

North Yorkshire

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Related subject: Richmond and Northallerton Constituency

Please see attached document

Attached Documents:

- richmond-and-northallerton-green-party-submission-on-lgbce-draft-proposals.pdf

North Yorkshire Council Boundary Review
by the Local Government Boundary
Commission England (LGBCE)

Submission by Richmond & Northallerton
Green Party to the LGBCE Draft Proposals
Consultation

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The area of interest to Richmond & Northallerton Green Party

Richmond and Northallerton Green Party is the local branch covering the area of the former Westminster constituency of Richmond (Yorks) and its successor constituency of Richmond and Northallerton. Our submission only addresses this part of North Yorkshire.

Our evidence-based approach to this consultation

The boundary review process and the proposed arrangements for divisions must address three statutory criteria which are of equal importance:

- Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
- Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

It is straightforward to quantitatively demonstrate whether electoral equality has been achieved. It is noted that the LGBCE draft proposal includes an “exception” case which falls outside the +/- 10% band the justification being that in the area concerned the other criteria cannot be satisfied without exceeding the +/-10% band.

Although the other two criteria are more subjective, in reviewing the draft proposals we take an evidence-based approach which is summarised below.

Regarding the community identity criteria, the principle of treating grouped parish councils as a unit should be applied generally to the boundary review exercise. Similarly, there should be a presumption that splitting parish/town councils into wards of different divisions should only happen when the parish is too large to form a single division. Weight should be given to the impact that school catchments have in creating community identities. Primary school catchments in rural areas are particularly strong influences on community identity.

With regards to the effective local government criteria, avoidance of splitting grouped parish councils has a positive impact because this means only one councillor needs to maintain a relationship with the grouped parish. We note that the LGBCE commentary on its draft proposals appears to indicate a preference for homogeneous divisions (e.g. all rural, all urban) where it is reasonably practical. We support this approach because it reduces the complexity of a councillor's workload.

There are many legacy issues from the former districts such as local plans and operational arrangements at NYC (e.g. area committees) which mean that it is preferable for effective local government that divisions as far as reasonably possible do not cross these boundaries. Although these legacy issues will diminish over time, they will remain operationally significant within NYC for several more years. Furthermore, the boundaries of the former districts often have significance as community boundaries because there are a variety of local groups and voluntary activities which work to these boundaries (e.g. Climate Action Stokesley & Villages, Community First Responder groups etc).

The Richmond and Northallerton Green Party notes that the submissions for the whole of North Yorkshire made to the previous stage by North Yorkshire Council (NYC) and by the North Yorkshire Liberal Democrats (NY Lib Dems) included several instances where their proposed divisional boundaries split the components of some grouped parishes into different divisions.

Such arrangements may satisfy the electoral equality criteria, but in our opinion give insufficient weight to the community identity criteria.

One such example related to Rudby Parish Council which made a submission to the earlier consultation requesting that their four constituent parishes were all placed in the same division. Richmond and Northallerton Green Party supported the Parish Council's submission and is pleased to see that the LGBCE has addressed the issue in the draft proposal.

LGBCE Draft Recommendations for the Stokesley Area

The external boundaries of the Stokesley sub-area are defined by: the local authority boundary of North Yorkshire; the physical geography; the legacy of historic local government arrangements; and the pattern of established community identities. Evidence supporting the rationale for the footprint of the sub-area was set out in Rudby Parish Council's submission to the previous consultation stage.

Subject to one minor amendment (which relates to Bilsdale Midcable), we support the LGBCE proposals for the Stokesley area.

The LGBCE draft recommendations propose moving Bilsdale Midcable parish (a former Hambleton parish) out of the Stokesley area divisions in the interest of improving electoral equality in a proposed division which otherwise is entirely in the former Ryedale district. Our opinion is that the benefit of improving electoral equality for the proposed Helmsley and Ampleforth is outweighed by the harm caused to community identity and effective local government. Bilsdale Midcable has longstanding links with the Stokesley area which the LGBCE do not appear to have taken into consideration in their proposed transfer of Bilsdale Midcable to their Helmsley and Ampleforth division.

Hutton Rudby and Appleton Wiske Division

The draft recommendation resolves the main issue we raised in our earlier submission which was to secure an arrangement where all of the Rudby Parish Council area would be within the same division. With regards to the statutory criteria:

- At 4% above average, the proposal satisfies the electoral equality criteria.
- On community identity, the arrangement avoids splitting up Rudby Parish or any of the other grouped parishes. At the eastern end the divisional arrangement is consistent with primary school catchment boundaries. At the western end, the small villages are a natural fit with the rural character of Hutton Rudby and Appleton Wiske division.
- The division (unavoidably) covers a large area due to the low population density but there are reasonable connections by roads between all parts of the division. This makes it practical for the division councillor to maintain relationships with the large number of parish councils in the area and all the communities they serve. The proposed division is entirely within the footprint of North Yorkshire Council's Richmond Area Committee.

Our opinion is the proposal satisfies all three statutory criteria and achieves a satisfactory balance between them. We supports the LGBCE draft recommendation for their proposed Hutton Rudby and Appleton Wiske division.

Stokesley Division

With a forecast electorate of 4430 by 2030, Stokesley town is not large enough to form a division on its own, so the division must include some of the adjacent parishes. The available choices for which parishes to include in Stokesley division is constrained by the need to leave sufficient electors to the east of Stokesley to form a division with Great Ayton as its major component.

Seamer, Newby and all the other nearby parishes have a relationship with Stokesley as their local market town. However, Seamer and Newby are the only adjacent parishes which fall within the Stokesley Primary School catchment. This is objective evidence they have a stronger community identity relationship with Stokesley than any of the other parishes.

With regards to the statutory criteria:

- At 3% below average, the proposal meets the electoral equality criteria.
- The arrangement includes the two adjacent communities which are likely to have the strongest community identity connections with Stokesley. All the other parishes included have a clear but slightly weaker connection.
- The division is compact in comparison with the more rural divisions and is well connected by roads (despite the unusual hourglass shape). The divisional councillor will only need to maintain relationships with a small number of parish and town councils. It should be an effective arrangement for local government.

Our opinion is that the proposal satisfies all three statutory criteria and achieves a satisfactory balance between them. We support the LGBCE draft recommendation for the proposed Stokesley division.

Great Ayton Division

The existing Great Ayton division is undersized, but Great Ayton itself is sufficiently large to make up the nucleus of a division in a similar way to Stokesley. The physical geography and low population density to the south and east means that the practically available options for achieving electoral equality involve adding electors from communities in the area around Stokesley to the Great Ayton division.

Submissions made by residents of Great and Little Broughton which are noted by LGBCE reflect the fact that some communities have stronger relationships with the market town of Stokesley than they have with the large village of Great Ayton.

Including Great and Little Broughton within the Great Ayton division rather than within the Stokesley division (with which they have historically been linked) may be sub-optimal on the community identity criteria for those particular communities, however, the available choices for alternative arrangements are constrained by the electoral equality criteria, the geography, and the strong links other communities have with Stokesley. Our opinion is that the proposed arrangement is the best distribution of parishes between the Stokesley and Great Ayton divisions.

We recommend that Bilsdale Midcable is retained within the Great Ayton division for the reasons set out below. Subject to this amendment we support the LGBCE proposed Great Ayton division.

Bilsdale Midcable

It is noted that the LGBCE draft proposal places Bilsdale Midcable in their proposed Helmsley and Ampleforth in the interests of achieving marginally better electoral equality for Helmsley and Ampleforth. Bilsdale Midcable is located in the former Hambleton district and part of the existing Great Ayton division.

With regards to the community identity criteria, the parish primary school at Chop Gate is in a federation arrangement with Carlton and Faceby school (located in the proposed Stokesley division). The parish also falls within the catchment of Stokesley secondary school rather than in the catchment of Helmsley.

<https://bilsdalecarltonschoools.co.uk/our-schools/about-our-schools/carlton-faceby-ce-school/>

With regards to effective local government criteria, in being part of the former Hambleton district, Bilsdale Midcable is subject to legacy issues such as licencing policy which are different to those applicable in the rest of the proposed Helmsley and Ampleforth division which has legacy issues from the former Ryedale district.

Our opinion is that the significant adverse impact on community identity and effective local government criteria outweighs the marginal benefit on electoral equality, therefore, we recommend that Bilsdale Midcable is placed in the Great Ayton division.

Summary of our opinion on the proposed Stokesley Area Divisions

We support the Stokesley, and the Hutton Rudby & Appleton Wiske divisions as proposed by the LGBCE. We support the Great Ayton division as proposed with one minor amendment of retaining Bilsdale Midcable with Great Ayton.

We support the proposed names for all three divisions.

LGBCE Draft Proposals for the Richmond Area

The sub-area is the hinterland of the largest local settlement (Richmond). Richmond itself and the garrison towns of Colburn and Hipswell are urban in character while the remainder of this area consists of rural communities and scattered, mostly small, villages.

The river Swale is a major geographical feature. Richmond town lies on the north bank, but the urban area extends south of the river into the adjacent parish of St Martins. Richmond swimming pool, the old railway station, and Richmondshire Rugby Club are all located in St Martins parish which as a community is closely connected with Richmond town. These facilities primarily serve Richmond town. Continuing south along the A6136 there is then a distinctive break before entering the garrison towns of Hipswell and Colburn.

The communities of Hipswell and Colburn have strong military connections which differentiates them from the predominately civilian communities of St Martins and Richmond. The existing Hipswell and Colburn division included St Martins and excluded part of the Colburn town council area. As such it was a sub-optimal arrangement which we are pleased to see that the LGBCE proposals for the current boundary review has addressed.

Another major issue is that Richmond Town itself is too large for a single division but not large enough to form two. Hence Richmond must be subdivided, and some rural parishes must be combined with parts of the town to achieve reasonable electoral equality.

We note that the LGBCE report states that they “have largely followed the Liberal Democrats proposals for Richmond and the surrounding areas”. Richmond and Northallerton Green Party also found that the arguments presented by the Liberal Democrats were more persuasive than those put forward by North Yorkshire Council.

Hipswell & Colburn Division

The proposed new division is an improvement on the existing division because it unifies the whole of the Colburn Town Council area within one division, and the removal of St Martins creates a division with a more homogeneous character.

- At +8%, the proposed division achieves electoral equality
- These two garrison towns each have a strong community identity within themselves and with each other.
- The arrangement is effective for local government because the constituent parishes lie wholly within the division.
- The proposed name is appropriate because it acknowledges there are two linked communities.

Richmond Division.

For the reasons discussed above, St Martins fits better with Richmond town than with Hipswell and Colburn. It would not be possible to include the whole Richmond urban area within one division without a significant breach of electoral equality, hence an arrangement where part of the Richmond urban area is included in an otherwise rural division is unavoidable. The proposed arrangement excises an appropriately sized northern part of the town which has reasonably clear boundaries within the urban area.

- At -10% the proposed arrangement achieves electoral equality
- As it includes the majority of the urban area, it has a strong community identity
- It should be an effective arrangement for local government because the division councillor only needs to maintain relationships with two local councils (Richmond Town and St Martins Parish).
- The proposed name is appropriate.

North Richmondshire and Brompton & Scorton

The A1(M) is a distinctive modern feature which roughly separates these two proposed divisions. We broadly agree with the rationale put forward by the Liberal Democrats which demonstrates why this distinctive physical feature happens to be in roughly the right place for a boundary. However, it is the underlying connectivity on the local road network, the alignment of parish boundaries, and the community identities which determine the location of the divisional boundary rather than the specific alignment of the A1(M). Other than around junctions, in rural areas motorways typically pass through without interacting with the area to a significant extent.

These divisions as proposed:

- Achieve electoral equality
- Each has (mostly) homogeneous characteristics from a community identity perspective. The unavoidable inclusion of part of Richmond within North Richmondshire results in a division which has a hybrid urban/rural identity.
- Should be effective for local government.

The LGBCE draft proposals for both these division achieve a good balance between the criteria. Both divisions are within the target range for electoral equality and no grouped parishes are split into separate divisions.

It is noted that the draft submission from NYC published on their website proposes transferring the 300 electors of Stapleton and Cleasby from Brompton and Scorton to North Richmondshire on the grounds of local road connectivity. We find this an unpersuasive justification for exceeding the +/- 10% threshold on electoral equality. The parishes of Barton and Stapleton are not part of the same grouped parish, so unless evidence is presented that a strong affinity (which is unknown to us) exists between the communities of Barton and Stapleton, we prefer the boundaries as proposed by the LGBCE.

North Richmondshire is an appropriate divisional name, but we recommend that Brompton and Scorton should be named as Brompton on Swale and Scorton to clearly differentiate it from the other Brompton in the adjacent North Northallerton and Brompton division.

Summary of our opinion on the proposed Richmond area divisions

We support the Hipswell & Colburn and Richmond divisions as proposed. We support the Richmondshire North and Brompton on Swale & Scorton divisions with the boundaries as proposed by LGBCE but with an amended division name which uses the full name of Brompton on Swale village.

Other divisions in the Richmond & Northallerton Constituency Area

We have reviewed these and find them generally satisfactory, but we have no specific comments in relation to those proposals.