

County Durham

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Comment text:

Dear Boundary Commission,

I am a resident of Escomb in County Durham and having read both the Joint Administration and Labour Group proposals that affect the village I am disappointed that the Commission has adopted the former. I can see no logic in moving the Escomb 'area' (BAFB) into the Evenwood division. My view is that some of the claims made in the Joint Administration proposal are misleading and it is important to differentiate here between Escomb - the village, and Escomb - the voter area (BAFB).

As a resident of St. Helen Auckland from 1967-1985 and Escomb since 1986 I know that Escomb village has strong associations with St Helen Auckland, West Auckland as well as Bishop Auckland. For instance, residents shop in St. Helen Auckland & Bishop Auckland and they socialise and have relatives living in St. Helen Auckland, West Auckland and Bishop Auckland. However, the Escomb voter area (which includes Escomb village) is 'distinct' from those communities to the west of the A68 in the Evenwood division.

The Joint Administration's argument for the Escomb area moving into Evenwood division seems to hinge on their claim it is 'rural'. I would strongly disagree.

- Whilst both Escomb village (and Witton Park) can be considered to be 'rural like' in their appearance they are certainly not in terms of location. When the construction of the Etherley Meadows housing estate is complete it will give Escomb village an almost contiguous residential property connection to Bishop Auckland. (The same could also be said to St. Helen Auckland if it were not for the Retail Park at St. Helen Auckland!). By road Escomb is about 2.5 mile from central Bishop Auckland and about the same distance from the Retail Park at St. Helen Auckland. (I now

consider Escomb as almost a suburb of Bishop Auckland).

- I would estimate the population of Escomb village to be 300-400 with number of voters 250-350, yet the 'Electorate 2022' figure for Escomb area found in https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-02/c_-_electoral_forecasting_proforma_-_durham_warding.xlsx is showing as 2,016 voters. This must be because the electorate also consists of those who live on the housing estates at Etherley Grange & Etherley Dene which are located on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland. These housing estates are not 'rural' by any stretch of the imagination yet contain by my estimation some 1600-1700 voters. The majority of children at Escomb school are from these estates.

Whilst Escomb village has an active community association, it does not have a parish council. I believe the same also applies to Witton Park.

If the 'evidence' provided by Councillor Potts which states 'that West Auckland and St Helen Auckland are distinct from the communities immediately to the west and north' relates to the document 'Councillors/886371.pdf ' which can be found in https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/durham_-_ic_-_councillors.zip then it makes no sense to cite lack of a bus service as a reason. In the 21st century there are a plethora of ways to contact your local elected representative.

Escomb village has been very well served by the West Auckland division councillors since unification in 2009 and I strongly believe that this would not be the case if it were to be assimilated into the Evenwood division. My view is therefore that the status quo should remain unchanged here.

To summarise I support the Labour Group's proposal for a two-seat West Auckland ward which involves the merging in of Toft Hill, Low Etherley, High Etherley and Etherley. As well as their obvious close proximity the current issues and future challenges of these areas are more aligned with those villages already in the division than those villages to the west.

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Attached Documents:

None attached