North Somerset

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Comment text:

Related subject: Wraxall and Failand

Please see my attached submission, which sets out my comments in full.

In summary, I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider its proposal to include The Elms within a Nailsea ward and instead retain it within Long Ashton Ward alongside the remainder of Wraxall & Failand Parish.

My submission addresses the Commission's observation that relatively little evidence had previously been provided relating specifically to The Elms. In particular, it highlights:

* detailed consultation evidence demonstrating the strong community identity of The Elms residents with Wraxall & Failand, including that 90% of responding households within The Elms wished to remain within the parish;
* why this evidence should be given significant weight under the statutory criterion of reflecting community identity;
* the practical implications for effective and convenient local government of dividing a single parish between two district wards, including more complex representation and governance arrangements; and
* why the modest electoral equality considerations do not, in this instance, outweigh the evidence relating to community identity and effective local government.

I hope the Commission will consider the attached submission when preparing its final recommendations.

Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England: North Somerset Draft Recommendations – The Elms / Wraxall & Failand

I am writing as one of the North Somerset Councillors for Long Ashton Ward. My submission relates specifically to the draft recommendation to include The Elms area of Wraxall & Failand Parish within a Nailsea ward.

I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider this aspect of the draft recommendations and to retain The Elms within the Long Ashton Ward, alongside the remainder of Wraxall & Failand Parish.

I recognise that the Commission must balance the three statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009: electoral equality, reflecting community identity, and providing for effective and convenient local government. I also recognise that the Commission has not proposed this change lightly. However, I believe there is further evidence, specific to The Elms, which means the statutory balance should be struck differently.

The draft report states that the earlier submission from Wraxall & Failand Parish Council contained substantial material about the parish generally, but that "relatively few of the points put forward related specifically to the Elms itself". This response is intended to address that point directly.

The strongest evidence is the local consultation undertaken during the recent Community Governance Review process. Wraxall & Failand Parish Council issued a questionnaire to all 1,034 households within the parish. It received 667 valid responses, representing an exceptionally high response rate of 65%. Overall, 89% of respondents wished The Elms and the surrounding land to the north and north-east of Nailsea to remain within Wraxall & Failand Parish. Importantly, the detailed results also demonstrate that 309 of those responses came from households within The Elms itself. Of those residents, 278 (90%) wished The Elms to remain within Wraxall & Failand Parish.

In my view, this is unusually strong evidence of community identity. It is not simply an assertion by the Parish Council or by elected representatives. It is direct evidence from the residents of the community whose identity the Commission is being asked to consider.

As one of the North Somerset Councillors representing the area for the last seven years, I was struck by the strength and clarity of that response. I fully recognise that residents of The Elms may naturally use Nailsea for shopping, schools and other day-to-day services. However, those practical links do not necessarily determine community identity. The consultation demonstrates that residents overwhelmingly regard themselves as belonging to Wraxall & Failand notwithstanding those connections.

The Commission's Technical Guidance explains that evidence of community identity should demonstrate what defines a community and distinguishes it from neighbouring

areas. It also explains that the Commission seeks, wherever possible, to avoid breaking established local ties. In my view, the consultation evidence does precisely that. It demonstrates that residents of The Elms themselves identify their community as part of Wraxall & Failand.

I acknowledge the Commission's conclusion that the urban character of The Elms and its proximity to Nailsea are factors which properly merit consideration when determining the most appropriate ward boundary.However, Schedule 2 requires the Commission to balance community identity and effective and convenient local government alongside geography and electoral equality. In my respectful submission, the exceptionally strong evidence of community identity, together with the governance consequences of dividing the parish, outweigh the fact that residents naturally access services in Nailsea.

There are also practical governance considerations. The proposal would leave Wraxall & Failand Parish divided between two North Somerset wards. The majority of the parish would continue to be represented by the two Long Ashton ward councillors, whilst The Elms would instead be represented by the councillor for Nailsea Yeo Ward. Residents of the same parish would therefore have different district councillor representation depending solely upon which part of the parish they live in.

In practice, this would create a more complex and less coherent arrangement. Parish Council meetings currently attended by the two Long Ashton ward councillors would, in principle, require the attendance of three district councillors. Matters such as planning applications, highways, public rights of way, flooding, parish initiatives and other issues affecting the parish as a whole would routinely require coordination between three district councillors despite there remaining only one parish council and one community. It would also make it less obvious to residents which district councillor they should approach on issues affecting the wider parish.

I also note that the draft recommendations would require Wraxall & Failand Parish Council to be divided into two parish wards, with four parish councillors representing The Elms and seven representing the remainder of the parish. I appreciate that this is simply the statutory consequence of dividing the parish between two district wards. However, it nevertheless illustrates that the proposal introduces additional electoral complexity into what is currently a straightforward and well-understood arrangement.

The electoral equality position does not appear to require the transfer of The Elms. Under the draft recommendations, Long Ashton Ward would have an electoral variance of -8% by 2031, whilst Nailsea Golden Valley would have a variance of -6%. Both are comfortably within the Commission's normal tolerance.

Indeed, elsewhere in the draft recommendations the Commission has accepted electoral variances outside the normal 10% guideline where it concluded that doing so better reflected community identity and produced stronger overall arrangements. For example, the proposed Backwell & Wrington ward has a projected variance of +12%, which the Commission concludes nevertheless provides "the best balance of the

statutory criteria". I respectfully suggest that the evidence relating to The Elms similarly justifies retaining an existing and well-understood community rather than dividing it.

For these reasons, I respectfully invite the Commission to amend the draft recommendations so that The Elms remains within Long Ashton Ward alongside the remainder of Wraxall & Failand Parish.

In my submission, this would provide the better balance of the statutory criteria by:

- reflecting the clearly demonstrated community identity of The Elms residents;
- avoiding the unnecessary division of an established parish community;
- supporting effective and convenient local government through simpler and more coherent representation;
- avoiding unnecessary parish warding and governance complexity; and
- continuing to deliver good electoral equality.

I therefore respectfully ask the Commission to give significant weight to the consultation evidence provided directly by residents of The Elms and to retain the area within Long Ashton Ward in its final recommendations.

Kind regards

Cllr Ashley Cartman

North Somerset Councillor – Long Ashton Ward