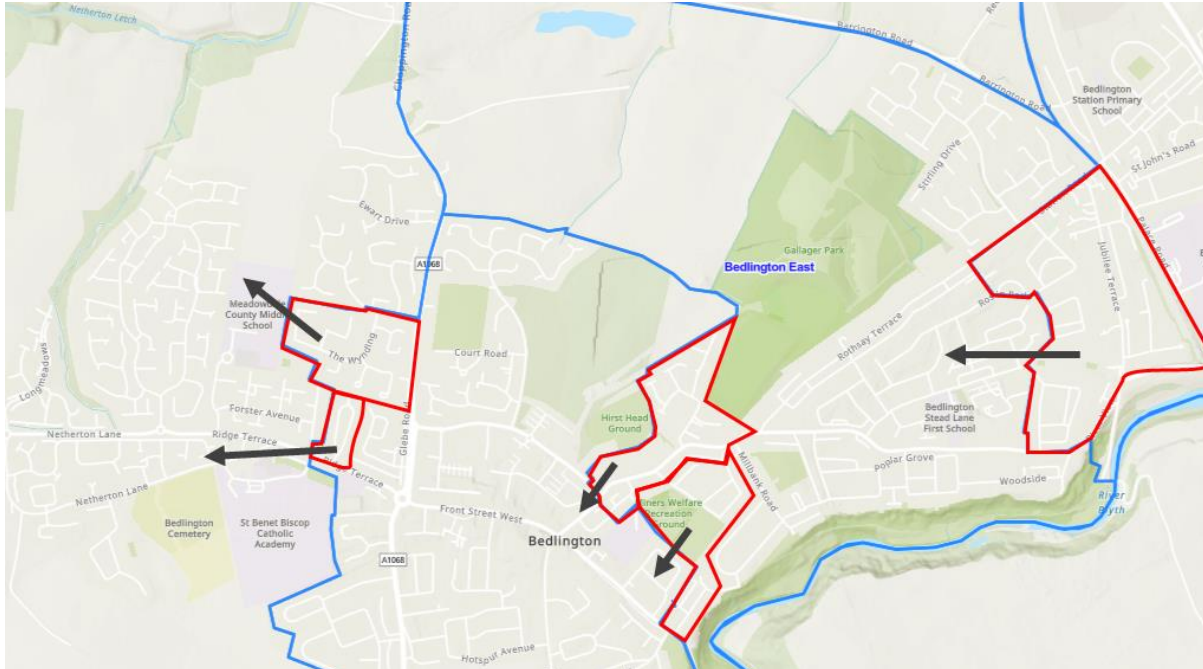
I feel there are obvious administrative benefits to the approach I propose. I have had to estimate the number of electors in The Wyndings estate, and Cumberland and Westmoorland Avenues but feel that even if this does not correspond with the exact number of electors to stay within the +/- 10% there is a solution to be identified that avoids splitting West Bedlington Parish across a third division.

- **Bedlington East** - I propose what we consider to be logical changes to Bedlington East Division. To set context the current BC proposals size Bedlington East -3% of the ideal size for a county electoral division. I believe there is obvious logic in not having Bedlington East Division cross over into a neighbouring parish council as addressed above. This is an administratively neater solution that results in Bedlington East being entirely located in the parish of East Bedlington.

In Bedlington East I propose one change in addition to that described above. I move parts of polling district W38SLK (Jubilee Terrace etc.) which are West of the railway line from Sleekburn Division and placed in Bedlington East. I feel this area is better aligned to the Bedlington East ward than to Sleekburn with the railway providing a very logical geographical boundary.

The Bedlington East division therefore would comprise the 3033 electors from current polling district W5BEDE plus 918 from W38SLK to give a total of **3951** or **+2.4%**.

The below map shows the changes made to the three divisions of Bedlington West, Central and East when compared to the BC proposals.



- **Sleekburn** – I note that due to the size of both East Bedlington Parish and Choppington Parish there is no logical solution to avoid a division at Sleekburn that does not cross the parish boundary between the two areas.

I agree with the decision of the BC to move properties north of Wansbeck Terrace into Sleekburn Division. It is our feeling however that this leave the remainder of the community of Bomarsund a little isolated and the proposal could be developed.

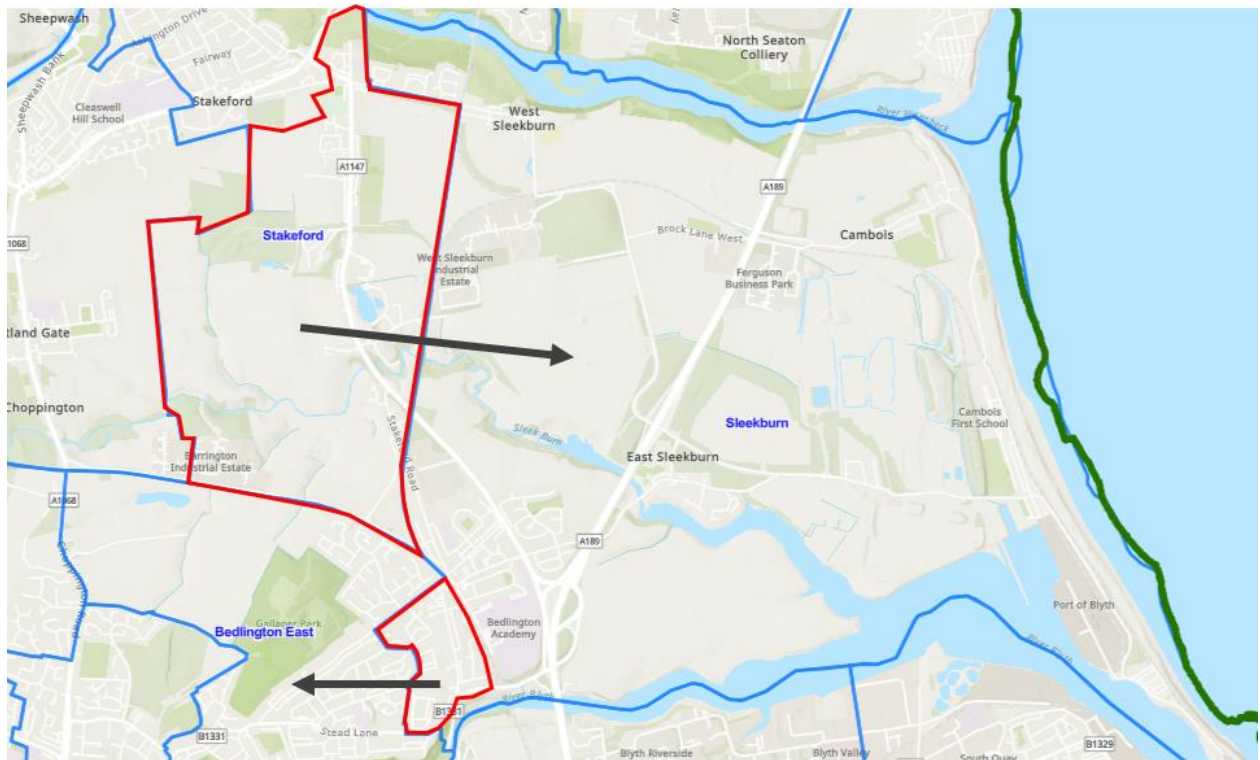
I disagree that properties at the end of Stakeford Road should move into a Stakeford Division as these residents are more connected to East Bedlington Parish / Sleekburn Division despite being in Choppington parish. This can clearly be appreciated from the geography.

It is my opinion that the community of Bomarsund which is a distinct community should move in its entirety into Sleekburn Division. This reunites the wider Bomarsund area with the remainder of the Bomarsund / Wansbeck Terrace community and creates a neater solution to distributing parts of Choppington parish into the three wards it will need to split.

Whilst it may not seem obvious from any desktop exercise these areas all have some form of interaction with the Sleekburn peninsular, the A1147 and issues associated with the old power station site in the heart of the division (as I propose) that will at some point house a new major employment opportunity on the associated land.

My proposed changes to the western boundary with Bedlington East division and with the Stakeford/Choppington Division boundary create a logical south western boundary of the railway for a significant portion of the ward boundary. This is logical both from a geographical point of view but also from a community one.

My proposals are shown on the map below re movement of electors/areas.



- **Stakeford** – The division as presented by the BC proposals is one of the smallest wards in the county in terms of electors and we think given the above logical and considered changes I have proposed that there can be create a ward that is better proportioned whilst reflecting well the estates and communities that make up the remainder of the wider Choppington Parish area.

The BC proposals show Stakeford to be 3,550 electors in total. In this counter proposals I explain above why I feel the area of Bomarsund and other eastern and south eastern parts of the original Stakeford division should move into Sleekburn division.

Having proposed later in this document that the balance of Hepscoth Parish is added to Choppington (c. 700 electors by 2028) and Choppington under the BC proposals being already 4,068 electors c. 5% oversized, there is a need to balance the number of electors better.

With the previous changes having avoided splits in many cases with parish and town councils the rebalancing in this instance is to relocate residents of Choppington parish within their own parish community.

I note to help balance existing imbalances before the changes are considered, the BC has already in their proposals added the second half of an estate south of “Stakeford Lane” to their proposed Stakeford division” (i.e. Cambridge Road, Wellington Road, Nelson Road and Stakeford Terrace). I agree this is logical. The BC have also added more of Ashington Drive, including also Hiltop close, Mitford Gardens etc. Again, I have no objection to this.

However, given the need to further amend the boundary between Stakeford and any Hepscoth and Choppington division I would propose to go further. I feel moving electors from W10CHP polling district into the new Stakeford Division is illogical geographically and from a community perspective. Therefore, I have focused on electors in W11CHP.

I feel there are two logical block areas, to move into Stakeford Division.

Area A including the remainder of Ashington Drive, Horsley Close, Wansbeck Avenue, Woodhorn Drive, Hillcrest Avenue, Parkway, Walton Drive and Meldon Gardens

Area B Byron Close, Cleasewell Hill, Crossway, Northway, Olympia Avenue, Rutherford Close, School Avenue, The Square, Cleaswell Hill, Freehold Avenue, Ashington Mews, Broadway, Back Mowbray Terrace, Front Street, Laburnum Court and Mowbray Terrace We simply feel both these areas provide a more logical distribution.

I feel the resulting division is logical geographically, in terms of the estates and communities it is made up from, is administratively located in one parish area and in terms of electors is closer to the ideal number.



- **Choppington and Hepscott** – Firstly I would propose the name **Choppington and Hepscott** for the division. My proposal is a variation on the one produced by the BC. I suggest moving the entirety of Hepscott Parish into Choppington a total of 1272 electors in 2028. As discussed in the information I provide for the Morpeth divisions I feel recent consultations on parish boundaries make this logical and reflect locally established preferences. It also keeps the parish of Hepscott in one county division which is more desirable from an administrative perspective.

The entirety of the W10CHP polling district is retained i.e. 806 electors. The balance of the areas not moved into the neighbouring Stakeford division (itself a part of Choppington parish in its entirety) then is also included a total of about 1749 electors. The above shows the changes that I would propose with the final boundary presented below.

Summary

I feel that the redistribution proposed creates more evenly distributed populations. Whilst West Bedlington divisions do end up being larger there is a logical administrative and community-based reason for doing so when compared, for example to the large wards in Morpeth where there is no administrative advantage to be had from wards that come close to the upper threshold of +10%.

Geographically there is logic for example in the location of the new proposed boundaries for Bedlington East and Sleekburn. Other wards are similarly more reflecting of their geographically. This in turn helps provide better collections of communities be they estate like in Stakeford or parishes like Hepscott.

The map below shows the area of the various Bedlington seats. Please note that this does not on inspection show the correct alignment between Bedlington West and Central so please refer to the text for a more clear understanding in this regard.

