

New electoral arrangements for Darlington Borough Council Draft Recommendations

April 2026

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A note on our mapping:

The maps shown in this report are for illustrative purposes only. Whilst best efforts have been made by our staff to ensure that the maps included in this report are representative of the boundaries described by the text, there may be slight variations between these maps and the large PDF map that accompanies this report, or the digital mapping supplied on our consultation portal. This is due to the way in which the final mapped products are produced. The reader should therefore refer to either the large PDF supplied with this report or the digital mapping for the true likeness of the boundaries intended. The boundaries as shown on either the large PDF map or the digital mapping should always appear identical.

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Introduction

Who we are and what we do

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament.¹ We are not part of government or any political party. We are accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. Our main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England.

2 The members of the Commission are:

- Bev Smith (Chair)
- Andrew Scallan CBE (Deputy Chair)
- Dame Gillian Guy
- Amanda Nobbs OBE
- Wallace Sampson OBE
- Liz Treacy
- Janet Waggott
- Ailsa Irvine (Chief Executive)

What is an electoral review?

3 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority. A local authority's electoral arrangements decide:

- How many councillors are needed.
- How many wards or electoral divisions there should be, where their boundaries are and what they should be called.
- How many councillors should represent each ward or division.

4 When carrying out an electoral review the Commission has three main considerations:

- 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.

5 Our task is to strike the best balance between these three considerations when making our recommendations.

¹ Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

6 More details regarding the powers that we have, as well as further guidance and information about electoral reviews and the review process in general, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Why Darlington?

7 We are conducting a review of Darlington Borough Council ('the Council') as its last review was completed in 2014, and we are required to review the electoral arrangements of every council in England 'from time to time'.² Our aim is to create 'electoral equality', where the number of electors per councillor is as even as possible, ideally within 10% of being exactly equal.

8 This electoral review is being carried out to ensure that:

- The wards in Darlington are in the best possible places to help the Council carry out its responsibilities effectively.
- The number of electors represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the borough.

Our proposals for Darlington

9 Darlington should be represented by 41 councillors, nine fewer than there are now.

10 Darlington should have 18 wards, two fewer than there are now.

11 The boundaries of almost all wards should change; one will stay the same.

How will the recommendations affect you?

12 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the Council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward, and, in some cases, which parish council ward you vote in. Your ward name may also change.

13 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of the borough or result in changes to postcodes. They do not take into account parliamentary constituency boundaries. The recommendations will not have an effect on local taxes, house prices or car and house insurance premiums, and we are not able to consider any representations which are based on these issues.

² Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 paragraph 56(1).

Have your say

14 We will consult on the draft recommendations for a 10-week period, from 28 April 2026 to 6 July 2026. We encourage everyone to use this opportunity to comment on these proposed wards as the more views we hear, the more informed our decisions will be in making our final recommendations.

15 We ask everyone wishing to contribute ideas for the new wards to first read this report and look at the accompanying map before responding to us.

16 You have until 6 July 2026 to have your say on the draft recommendations. See page 41 for how to send us your response.

Review timetable

17 We wrote to the Council to ask its views on the appropriate number of councillors for Darlington. We then held a period of consultation with the public on warding patterns for the borough. The submissions received during consultation have informed our draft recommendations.

18 The review is being conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
18 November 2025	Number of councillors decided
25 November 2025	Start of consultation seeking views on new wards
2 February 2026	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming draft recommendations
28 April 2026	Publication of draft recommendations; start of second consultation
6 July 2026	End of consultation; we begin analysing submissions and forming final recommendations
29 September 2026	Publication of final recommendations

Analysis and draft recommendations

19 Legislation³ states that our recommendations should not be based only on how many electors⁴ there are now, but also on how many there are likely to be in the five years after the publication of our final recommendations. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for our wards.

20 In reality, we are unlikely to be able to create wards with exactly the same number of electors in each; we have to be flexible. However, we try to keep the number of electors represented by each councillor as close to the average for the council as possible.

21 We work out the average number of electors per councillor for each individual local authority by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors, as shown on the table below.

	2024	2031
Electorate of Darlington	82,040	89,947
Number of councillors	41	41
Average number of electors per councillor	2,001	2,194

22 When the number of electors per councillor in a ward is within 10% of the average for the authority, we refer to the ward as having 'good electoral equality'. All but one of our proposed wards for Darlington are forecast to have good electoral equality by 2031.

Submissions received

23 See Appendix C for details of the submissions received. All submissions may be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Electorate figures

24 The Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2031, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2026. These forecasts were broken down to polling district level and predicted an increase in the electorate of 9.6% by 2031.

25 We considered the information provided by the Council and are satisfied that the projected figures are the best available at the present time. We have used these figures to produce our draft recommendations.

³ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

⁴ Electors refers to the number of people registered to vote, not the whole adult population.

26 Our mapping tool uses geocoded electoral registers supplied by the Council to locate electors, by associating addresses with specific geographic coordinates. It considers each elector's location to produce precise elector counts for each ward. There can be very slight differences between the electorate figures published on our website at the beginning of the review and the electorate figures published in this report. However, these are very minor and do not impact on our recommendations.

Number of councillors

27 Darlington Borough Council currently has 50 councillors. We have looked at evidence provided by the Council and concluded that a reduction of nine councillors will ensure the Council can carry out its roles and responsibilities effectively.

28 We therefore invited proposals for new patterns of wards that would be represented by 41 councillors.

29 We received one submission about the number of councillors in response to our consultation on ward patterns. The submission agreed with the principle of reducing councillors for Darlington but suggested a greater reduction. It did not specify what that reduction should be and provided no additional commentary. We have based our draft recommendations on a 41-councillor council.

Ward boundaries consultation

30 We received 58 submissions in response to our consultation on ward boundaries. These included five borough-wide proposals from: the Conservative Party (hereafter 'Conservative Group'), the Labour Group, a group comprising four borough councillors (Councillors Henderson, Holroyd, Lawley and Snedker) and four members of the public (hereafter 'eight-person group'), which was submitted by Councillor Bryony Holroyd along with her own scheme in the same submission, and Councillor Matthew Snedker. We also received two partial schemes, one covering areas around Darlington town centre and one concerned with areas west of the centre.

31 The Darlington Liberal Democrats made a submission suggesting the reduction of all three-member wards to become two-member wards, with one single-member ward around Sadberge. This was supported by a member of the public. This would result in high levels of electoral inequality, and we do not consider a case has been made to justify such poor variances. The remainder of the submissions provided localised comments for warding arrangements in particular areas of the borough.

32 The five borough-wide schemes mostly provided mixed patterns of two- and three-councillor wards for Darlington. The Conservative Group was the only borough-wide scheme to suggest one-councillor wards. We carefully considered the

borough-wide schemes received and were of the view that the proposed patterns of wards from all respondents resulted in good levels of electoral equality in most areas of the authority and generally used clearly identifiable boundaries.

33 Our draft recommendations are based on elements of all of the borough-wide schemes received. In wards southwest of the centre our recommendations are based on a partial scheme from a member of the public, which is similar to proposals in schemes from the eight-person group and Councillor Snedker. In the more rural wards surrounding Darlington, as well as in town wards east of the East Coast Main Line, we recommend wards similar to the Conservative Group's proposals. North of the centre, around Faverdale and Harrowgate Hill, we have based our recommendations on the suggestions of the eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd. In Pierremont our proposals are based on the Labour Group's suggestions.

34 Our draft recommendations also take into account local evidence that we received, which provided further evidence of community links and locally recognised boundaries. In some areas we considered that proposals did not provide for the best balance between our statutory criteria and so we identified alternative boundaries.

35 We visited the area in order to look at the various proposals on the ground. This tour of Darlington helped us to decide between the different boundaries proposed.

Draft recommendations

36 Our draft recommendations are for six three-councillor wards, 11 two-councillor wards and a single one-councillor ward. We consider that our draft recommendations will provide for good forecast electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we received such evidence during consultation.

37 The tables and maps on pages 8–38 detail our draft recommendations for each area of Darlington. They detail how the proposed warding arrangements reflect the three statutory⁵ criteria of:

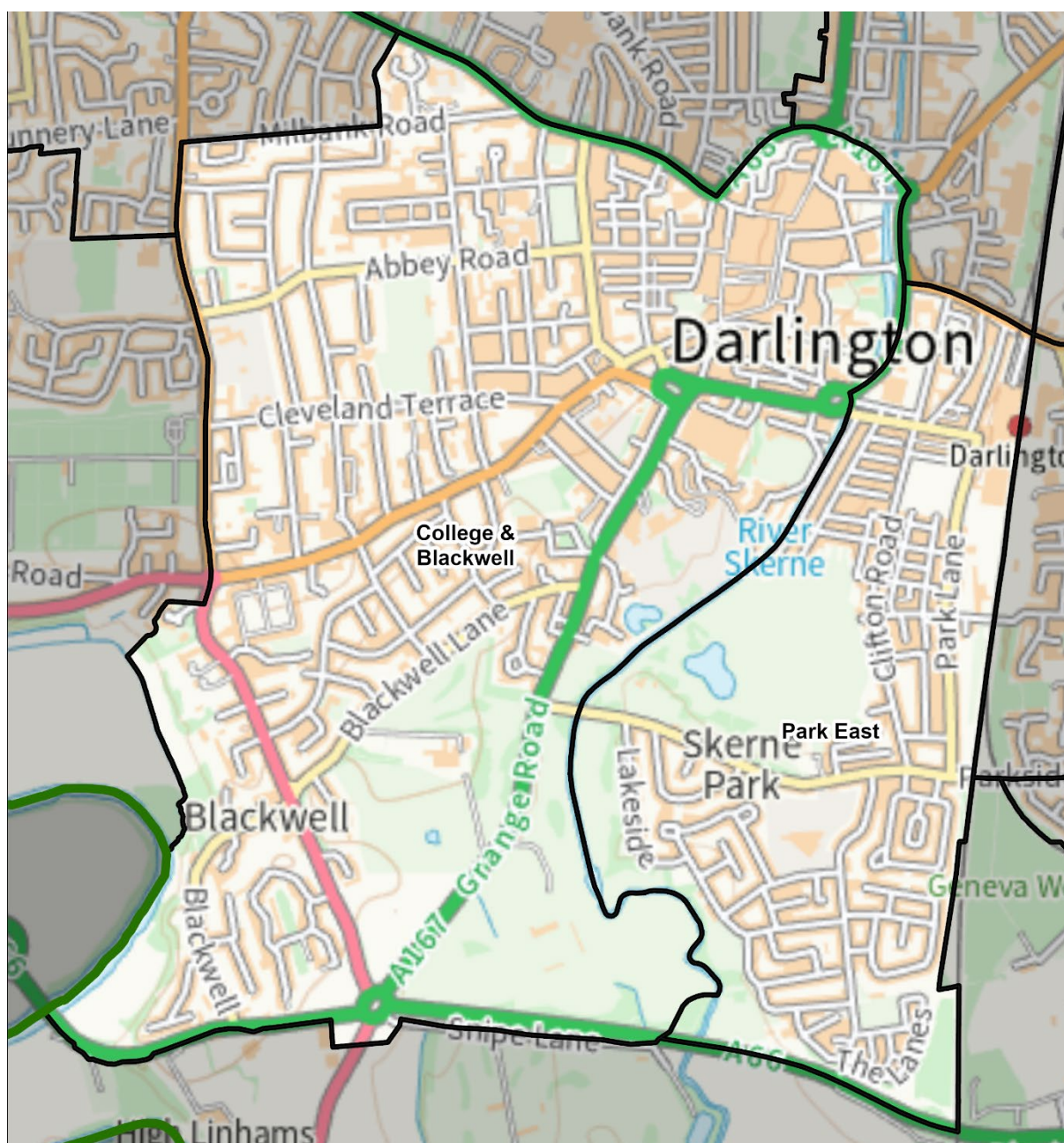
- Equality of representation.
- Reflecting community interests and identities.
- Providing for effective and convenient local government.

38 A summary of our proposed new wards is set out in the table starting on page 47 and on the large map accompanying this report.

39 We welcome all comments on these draft recommendations, particularly on the location of the ward boundaries, and the names of our proposed wards.

⁵ Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Central and Parks



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
College & Blackwell	3	7%
Park East	2	-6%

40 We have identified a Central and Parks area of Darlington for this report that includes the town centre, the Skerne Park area, and the Blackwell area. We note that it is separated from the rest of the borough by strong boundaries including the A66 ring road, Carmel Road North, the East Coast Main Line, the A167, and the A68.

College & Blackwell

41 To facilitate the proposed reduction in councillor numbers, all the schemes in this area include proposals for a different permutation of wards compared to the existing arrangements. Currently this area is made up of three wards: College, Park East, and Park West.

42 The Conservative Group largely maintained existing ward boundaries, dividing Hummersknott between proposed Park West, Mowden, and Abbeyfield wards. It proposed retaining the boundary between Park East and Park West wards along the River Skerne and shifting the boundary with the town centre along Larchfield Street and Victoria Road. Its proposed Abbeyfield ward crosses Carmel Road North below Milbank Road; we drove along this road on our tour of Darlington and noted that it serves as a strong boundary due to clear physical barriers on either side and few crossing points. We noted its proposed boundary would also isolate Cardinal Gardens from the rest of Abbeyfield.

43 The Labour Group suggested dividing the existing Park West ward between proposed Hummersknott, College, Park, and Hurworth wards. College ward continues to use the strong boundary of Carmel Road North. It argued that a small residential area above Blackwell Lane is 'well connected via both Carmel Road North/South and Coniscliffe Road' and proposed including it in Hummersknott.

44 The Labour Group suggested transferring an area around Romanby Drive into its proposed Hurworth ward. This change is described in greater detail in paragraph 152. We consider that including this area north of the A66 in a Hurworth ward would not reflect the community evidence as identified by respondents in Hurworth.

45 The proposals from the eight-person group, Councillor Holroyd, and Councillor Snedker all combine the existing College and Park West wards into a single three-member ward. They proposed this should be called West End or College & Blackwell. Councillor Holroyd proposed including houses south of the A66 along Bridge Road in a West End ward, suggesting that residents might 'feel more urban than rural'. We note this would divide Hurworth parish and result in a very small parish ward with too few electors for convenient and effective local government.

46 A resident of College ward gave a detailed submission in which they described how they frequently travel between their home in College and the town centre of Darlington, which is 'an essential part of daily life for many residents'. They noted that this access to the centre from College is via 'routes that form a natural community link that should remain within the same ward wherever possible'. The submission goes on to note that the town centre and station area 'are not just transport hubs but also social and economic focal points' for residents of College ward, and that 'major roads and pedestrian routes connect these areas seamlessly'

such that 'splitting them across different wards would disrupt representation for people who rely on these links'.

47 A resident of Park West suggested that the existing Park West ward 'lacks a clear centre, shared facilities, or established identity'. They suggested that residents in this area associated with the surrounding areas including those in the existing Park East, Hummersknott, and College wards. They noted that transferring electors from Park West to neighbouring wards could provide 'a proportionate, low-disruption means of improving ward coherence while supporting electoral equality and effective local governance'. They also noted that the Park East ward could therefore be renamed to reflect that it would be the only ward associated with the broader Park area.

48 On our tour of this area, we noted the boundary which exists to the east of the town centre created by consecutive barriers of the River Skerne, the A167, and several large buildings dedicated to services (including police, fire, and mail delivery) immediately following one another. We also noted that the electors in the west of the town centre, presently included in Park East ward, are separated from other residents in their ward by the sparsely populated town centre and the A167/River Skerne boundary described above.

49 We consider that a new proposal for the town centre in its entirety, different from both existing arrangements and the schemes we received, would better reflect the balance of our statutory criteria. We propose including the entirety of the town centre in a ward oriented to the west and south rather than the east. We consider that this reflects the commentary of the resident from College ward regarding local community ties. We additionally consider that the A167/River Skerne boundary at the east of the town centre is very strong, and that using it as a boundary between the centre and Park East allows for more convenient and effective local government. We would be interested in hearing from residents in this area about which ward they would feel more connected to.

50 We recommend a three-member College & Blackwell ward with a 7% variance. This ward includes the entirety of the existing Park West ward, most of the existing College ward, and the town centre.

Park East

51 All schemes have proposed a Park East ward similar to the existing warding arrangements, with slight alterations. The proposed western boundaries are discussed in the preceding section on College & Blackwell. The northern boundary is discussed in paragraphs 99–106 on our proposed North Road ward.

52 The Conservative and Labour groups both proposed retaining the existing eastern and southern boundaries, which run along the East Coast Main Line railway

in the east, and along the A66 in the south. We note the strength of these boundaries, particularly the railway line which sits on the eastern edge of the ward.

53 The eight-person group also proposed using the railway line as the boundary, with a small area north of Parkgate included in a Hundens & Morton Park ward. We consider that the railway boundary here is still strong, and do not consider that a ward spanning that boundary, even in the centre of Darlington town, would reflect the community ties of the area.

54 Councillor Holroyd's scheme proposed similar boundaries to the eight-person group but also included electors around the Teesside University Darlington.

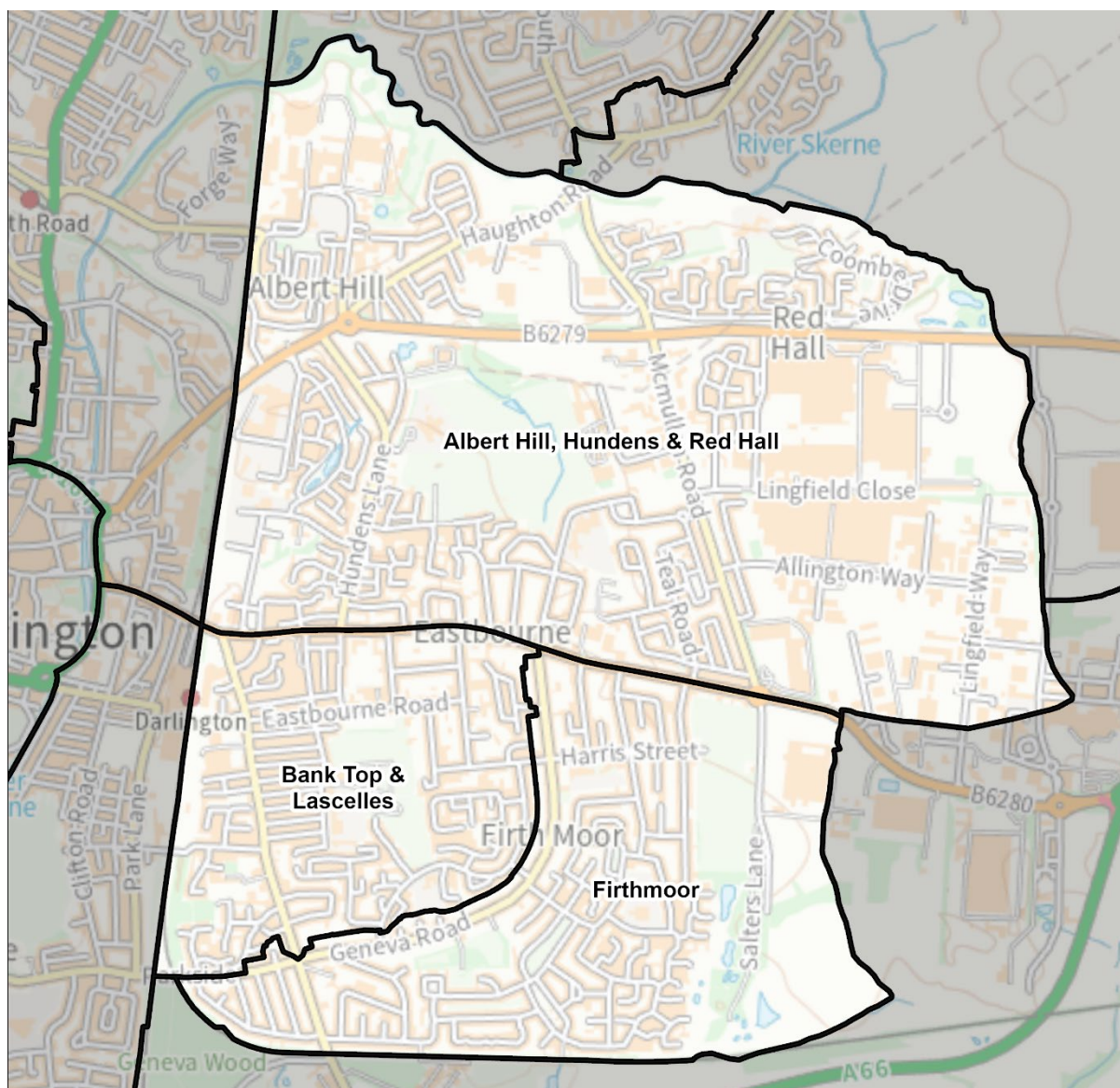
55 Councillor Snedker proposed a ward spanning more widely across the railway line, including areas to the east in a new Bank Top ward. He also proposed including the Skerne Park area south of the ward in a Firthmoor & Skerne Park ward. This is discussed in paragraph 69.

56 One resident of Park East ward noted that they accessed the River Skerne as a local amenity for outdoor activities.

57 Different schemes proposed different names for this ward, reflecting the different boundaries. While South Park was suggested, we are proposing to retain Park East as it is likely to be more familiar to residents. We welcome views on which name best reflects this ward.

58 We recommend a two-member Park East ward similar to the existing ward. We consider that the existing ward generally reflects community ties in this area and provides for effective and convenient local government. We do, however, propose the transfer of the town centre to College & Blackwell, as we consider this will better reflect the community ties identified by the resident of College ward. We also propose an amended northern boundary for Park East along St Cuthbert's Way and Parkgate. We consider Parkgate is a stronger boundary because of the volume of traffic running along it, as well as the limited opportunities for pedestrians or cars to cross it, including physical barriers along pavements.

Eastbourne



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall	3	3%
Bank Top & Lascelles	2	4%
Firthmoor	2	9%

59 We have identified an Eastbourne area of Darlington for this section of the report that includes several distinct neighbourhoods in the east of Darlington town. We note that the area is bounded by the East Coast Main Line, the Tees Valley railway line, the River Skerne, and the boundaries of parishes adjacent to the east and south. We also note that proposals received here reference boundaries within this area, including Tornado Way and Yarm Road, to distinguish between certain communities.

Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall, Bank Top & Lascelles, and Firthmoor

60 We received five proposed warding patterns in the Eastbourne area but no additional comments from local residents. All the schemes had good electoral equality, except for the eight-person group's proposed Eastbourne & Firthmoor ward, which is forecast to have a variance of -12% by 2031.

61 The Conservative Group and the eight-person group both proposed using the entirety of the B6280 (Yarm Road) as a boundary between wards. The Labour Group, Councillor Holroyd, and Councillor Snedker proposed wards which crossed Yarm Road. All schemes apart from the Conservative Group's proposed including the Albert Hill and Red Hall areas in wards to the north with Haughton-le-Skerne and Springfield.

62 The Conservative Group proposed two wards in this area: a single-member Albert Hill & Red Hall ward and a two-member Central Park & Lingfield ward. It proposed the B6279 (Tornado Way) as the boundary between the two wards.

63 The Conservative Group considered that 'Albert Hill and Red Hall are adjacent areas with similar character and challenges' and that 'Tornado Way provides key transport links serving both areas.' It argued that shared issues including 'higher levels of deprivation, health inequalities, housing pressures, and a greater reliance on public services' mean that 'residents have aligned priorities and would benefit from a unified approach to representation' within a single-member ward.

64 Its proposed two-member Central Park & Lingfield ward is 'based on clear demographic similarities and stronger community alignment between Central Park and Lingfield than with the areas they were previously paired with'. It suggests that there is 'regular movement between these two areas as part of everyday life'.

65 South of Yarm Road, the Conservative Group proposed wards very similar to the existing pattern, and in both cases suggested reducing these wards from three members to two members. Its proposed Bank Top ward has the same boundaries as the existing Bank Top & Lascelles ward. Its proposed Firthmoor ward has very similar boundaries to the existing Eastbourne ward, with housing developments south of the Tees Valley railway included in an expanded Hurworth ward.

66 The Labour Group proposed two wards south of Tornado Way and north of the Tees Valley railway: Bank Top & Central and Tommy Crooks & McMullen, both represented by three councillors and both crossing Yarm Road. It argued that while 'Yarm Road is an arterial route into Darlington, it has many road and pedestrian crossing points facilitating movement in a north/south direction' and that 'Yarm Road is a much softer and more permeable boundary than it appears when looking simply at a map.' It goes on to note that residents from across the whole area use shopping

facilities along Yarm Road, and that healthcare, school catchments and green spaces span across this area and are used by residents north and south of the road.

67 The eight-person group suggested a two-member Hundens & Morton Park ward, resembling the Conservative Group's Central Park & Lingfield ward, but including a small area west of the East Coast Main Line. It argued that 'Yarm Road and Tornado Way are community dividers' and that its proposed ward contains areas that 'sit together within them'. It also proposed a three-member Eastbourne & Firthmoor ward similar to the existing Eastbourne ward with the addition of residential housing north and west of Geneva Road included. Its third ward in this area is a two-member Bank Top & Neasham Road ward with the A66 as its southern boundary 'to include the new development at the southern end [around Darlington arena]' in the ward.

68 Councillor Holroyd proposed two three-member wards: Eastbourne & Neasham Road and Firthmoor & Lingfield, both of which cross Yarm Road. She suggested that the Eastbourne & Neasham Road ward 'keeps the similar-feeling Eastbourne sports centre and the older housing around it & Hundens Lane in with Eastbourne Park, and other estates down Neasham Rd to include the new developments near the arena' and that this would 'correct boundaries so urban areas are within [this ward], and more rural areas are moved into Hurworth ward'.

69 Councillor Snedker proposed three wards, two of which straddled the East Coast Main Line. He proposed a Bank Top ward, which 'includes the central area of the town' and ensures the 'dense terraces associated with the historic railway and engineering industry are kept together'. He also proposed a Firthmoor & Skerne Park ward comprising 'two distinct communities'. In addition, he proposed an Eastbourne ward including some housing south of Yarm Road around Eastbourne Park along with residential areas north of Yarm Road east of Hundens Lane.

70 We visited this area on our tour of Darlington and considered that both the River Skerne and the East Coast Main Line form clear and identifiable boundaries and that they should be used as ward boundaries.

71 Accordingly, we were not persuaded to adopt Councillor Snedker's proposals in this area which included two wards that crossed the East Coast Main Line. We also consider that the Albert Hill and Red Hall communities should be included in Eastbourne wards and not with the Haughton and Springfield area.

72 From our tour of the area, and from our understanding of what people told us during our consultation, we believe that there are several neighbourhoods which although distinct share some broad community links. We consider that these areas are better reflected in a three-member ward as opposed to having smaller single-

and two-member wards which we are not persuaded provide a strong reflection of more compact community identities, as suggested by the Conservative Group.

73 We note that all five schemes received proposed using the B6279 (Tornado Way) as a ward boundary. On our tour of this area, we observed that the road is busy, with limited crossing points. However, we consider that communities on either side of the road do have some shared community ties. Traffic does flow across Tornado Way along McMullen Road, Haughton Road, and Hundens Lane. Accordingly, we were persuaded that residents do cross this road, and we consider that a ward spanning areas both north and south of the road would still allow for convenient and effective local government.

74 We therefore propose a three-member Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall ward, which includes Central Park and the Lingfield community at McMullen Road, as part of our draft recommendations. We would be interested to hear from local residents on both the boundaries and name of this proposed ward.

75 We note the Labour Group's commentary around the nature of Yarm Road as a congregating point and agree that many of its services are likely accessed by residents both north and south of the road. While we recognise that Yarm Road is a commercial and social hub for residents across a large area of Eastbourne, there are too many residents who use this hub to form a single ward with good electoral equality. We believe an east/west division of Eastbourne, as proposed by the Labour Group and Councillor Holroyd, is not more representative of local communities and movement patterns than the north/south split suggested by the Conservative Group and the eight-person group. We do not consider that the alternatively proposed ward boundaries here of The Broadway, as suggested by the Labour Group, or behind houses on The Fairway and The Causeway, as suggested by Councillor Holroyd, would better reflect community ties than the existing Yarm Road boundary. We would be interested in hearing from residents about our draft recommendations here.

76 In the absence of input from Eastbourne residents, we recommend wards similar to the Conservative Group's proposals: Bank Top ward will remain unchanged but have two members instead of three, and Firthmoor ward (formerly Eastbourne) will also stay mostly the same with two members instead of three. We consider that Firthmoor is a more representative name for this ward than Eastbourne, which appears to reflect a much larger area. We consider that Lascelles is still representative of a community within its ward and suggest retaining it in the name.

77 As part of our draft recommendations, we therefore propose a two-member Bank Top & Lascelles ward, a two-member Firthmoor ward and a three-member Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall ward.

included an additional small area around Killhope Crescent. The Conservative Group suggested a three-member Brinkburn & Cockerton Village ward, covering part of Pierremont ward south of Brinkburn Road. The Labour Group proposed a two-member Brinkburn & Cockerton East ward, including George Stephenson Drive to the north.

80 The eight-person group proposed a three-member Cockerton ward similar to the existing Cockerton arrangement that extended further east beyond the A68 (West Auckland Road) to include housing around Brinkburn Drive and surrounding areas. It noted that the northern boundary of this ward is the 'old SD railway line' and that Cockerton's shops, club, and police station would all be included within this proposal for Cockerton. The eight-person group's submission noted that 'there are key dividing lines in Darlington such as railway lines, old railway line routes (currently walking and cycling routes, but which nevertheless form relatively hard boundaries between communities)' and that these boundaries should be respected. Councillor Holroyd supported these proposals in her scheme as well.

81 Councillor Snedker proposed a three-member Cockerton ward entirely between the A1(M) and the A68 (West Auckland Road), with housing along Eggleston View included in a Mowden ward. He included areas east of the A68 in a two-member Faverdale ward bounded by Brinkburn Road to the south. We note that this arrangement would rely on limited links between Eggleston View and Mowden. We do not consider that it would provide for effective and convenient local government.

82 We note that the Conservative and Labour groups' submissions here both proposed wards with strong electoral equality in an area where it is challenging to do so. Faverdale has clear strong boundaries in all directions: the A1(M) to the west, the Tees Valley railway to the east, the former Darlington and Barnard Castle Railway line to the south, and extensive rurality to the north. On existing boundaries, not including Archdeacon Newton or Brinkburn, this area has too many electors for a two-member ward with good electoral equality and too few electors for a three-member ward with good electoral equality. The Conservative and Labour groups both opted to include areas around Nickleby Lane in wards to the south in part to improve electoral equality for Faverdale.

83 During our tour of Darlington, we noted that the walking and cycling route along the old Darlington and Barnard Castle Railway forms a clear boundary between Branksome, Brinkburn, Cockerton, and Faverdale to the north. We agree with the eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd that this boundary is sufficiently strong that there should not be wards which straddle it. We additionally agree that Cockerton's key amenities around Cockerton Green should all be included within one Cockerton ward. We do note, however, that the Cockerton ward proposed by these schemes includes part of Brinkburn east of the A68 (West Auckland Way), and we consider the Brinkburn area is distinct and better represented in a different ward.

84 We propose a two-member Branksome & Cockerton ward similar to the existing Cockerton ward, with a small change to run behind some houses along the A68 and to include an area projected for future development to the west. This warding arrangement preserves the strong walking and cycling path boundary to the north noted above and retains all of Cockerton's services within one ward.

85 We consider that the Brinkburn neighbourhood above Brinkburn Road and below the former railway is a different community from Branksome and Cockerton. We consider that it has a distinct character and that it should be represented in a separate single-member ward. We propose a single-member Brinkburn ward with a northern and eastern boundary along the former railway line, a southern boundary along Brinkburn Road, and a western boundary behind houses along the A68.

Faverdale

86 As in Branksome, Brinkburn, and Cockerton, we received no comments from local residents in Faverdale. Councillor Snedker's proposals are described in paragraph 81; he suggested retaining the existing northern Faverdale boundary.

87 The Conservative Group proposed a two-member Faverdale ward with its northern boundary the same as the existing ward boundary including the High Grange area.

88 The eight-person group proposed a two-member Faverdale & Burtree ward, extending north above Burtree Lane noting that this keeps 'Faverdale, West Park & Burtree building sites together as these all feel quite similar'. Due to significant housing development in the area, this ward has a forecast variance of 26%.

89 The Labour Group proposed including developments northeast of Burtree Lane in a two-member Faverdale ward. It acknowledged that 'as much of the development is still taking place in the north of this ward, we are yet to fully to understand how changing community facilities and infrastructure will actually shape the new communities – making it difficult to be certain about where best to draw boundaries.'

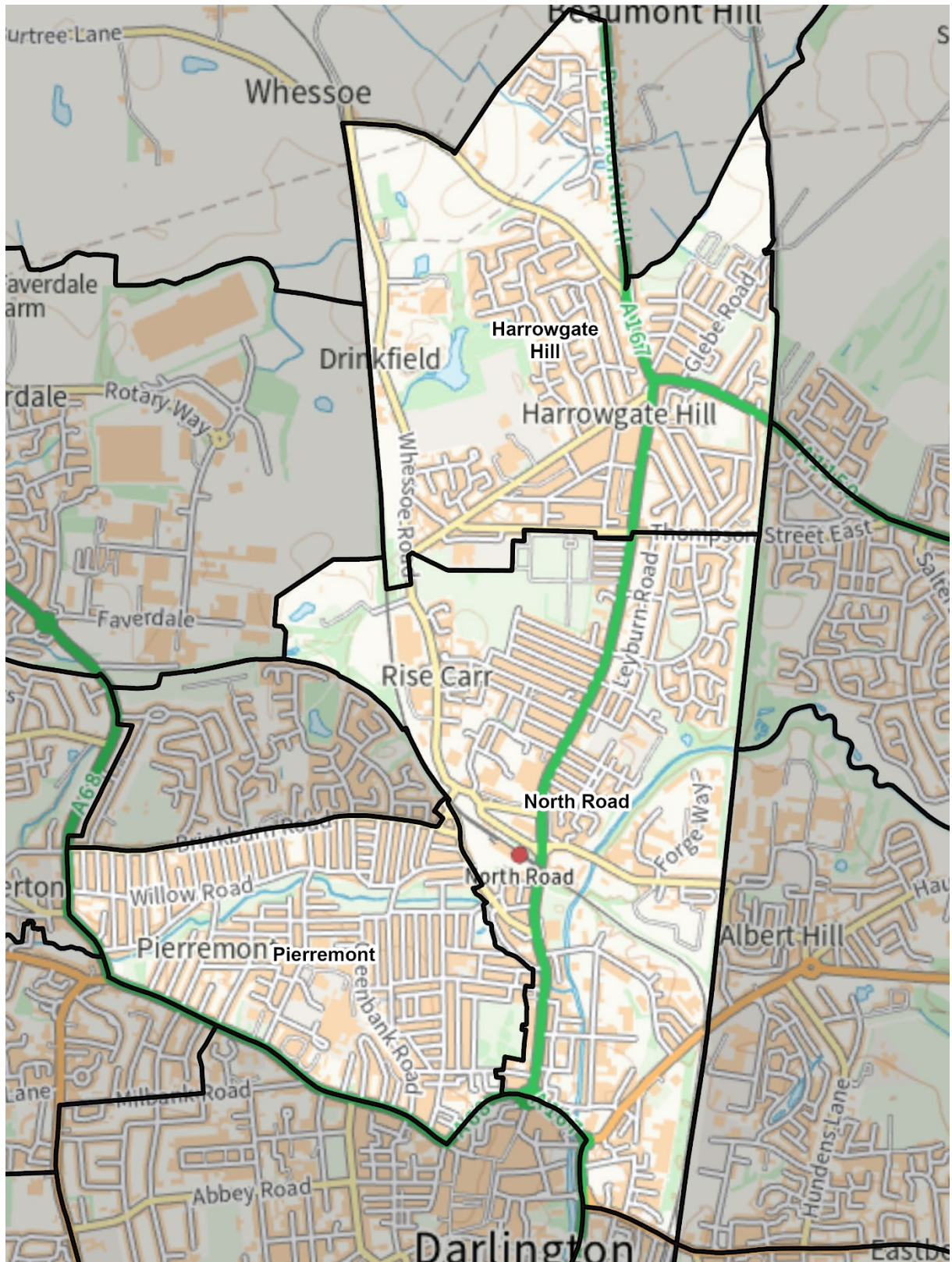
90 On our Darlington tour, we noted that Faverdale is largely defined by its extensive new housing developments at various stages of completion. We consider that the shared character of this new housing is an important element to recognise in warding patterns here. We agree with the Labour Group that it is challenging to anticipate how future housing here will shape communities and wards, and we have therefore opted to retain the existing northern boundary of Faverdale ward rather than attempt to predict its extent.

91 We propose a two-member Faverdale ward which is bounded to the west by the A1(M), to the south by the former Darlington and Barnard Castle Railway line (now a pedestrian and cycle path), to the north by the existing boundary south of

Burtree Lane, and to the east by the East Coast Main Line (except for a small area at the Honeypot Lane Caravan Site which is included in North Road). Given the strength of the former railway boundary and the similarities between Nickleby Lane and nearby residential roads east of Newton Lane, we recommend including them all in the same ward.

92 We acknowledge that this ward has a forecast variance of 12%, making it the only proposed ward beyond 10%. We consider that the strength of both community ties and effective and convenient local government for this arrangement of Faverdale is sufficient to support a ward with a 12% forecast variance.

Harrowgate Hill and Pierremont



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Harrowgate Hill	3	-10%
North Road	2	2%
Pierremont	3	-4%

93 We have identified a Harrowgate Hill and Pierremont area of Darlington for this report which lies north of the town centre and also includes the Rise Carr, Northgate, and North Road areas. We note that this area is separated from the rest of the borough by strong boundaries including the A68, the A167, the East Coast Main Line, and the Tees Valley railway line.

Harrowgate Hill

94 Harrowgate Hill is a ward bounded in the east and west by the two primary railway lines that run through Darlington; only one scheme has suggested crossing the railway line in the west and two have done so in the east. We visited this area on our tour of Darlington, and we consider that these railway lines are clear and identifiable and we are using them to form ward boundaries in this area.

95 We received three proposals to move Harrowgate Hill ward's southern boundary to Thompson Street West behind Harrowgate Hill Primary School, while Labour and Councillor Snedker proposed retaining the current boundary along Crosby Street. The eight-person group and Councillor Snedker also proposed retaining the existing boundary along Thompson Street East until the ward ends at the railway line to the east.

96 An additional submission by Councillor Lawley suggested that the Harrowgate Hill Primary School and nearby roads should be included in Harrowgate Hill ward.

97 The existing northern boundary runs through the middle of the development sites on the west side of Beaumont Hill. Both the Conservative and Labour groups proposed shifting the southern boundary to Burtree Lane which would allow the development to be included in a separate ward. The other schemes propose a ward that extends to the north to include parts, or all, of Whessoe parish where the developments (and some houses south of Burtree Lane) sit. The eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd suggested that 'new building just north [of Harrowgate Hill] should logically be joined onto the urban area.'

98 On our tour we visited this area and consider including new developments in a Harrowgate Hill ward is reasonable because the access for these areas is to the south towards the existing Harrowgate Hill community. We agree with the comments of the eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd that these developments will come to form part of the extent of Darlington town and are more suited to a ward oriented

towards the town than towards more rural areas to the north and west. We also agree that Harrowgate Hill Primary School should be included in a Harrowgate Hill ward and propose boundary changes at the south of the ward to accommodate this. Therefore, we recommend that the northern boundary of Harrowgate Hill should run along the north of the developments and down Beaumont Hill, and the southern boundary should run south of the school and along Thompson Street East, resulting in a three-member ward with a variance of -10%.

North Road and Pierremont

99 In order to apply a reduced number of councillors in Darlington, most schemes opted to amend the existing Northgate ward and split it between neighbouring wards.

100 The Conservative Group's was the only proposal to suggest retaining the Northgate ward, expanding it westwards to include the eastern area of the existing Pierremont ward. Further west it proposed a new Brinkburn & Cockerton Village ward that incorporates the western side of Pierremont ward, which includes the settlement north of Brinkburn Road and those across the West Auckland Road.

101 We consider that this proposal divides communities in both Pierremont and in the north of the Cockerton and Branksome area. We consider that placing Brinkburn in a separate ward from Faverdale is preferable, as the two areas lack connections and have a strong boundary between them.

102 Both the Labour Group's and Councillor Snedker's schemes proposed a Pierremont ward expanded into the existing Northgate ward, with its eastern boundary becoming the A167 (Northgate). We consider that this arrangement better reflects a broader community that relates to Pierremont, as residents east of Greenbank Road and south of Widdowfield Street, which are in the existing Northgate ward, share easy access to The Denes green space which acts as the core of the Pierremont neighbourhood. Both schemes include the area east of Northgate in a ward that extends south and includes Darlington town.

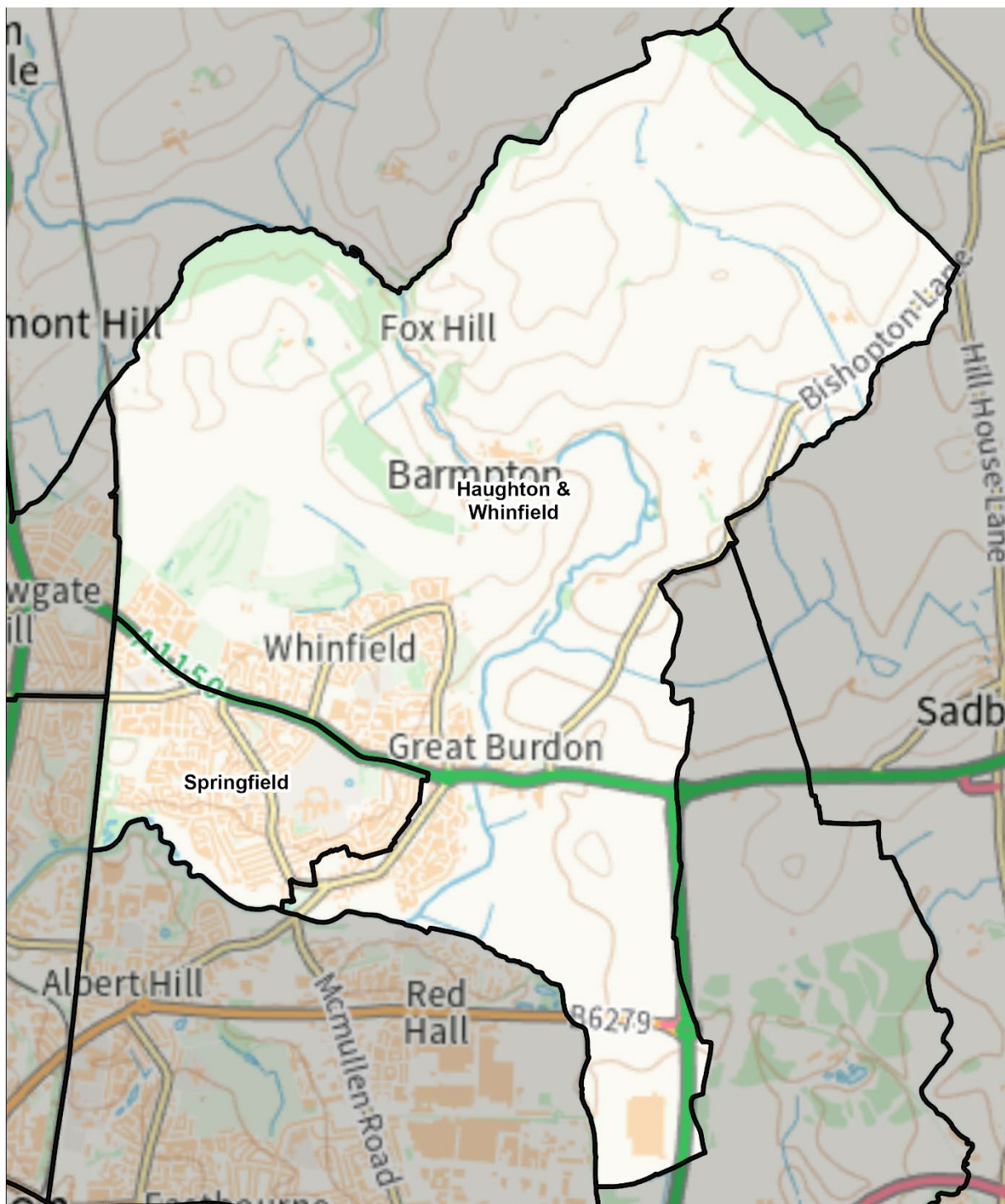
103 The eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd also both proposed an expanded Pierremont ward. The eight-person group suggested an eastern boundary down the middle of Northgate while Councillor Holroyd proposed a boundary running behind buildings along Northgate instead. We consider that the Northgate road area would be better reflected in a North Road ward as suggested by those proposals, and that a boundary behind Northgate accurately reflects where the Pierremont area ends. We have therefore proposed a similar boundary to Councillor Holroyd's suggestions in our draft recommendations. We propose using the Cocker Beck river as far as Widdowfield Street, so that all the houses along Westbrook are included in a North Road ward, as we think the river is a stronger boundary.

104 Both the eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd also suggested including the remainder of Northgate ward in North Road instead of a ward to the south. Both proposed a southern boundary along Haughton Road, as in the existing ward. Both schemes are predicated on wards which would cross the East Coast Main Line north of the station. From our tour it was noted that this would not be an optimal solution, and that the houses to the south of Haughton Road look to the north, with shared access to public parks. We consider that Parkgate, which was also proposed as a boundary by the eight-person group, appeared to be a stronger boundary, with busy traffic running along it and limited opportunities for pedestrian or car crossings.

105 We have proposed including the Honey Pot Lane Caravan Site in North Road ward due to its singular road connection across the railway line via Elmtree Street. This improvement in internal access allows for more convenient and effective local government than the existing arrangements, as there is no connection to Faverdale.

106 We propose a two-member North Road ward running from the southern boundary of Harrowgate Hill to Parkgate and an expanded three-member Pierremont ward as described above.

Haughton, Whinfield and Springfield



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Haughton & Whinfield	3	0%
Springfield	2	-9%

107 We have identified a Haughton, Whinfield and Springfield area of Darlington for this report that also includes the parishes of Barmpton and Great Burdon. These

parishes are forecast to include a significant amount of new housing as part of the large-scale Skerningham development. We consider this development will form part of what constitutes Darlington town. This part of the report includes areas that are already built up along with some that are currently more rural but are expected to become more populated throughout the forecast period and beyond. We also note that there are strong boundaries between this area and adjacent parts of Darlington town in the form of the East Coast Main Line and the River Skerne.

Haughton & Whinfield and Springfield

108 Proposals in this area differed in their approach to the Skerningham development and what ward it should be included in. All schemes received in this area achieved good electoral equality in their proposed wards, with the exception of Councillor Snedker's proposed Whinfield & Barmpton ward, at 13%.

109 Only the Conservative Group proposed using the River Skerne as the southern boundary of the Haughton and Springfield area. It proposed a three-member Whinfield Rural ward comprising Haughton village, Whinfield, and the parishes of Barmpton and Great Burdon. It suggested that these parishes 'lie on the edge of Darlington and form part of the wider Whinfield area' and include the majority of the approved Skerningham development which 'physically and functionally connects the surrounding rural communities to Whinfield proper'. Its proposal included detail of a small social media consultation conducted by local councillors where residents indicated that Haughton village and Great Burdon shared ties with Whinfield. The Conservative Group proposed a two-member Springfield ward, transferring Haughton village to Whinfield Rural and including the Oakwood Drive Estate north of the A1150.

110 The Labour Group proposed a three-member Haughton-le-Skerne ward 'focussed around the Skerne River' comprising the neighbourhoods of Albert Hill, Haughton, Red Hall, and Springfield. It proposed transferring an area of Springfield north of Springfield Road into Harrowgate Hill to improve electoral equality. It additionally proposed a two-member Whinfield ward combining Whinfield and the Skerningham development, which covers parts of Barmpton and Great Burdon parishes. It suggested that 'the development is adjacent to Whinfield and there will be connectivity by road and footpath between the two. New electors will have access to the community facilities within the existing Whinfield ward.'

111 The eight-person group proposed a similar three-member Haughton ward to the Labour Group, though with a 'more modern development north of Thompson St East' transferred north as it 'feels more like Whinfield'. Its proposed three-member Whinfield ward is described as a 'logical new "outer urban area" of new(er) developments with similar feel'. This ward would use the East Coast Main Line as its western boundary. Councillor Holroyd proposed the same wards but suggested the name Haughton & Red Hall to reflect more areas of the ward.

112 Councillor Snedker proposed a similar three-member Haughton & Red Hall ward, although including the area north of Thompson St East around Kingsway. This scheme additionally proposed a different two-member rural Whinfield & Barmpton including parishes to the northeast, described in greater detail in the Hurworth and Middleton section of this report.

113 We visited Haughton, Springfield, and Whinfield on our tour of Darlington and consider that Haughton village is a distinct community which feels separate from its adjacent neighbourhoods. We consider that the boundary between the Haughton and Springfield areas is as distinct as between Haughton and Whinfield and consider that Haughton could be included in a ward with either of those areas.

114 As described in the Eastbourne section, we consider the River Skerne a strong southern boundary between Haughton and Albert Hill and Red Hall, with only one road (Haughton Road) connecting these areas, which also have a different community feel to Haughton. We do not consider that there are sufficient shared local ties between Haughton and areas to the south of the river as suggested by the proposals of the Labour Group, the eight-person group and Councillors Holroyd and Snedker.

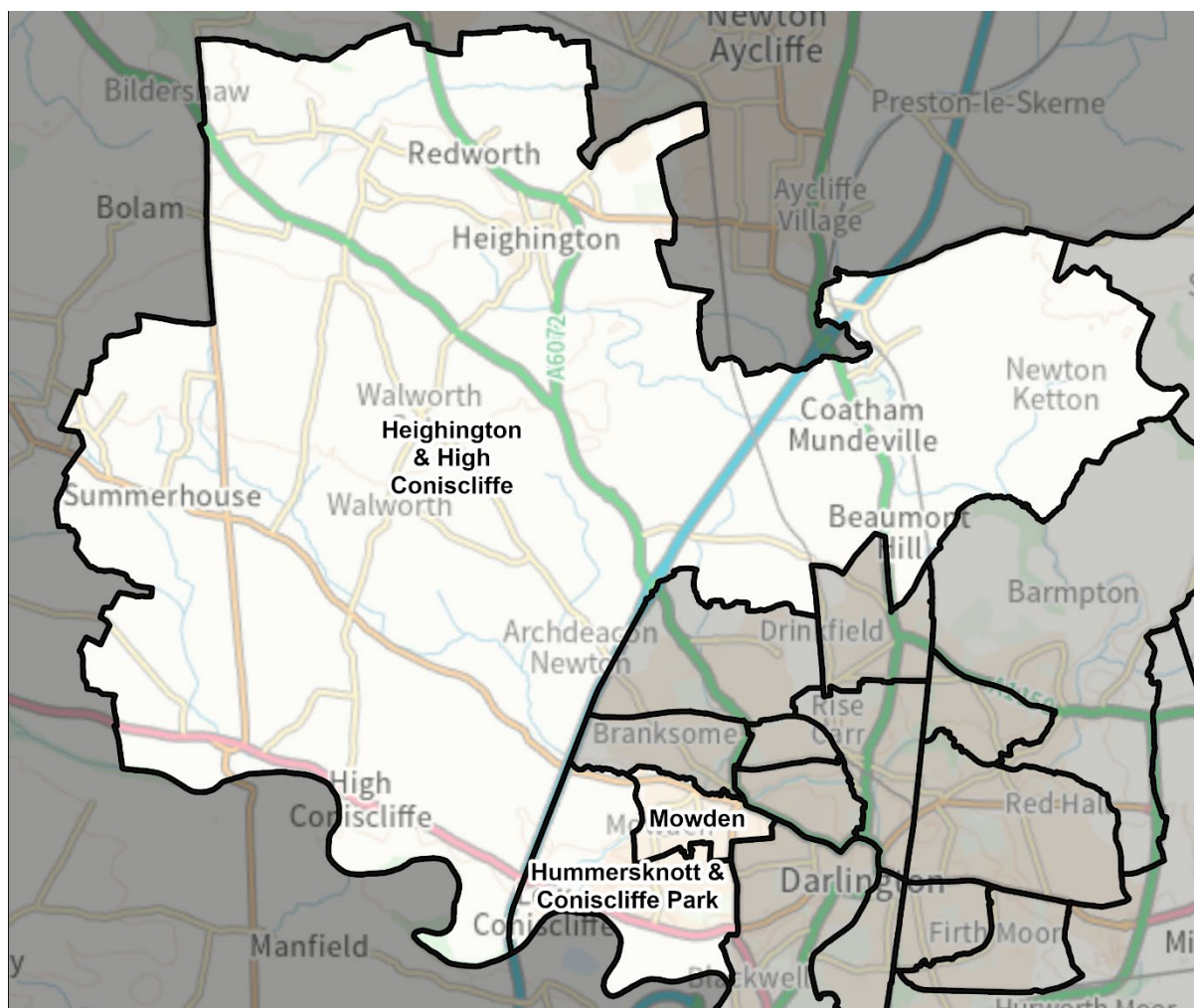
115 We are persuaded by the Conservative Group's assessment that recent and upcoming growth in Whinfield and Skertingham can best be reflected by a ward where 'communities affected by the same development pressures are represented together'. We consider that, because of planned development on both sides of the A1150 (Stockton Road) in Great Burdon parish, this parish should be retained whole rather than divided as it is in the proposals of the Labour Group. The Conservative Group, the eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd propose an undivided Great Burdon parish included in a ward with Whinfield which we consider reflects community ties and will allow the entire development to be represented within one ward.

116 Our warding pattern in this area is largely the same as the proposals of the Conservative Group except around the northwest of Springfield. We consider that the A1150 (Salters Lane North) at the west of Springfield is a strong boundary between the Oakwood Drive development and the Kingsway area. We propose Oakwood Drive is included in a ward with Whinfield, and that Kingsway is included in a ward with Springfield, noting that the only road access to Kingsway is south via Thompson Street East. We additionally consider that St Andrew's Church on Haughton Green is historically part of Haughton-le-Skerne and propose that it is included in a Haughton ward rather than a Springfield ward.

117 We consider that Haughton village represents a significant element of this ward, and that it should be retained in the name of any ward proposed here.

118 We therefore propose a three-member Haughton & Whinfield ward and a two-member Springfield ward similar to the proposals of the Conservative Group, with adjustments to the Oakwood Drive area and St Andrew's Church as described.

Heighington and Hummersknott



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Heighington & High Coniscliffe	2	-5%
Hummersknott & Coniscliffe Park	2	-2%
Mowden	2	-4%

119 This area comprises the Heighington and Hummersknott area of Darlington that includes both the southwest extent of Darlington town as well as rural parishes west and north of the town. We have opted to discuss wards here in the same section of the report because we have received different proposals for the boundary between the built-up Hummersknott and Mowden areas and the rural areas west of the A(1)M.

Heighington & High Coniscliffe

120 Proposals received in this area suggested retaining a Heighington ward mostly similar to the existing arrangements, with some adjustments to boundaries around development sites at the northeast and southeast of the existing ward, where it borders the latest expansions of Darlington town.

121 Archdeacon Newton is a small rural parish in the existing Brinkburn & Faverdale ward – it is currently separated from the rest of the ward by the A1(M). All schemes in this area proposed including Archdeacon Newton in a Heighington ward. This was supported by Councillor Crudass.

122 High Coniscliffe Parish Council and a resident of the parish proposed to retain the existing Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. A resident of Piercebridge suggested that the village should be retained within a Heighington ward if possible.

123 The Conservative and Labour groups both proposed retaining the northeastern boundaries of the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. Councillor Snedker proposed including Brafferton parish in the ward.

124 The eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd proposed using the A1(M) as a boundary, extending its use as a boundary north of Archdeacon Newton. This proposal would divide Coatham Mundeville parish between wards.

125 Councillor Snedker proposed including the entirety of the parish of Whessoe in a Harrowgate Hill ward, which would result in a Heighington ward with a forecast variance of -20%.

126 We have not been persuaded by the proposals that would result in dividing Coatham Mundeville parish between wards as this would require the creation of a parish ward which we do not consider reflects effective and convenient local government in a sparsely populated rural parish.

127 In the northeast area of Heighington we note that the existing ward boundary divides a new housing development. We have proposed that the entire development should be included in Harrowgate Hill ward and suggest an appropriate amendment to the boundary of Heighington to accommodate this.

128 Our draft recommendations mostly retain the existing arrangements except for three modifications: we are including the parish of Archdeacon Newton in this ward; we have adjusted the boundary between Heighington and Harrowgate Hill to reflect where a new development is taking place; and, in the south, as discussed in more detail below, we are proposing to include Coniscliffe Park, Low Coniscliffe, and Merrybent Drive in a Darlington town ward.

129 To reflect these changes, we are calling the ward Heighington & High Coniscliffe.

Hummersknott & Coniscliffe Park

130 The existing Darlington town wards of Hummersknott and Mowden have a western boundary along the Baydale Beck river. This river also forms the eastern

boundary of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent parish. This parish straddles the A1(M). Between the A1(M) motorway and the Baydale Beck river there are ongoing developments, under the name of Coniscliffe Park, which are currently unoccupied but are forecast to house about 650 electors by 2031. The proposals that we received in this area all addressed this development in different ways.

131 All schemes (except from the Conservative Group) proposed extending one of the Darlington town wards, either Hummersknot or Mowden, to the east to include the new developments at Coniscliffe Park. The Conservative Group proposed retaining the entirety of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent parish in Heighington ward, including new housing.

132 The Labour Group proposed extending the Mowden ward westwards to include new developments. It retained the existing settlements of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Drive in a proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, noting that these communities are 'viewed as being rural areas'.

133 The eight-person group and Councillor Holroyd proposed merging the existing Hummersknot and Mowden wards in a three-member ward with a western boundary running partly along the A1(M). This ward included the Coniscliffe Park development, as well as the settlement off Merrybent Drive, but not Low Coniscliffe. This results in a Hummersknot & Mowden ward with a 12% variance. These proposals also noted that 'Low Coniscliffe feels like a small village, more suited to the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward.' This was supported by a resident.

134 Councillor Snedker proposed retaining the existing boundary between Mowden and Hummersknot wards; his scheme also extended the boundary of Hummersknot to the A1(M), but did not include Low Coniscliffe, creating a two-councillor Hummersknot & Coniscliffe Park ward with good electoral equality.

135 On our tour of this area, we noted that development of Coniscliffe Park is still in its early stages. We consider that dividing Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent parish in any way where new developments would be separate from the rest of the parish would result in a parish ward with very few residents until the developments are built out. We consider that the Coniscliffe Park development will alter the community ties between Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Drive and Darlington, and we consider they may share greater ties with Darlington town than with rural areas to the west of the motorway.

136 On our tour we noted that the road access between planned developments at Coniscliffe Park and Hummersknot via Coniscliffe Road in the south allowed for better internal ward links than the alternative: a ward where the developments would be included in a Mowden ward via Staindrop Road in the north. We also consider that the completed development along Ash Lane is similar in character to new

developments to the north. We noted the strength of the A1(M) as a boundary and consider that dividing Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent parish there is appropriate.

137 We therefore recommend the inclusion of the new Coniscliffe Park developments in a two-member Hummersknott & Coniscliffe Park ward with the western boundary as the A1(M). We consider that this proposal reflects the expanding nature of a Darlington town ward such that it includes all residential developments east of the motorway, including those which we consider will share greater transport and community links with Darlington as they are developed over the forecast period. We also note the strength of the eastern boundary along Carmel Road, which would be retained.

Mowden

138 We received a resident's scheme for this area of Darlington which proposed combining part of the existing College ward with the existing Park West ward. This approach was shared by the eight-person group and Councillors Holroyd and Snedker, though it differs in proposing that the area north of Milbank Road and west of The Woodlands should be included in Mowden. This area includes residential streets between Milbank Road and the A68 (Woodland Road).

139 The Conservative Group proposed extending Mowden to the immediate south, while replacing College ward with a new Abbeyfield ward with similar boundaries. This proposal featured two wards which cross Carmel Road south of Abbey Road, which, as noted above, we identified as a very strong boundary on our tour.

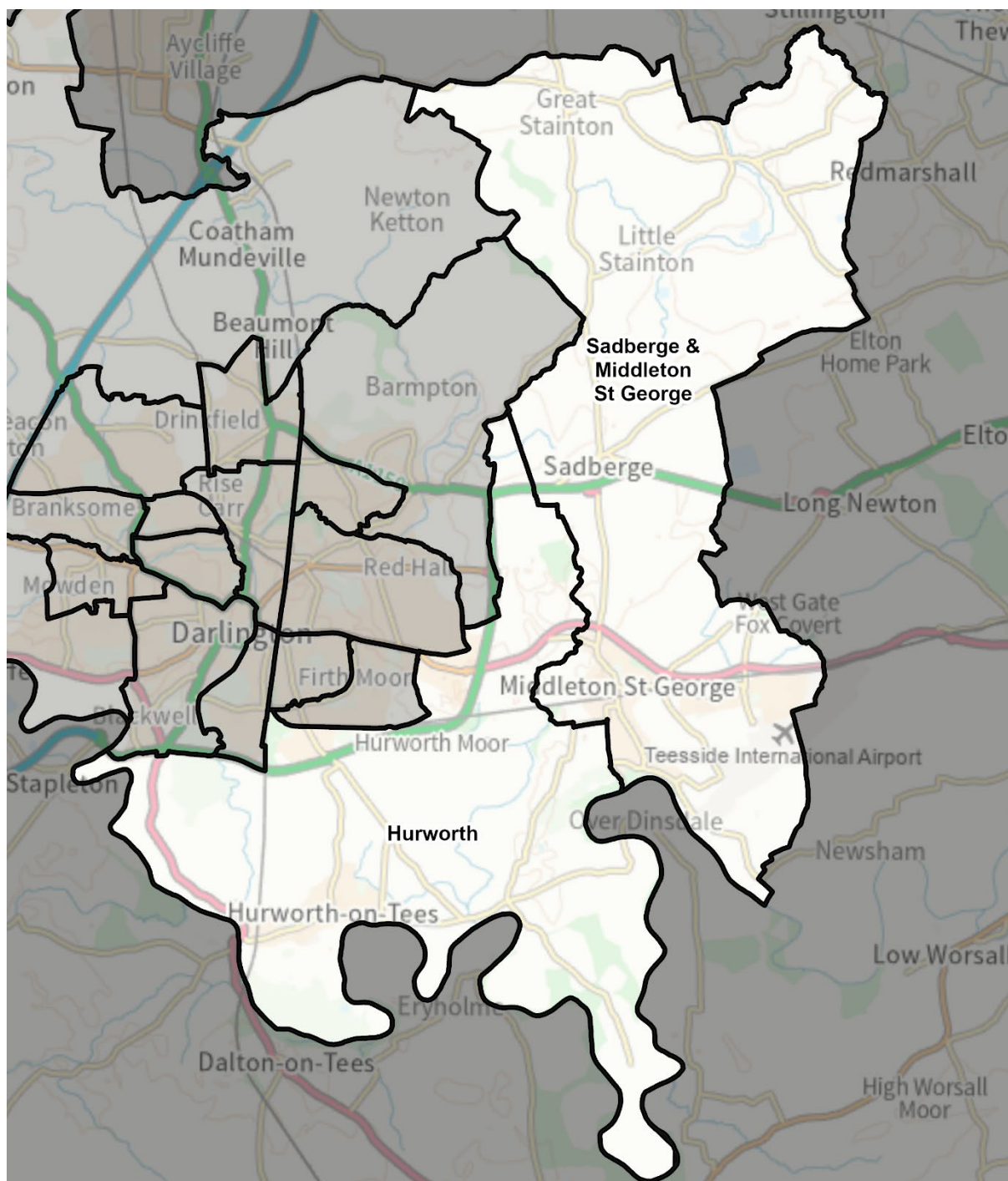
140 Councillor Snedker's scheme also proposed retaining Mowden and extending its boundary north to create a Mowden & Wyvern ward, which includes Eggleston View and surrounding roads in the Branksome area on the other side of the Cocker Beck river. We consider that this would split the community in Branksome from their adjacent community while including it in Mowden, where they have little direct connection and no internal road access to the rest of Mowden ward.

141 We consider the resident's proposal for Mowden best reflects local community ties and recommend a Mowden ward that is based on their proposal. We consider that an additional amendment to the ward to include residential streets south of Nunnery Lane, including Cardinal Gardens, in Mowden allows for more effective and convenient local government here. These roads have better internal ward access to Mowden, to the immediate north, than any connections to Hummersknott, as in the existing warding pattern; there is a large unpopulated space around St Clare's Court and Carmel College separating these residential roads from Hummersknott.

142 We propose a two-member Mowden ward similar to the existing arrangement, with the inclusion of the northern area of the existing College ward as described in the resident's scheme and a small area south of Nunnery Lane. We would be

interested in hearing from local residents regarding the precise community ties for residential roads which we have proposed including in Mowden, such as Cardinal Gardens or Woodland Terrace, to understand if these streets are well situated in Mowden.

Hurworth and Middleton



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2031
Hurworth	2	-4%
Sadberge & Middleton St George	3	-5%

143 This area of the borough comprises parishes to the east and south of Darlington town, including the most populous parishes of Hurworth and Middleton St George. We have identified two wards in this area, one of which includes a small

unparished area south of the Tees Valley railway line and north of the A66 ring road. Development is taking place within this area, and we have received a number of comments about where the community identity of these new areas of housing will be. A number of residents opposed this area being included in wards with Hurworth.

Hurworth

144 The Hurworth area generated the largest response across Darlington during the initial consultation; 29 of the 58 submissions we received were regarding Hurworth. The vast majority of people responding about this area considered that any Hurworth ward's northern boundary should be the A66 ring road and that the population north of the ring road should be included in a Darlington town ward. Responses from Hurworth residents suggested that the A66 divides the older Hurworth village (to the south of the road) from new build developments (to the north of the road).

145 Submissions such as one from the Hurworth Grange Bar CIC, a local organisation, noted, 'It is not safely possible for residents of the two new estates [north of the A66] to walk to Hurworth village, community centre, doctor's surgery, school, or other facilities, as there is no footpath down the A66, nor via Roundhill Road. It is far simpler and convenient for them to walk under the railway bridge into Darlington, which is less than 300 yards of pavement.'

146 The existing Hurworth ward boundary follows the Hurworth parish boundary, which extends north of the A66 and includes newer areas of housing. One resident of Hurworth Moor, which is not in Hurworth parish or in the existing Hurworth ward, expressed a preference for being included in a Hurworth borough ward. We recognise that this area is strongly connected to the rest of Hurworth, and as part of our draft recommendations, we propose including Hurworth Moor in Hurworth ward.

147 In contrast to the majority of submissions from Hurworth, Councillor J. Foster of Hurworth Parish Council made a submission noting that 'it will be practical for Hurworth [district ward] to expand with the new houses attached to the ESH Homes estate' as part of the reduction in councillors across Darlington.

148 Neasham Parish Council made a submission setting out why it should be included in a Hurworth-centred ward. It noted that 'Neasham's day-to-day community identity, local routes and resident connections align most naturally with Hurworth' and that 'Neasham children attend school predominantly in Hurworth [...] which also provides the closest post office and the most convenient local convenience stores.'

149 One local resident organised a petition in Hurworth village, asking respondents to indicate if they would prefer to 'increase the boundary to take in more houses' or to 'reduce the boundary to the A66'. All 17 signatories opted for the latter option.

150 We note that a single-member Hurworth ward comprising only Hurworth village south of the A66 would have 29% more electors than the average. We considered alternative arrangements such as including Neasham parish, as in the existing arrangement. This would result in a forecast variance of 49%. A two-member ward comprising Hurworth and Neasham parishes (minus new developments north of the A66) would result in a forecast variance of -26%. This two-member ward was put forward by the eight-person group, and Councillors Holroyd and Snedker.

151 We received other proposals in relation to Hurworth that would result in good electoral equality. The Conservative Group proposed a two-member Hurworth ward with the Tees Valley railway line as its northern boundary, rather than the A66. It additionally proposed including Morton Palms parish in the Hurworth ward, noting that residents in this area have easy access to Hurworth facilities via the A66 corridor. It argued that new homes in the Hurworth Gardens area north of the A66 around Darlington Arena should be included in Hurworth ward 'to ensure community cohesion'. The forecast variance of this proposed ward would be -4%.

152 The Labour Group also proposed a two-member Hurworth ward with good electoral equality. Its ward would be bounded by the Tees Valley railway line to the north. This proposal suggests transferring another area north of the A66 in Hurworth, rather than Morton Palms: housing around Blackwell Lane and Romanby Drive, which forms the southern extent of the existing Park West ward. It argued that the housing in this area is less typical of the urban area of Darlington as it faces onto the A167, which would also serve as its link to Hurworth village. It additionally noted that its decision to include new housing north of A66 road 'ensures the whole of Snipe Lane development is in Hurworth' as 'currently the ward boundary runs diagonally across the open space' where the development is situated. The forecast variance of this ward would be -1%.

153 The distribution of the electorate in this area makes it challenging to balance our criteria. Hurworth and Neasham parishes together are mathematically entitled to 1.7 councillors based on forecasts; Hurworth alone is entitled to 1.5 councillors. We also do not consider that dividing Hurworth parish to achieve a single-member ward would reflect local communities.

154 We visited Hurworth on our tour of Darlington and did note the distance between new housing developments around Snipe Lane and Darlington Arena and the Hurworth village area. The large expanse of countryside between the two areas along Roundhill Road offers limited access other than driving and crossing the A66.

155 We recognise the views that residents have identified concerning combining Hurworth and newer developments north of the A66. However, we consider that a variance of -26% is not justified. We consider that to get a good balance between the criteria it is necessary to consider including additional electors from neighbouring

areas so that we can recommend a Hurworth ward with a better level of electoral equality. We note that Hurworth's location at the southern edge of the borough boundary, bordered only by Middleton St George to the east and Darlington town to the north, leaves it with very few adjacent areas to be included to balance its forecast electorate.

156 We have decided to include new housing around Snipe Lane in a proposed Hurworth ward, as proposed by the Conservative and Labour groups. We agree that having decided to include a section of the built-up part of Darlington in a Hurworth ward achieves the best balance of our statutory criteria. Extending the boundary further north, to the railway line, allows all developments around the Darlington Arena to be included within the same ward.

157 We consider the Conservative Group's suggested inclusion of Morton Palms parish more persuasive than the Labour Group's suggestion of including housing around Blackwell Lane. We consider that the Blackwell Lane area has better connections with other communities north of the A66 and is therefore suited to be included in a Darlington town ward rather than an outlying ward. Although including the Morton Palms parish extends the overall area of a Hurworth borough ward, we agree with the Conservative Group that most residents there are concentrated in the south of that parish and are closest in proximity to Hurworth.

158 We therefore propose a two-member Hurworth ward in line with the suggestions of the Conservative Group, comprising the entirety of the parishes of Hurworth, Morton Palms, and Neasham, as well as unparished areas south of the Tees Valley railway around the Neasham Road and Darlington Arena.

159 We would be interested to hear from local residents regarding the name of this ward, and whether it would be appropriate to include an additional descriptor to refer to those housing areas north of the A66. For example, we welcome views on whether we should include names such as Elder Brook Park or Neasham Road which refer to ongoing housing development sites.

Sadberge & Middleton St George

160 We received relatively few responses relating to Sadberge & Middleton St George. Two residents suggested including Middleton St George and Middleton One Row in a Hurworth ward; however, an arrangement with those settlements together would be too large even for a three-member ward, with a forecast variance of 35%.

161 All five borough wide schemes proposed retaining the link between the ward's two eponymous settlements, although there were several different approaches to the ward's northern and northwestern boundaries.

162 The Conservative Group proposed a ward comprising, in addition to Middleton St George and Sadberge parishes, the parishes of Bishopton, East and West Newbiggin, Little Stainton, and Great Stainton. It proposed transferring Morton Palms parish to Hurworth, as described above, as well as the transfer of Barmpton and Great Burdon parishes (which include parts of the large incoming Skertingham housing development) to its proposed Whinfield Rural ward, such that 'areas experiencing significant housing growth are grouped with wards facing similar planning and service pressures.'

163 The Labour Group proposed dividing Barmpton parish along the River Skerne, to allow the village of Barmpton to remain in the more rural Sadberge & Middleton St George ward while separating the forecast Skertingham development to include it in a denser Darlington town ward. It additionally proposed transferring a divided Great Burdon parish into three different Darlington town wards.

164 The eight-person group proposed similar amendments to the Labour Group, including the division of Barmpton parish and a similar transfer of Great Burdon parish as described above. It additionally suggested including Brafferton parish and part of Coatham Mundeville parish in Sadberge & Middleton St George, using the A1(M) as the northwestern boundary of the ward. This was also suggested by Councillor Holroyd's scheme.

165 Councillor Snedker proposed including several parishes north of Sadberge (Barmpton, Bishopton, Brafferton, Great Stainton, and Little Stainton) in a new Barmpton & Whinfield ward where 'Whinfield expands to the northeast, taking in communities that naturally connect to the urban area via the Whinfield area'.

166 All of the proposed Sadberge & Middleton St George wards described above achieved good electoral equality, although Councillor Snedker's Barmpton & Whinfield ward has a forecast variance of 13%.

167 We visited Barmpton on our tour of Darlington and note that the only access to Barmpton village is via Barmpton Lane, which runs through the Whinfield area and the southern area of Barmpton parish. We consider that a strong principle of effective and convenient local government is when residents have complete internal access within their ward rather than having to exit it and travel via another ward.

168 We additionally note that the proposals of the Labour Group, the eight-person group, and Councillor Holroyd all result in a very small parish ward in Barmpton parish where the village of Barmpton (and surrounding farms north of the River Skerne) comprise very few electors which would be split from the rest of their parish.

169 We consider that Councillor Snedker's proposed Barmpton & Whinfield ward combines communities of a different character and represents a greater degree of change for residents in parishes in the northeast of the borough.

170 We consider that the Sadberge & Middleton St George ward as proposed by the Conservative Group reflects the best balance of our statutory criteria, as it has good electoral equality, reflects local communities that were identified in the existing arrangements, and does not divide any parishes which could otherwise be retained whole. We have therefore included it in our draft recommendations in this area.

Conclusions

171 The table below provides a summary as to the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality in Darlington Borough Council, referencing the 2024 and 2031 electorate figures against the proposed number of councillors and wards. A full list of wards, names and their corresponding electoral variances can be found in Appendix A to the back of this report. An outline map of the wards is provided in Appendix B.

Summary of electoral arrangements

	Draft recommendations	
	2024	2031
Number of councillors	41	41
Number of electoral wards	18	18
Average number of electors per councillor	2,001	2,194
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	10	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Draft recommendations

Darlington should be made up of 41 councillors serving 18 wards: one single-councillor ward, 11 two-councillor wards and six three-councillor wards. The details and names are shown in Appendix A and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Mapping

Sheet 1, Map 1 shows the proposed wards for Darlington Borough Council. You can also view our draft recommendations for Darlington Borough Council on our interactive maps at www.lgbce.org.uk

Parish electoral arrangements

172 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

173 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Darlington Borough Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

174 As a result of our proposed ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council and Whessoe Parish Council.

175 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent parish.

Draft recommendations

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Low Coniscliffe	6
Merrybent	1

176 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Whessoe parish.

Draft recommendations

Whessoe Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Beaumont Hill	2
Burtree Lane	5

Have your say

177 The Commission has an open mind about its draft recommendations. Every representation we receive will be considered, regardless of who it is from or whether it relates to the whole borough or just a part of it.

178 If you agree with our recommendations, please let us know. If you don't think our recommendations are right for Darlington, we want to hear alternative proposals for a different pattern of wards.

179 Our website is the best way to keep up to date with progress on the review and to have your say www.lgbce.org.uk

180 Each review has its own page with details of the timetable for the review, information about its different stages and interactive mapping.

181 Submissions can also be made by emailing reviews@lgbce.org.uk or by writing to:

Review Officer (Darlington)
LGBCE
7th Floor, 3 Bunhill Row
London
EC1Y 8YZ

182 The Commission aims to propose a pattern of wards for Darlington Borough Council which delivers:

- Electoral equality: each local councillor represents a similar number of electors.
- Community identity: reflects the identity and interests of local communities.
- Effective and convenient local government: helping your council discharge its responsibilities effectively.

183 A good pattern of wards should:

- Provide good electoral equality, with each councillor representing, as closely as possible, the same number of electors.
- Reflect community interests and identities and include evidence of community links.
- Be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries.
- Help the council deliver effective and convenient local government.

184 Electoral equality:

- Does your proposal mean that councillors would represent roughly the same number of electors as elsewhere in Darlington?

185 Community identity:

- Community groups: is there a parish council, residents' association or other group that represents the area?
- Interests: what issues bind the community together or separate it from other parts of your area?
- Identifiable boundaries: are there natural or constructed features which make strong boundaries for your proposals?

186 Effective local government:

- Are any of the proposed wards too large or small to be represented effectively?
- Are the proposed names of the wards appropriate?
- Are there good links across your proposed wards? Is there any form of public transport?

187 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, we make available for public inspection full copies of all representations the Commission takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all representations will be placed on deposit at our offices and on our website at www.lqbce.org.uk A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

188 If you are a member of the public and not writing on behalf of a council or organisation we will remove any personal identifiers. This includes your name, postal or email addresses, signatures or phone numbers from your submission before it is made public. We will remove signatures from all letters, no matter who they are from.

189 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with the draft recommendations. We will then publish our final recommendations.

190 After the publication of our final recommendations, the changes we have proposed must be approved by Parliament. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in draft in Parliament. The draft

Order will provide for new electoral arrangements to be implemented at the all-out elections for Darlington Borough Council in 2027.

Equalities

191 The Commission is satisfied that it complies with its legal obligations under the Equality Act and that no adverse equality impacts will arise as a result of the outcome of the review.

Appendices

Appendix A

Draft recommendations for Darlington Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2024)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2031)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall	3	6,623	2,208	10%	6,799	2,266	3%
2	Bank Top & Lascelles	2	4,548	2,274	14%	4,578	2,289	4%
3	Branksome & Cockerton	2	4,757	2,379	19%	4,821	2,411	10%
4	Brinkburn	1	2,340	2,340	17%	2,365	2,365	8%
5	College & Blackwell	3	6,949	2,316	16%	7,041	2,347	7%
6	Faverdale	2	3,637	1,819	-9%	4,911	2,456	12%
7	Firthmoor	2	4,744	2,372	19%	4,803	2,402	9%
8	Harrowgate Hill	3	5,347	1,782	-11%	5,930	1,977	-10%
9	Haughton & Whinfield	3	4,637	1,546	-23%	6,597	2,199	0%

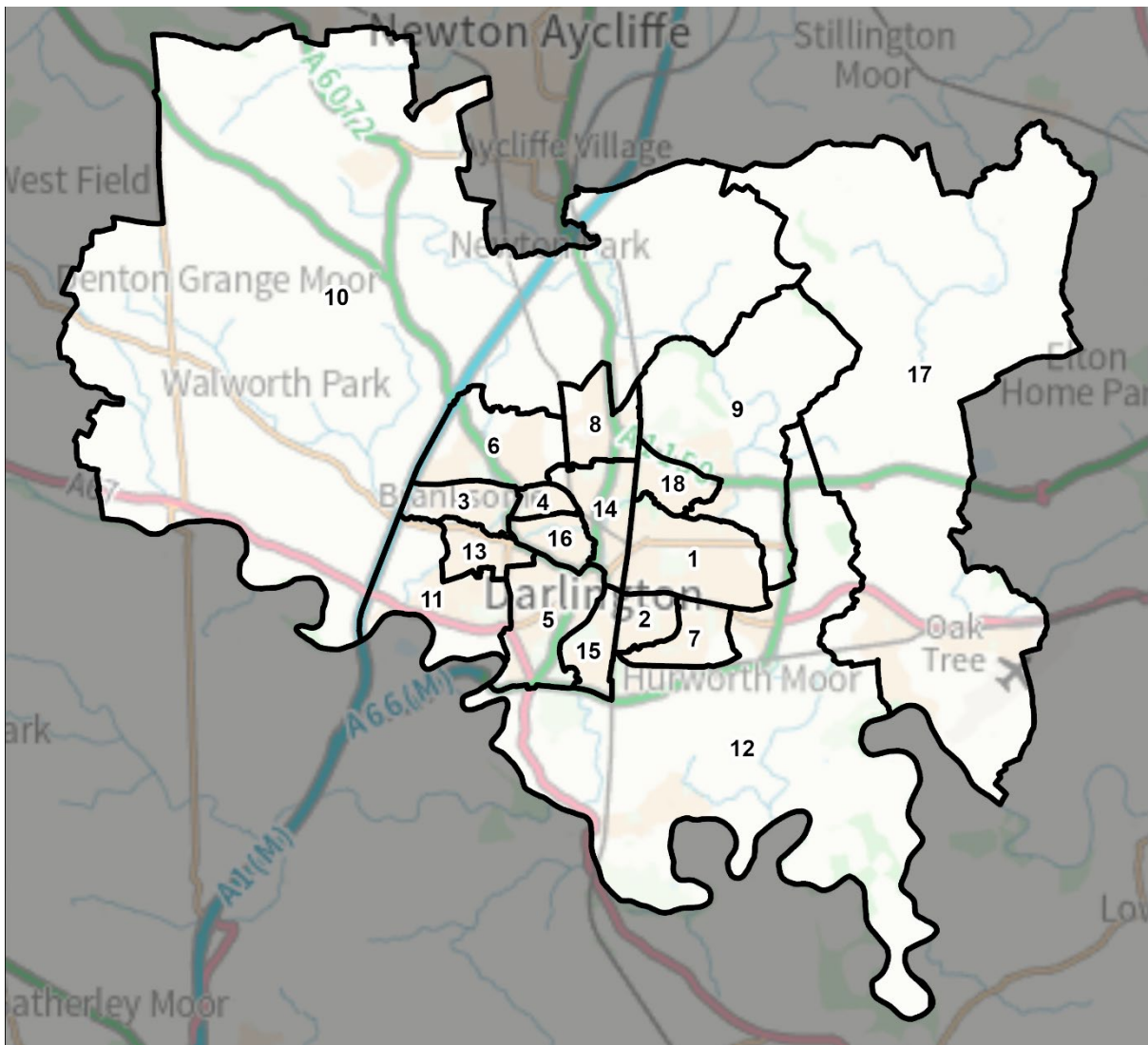
	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2024)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2031)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
10	Heighington & High Coniscliffe	2	3,358	1,769	-12%	4,184	2,092	-5%
11	Hummersknott & Coniscliffe Park	2	3,306	1,653	-17%	4,322	2,161	-2%
12	Hurworth	2	3,653	1,827	-9%	4,220	2,110	-4%
13	Mowden	2	4,216	2,108	5%	4,234	2,117	-4%
14	North Road	2	4,301	2,151	6%	4,483	2,242	2%
15	Park East	2	3,973	1,987	-1%	4,119	2,060	-6%
16	Pierremont	3	6,286	2,095	5%	6,291	2,097	-4%
17	Sadberge & Middleton St George	3	5,265	1,755	-12%	6,275	2,092	-5%
18	Springfield	2	3,920	1,960	-2%	3,974	1,987	-9%
	Totals	41	82,040	-	-	89,947	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,001	-	-	2,194	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Darlington Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each electoral ward varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Appendix B

Outline map



Number	Ward name
1	Albert Hill, Hundens & Red Hall
2	Bank Top & Lascelles
3	Branksome & Cockerton
4	Brinkburn
5	College & Blackwell
6	Faverdale
7	Firthmoor
8	Harrowgate Hill
9	Haughton & Whinfield
10	Heighington & High Coniscliffe
11	Hummersknott & Coniscliffe Park
12	Hurworth
13	Mowden
14	North Road
15	Park East
16	Pierremont
17	Sadberge & Middleton St George
18	Springfield

A more detailed version of this map can be seen on the large map accompanying this report, or on our website: www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/darlington

Appendix C

Submissions received

All submissions received can also be viewed on our website at:
www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/darlington

Political Groups

- Darlington Conservative Party
- Darlington Liberal Democrats
- Labour Group of Darlington Borough Council

Councillors

- Councillor P. Crudass (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor J. Foster (Hurworth Parish Council)
- Councillor B. Holroyd (Darlington Borough Council), who also submitted a scheme compiled by four councillors and four members of the public
- Councillor R. Lawley (Darlington Borough Council)
- Councillor M. Snedker (Darlington Borough Council)

Local Organisations

- Hurworth Grange Bar CIC

Parish and Town Councils

- High Coniscliffe Parish Council
- Neasham Parish Council

Local residents

- 46 local residents

Petitions

- Hurworth boundaries petition, by a member of the public

Appendix D

Glossary and abbreviations

Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral inequality	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. We only take account of electors registered specifically for local elections during our reviews.
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town council'
Parish (or town) council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
Town council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

The
Local Government
Boundary Commission
for England

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was set up by Parliament, independent of Government and political parties. It is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government.

Local Government Boundary Commission for
England
7th Floor, 3 Bunhill Row,
London,
EC1Y 8YZ

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