

Sunderland

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Comment text:

Related subject: Washington

The names of the Washington Wards should be:

Washington Central; Washington East; Washington North; Washington South and Washington West. A reasoned case for this is contained in the attached PDF.

Attached Documents:

- 240325ward-boundaries.pdf

From: Washington and Gateshead West Constituency Labour Party

The Review.

The Boundaries Commission, fulfilling its statutory duty, say the revision of boundaries is necessary because it is a “long time” since the last such review.

The Commission have decided what ward boundaries should be, ensuring that new proposed wards are of a proper population size and have now embarked upon a final round of consultations, asking for final amendment suggestions on the names of new wards, with a **closing date of 24 April 2024.**

A Labour View.

The Labour Party is the predominant political organisation in Washington. With hundreds of members, we maintain a Branch in every ward, closely linked to the local community and tenants’ organisations. This will continue. So far, during this review, the Boundaries Commission have dismissed our representations, adopting Conservative and Liberal submissions (although those 2 organisations have little reach in Washington and do not muster a Councillor between them!).

The Labour Party felt only minor boundary amendments were strictly necessary in Washington. We are compelled to work with the new boundaries which have been defined. The question of what names should be bestowed upon the new wards remains to be resolved. The Commission seems determined to stick to its own conventions, preferring short names drawn from the locality. We agree – but **the only apt names which will not offend many local sensibilities are Washington Central; Washington East; Washington North; Washington South and Washington West.**

Significantly, no Washington organisation suggested changing the names of the current wards during this review! This is because the most significant feature of each current Ward name is the designation “Washington”, followed by an appropriate “compass point”.

In everyday life whichever of the 5 “compass” point labels for the Washington wards applies do not matter to most. When residents are asked to describe where in Washington they live, they will almost invariably name a village or district – whether “Usworth”, “Springwell”, “Mount Pleasant”, “Blackfell;” The Village”, “Washington Station” or any other district. No-one says they live at a particular compass point. But residents, for instance, of Washington Village and Columbia will vehemently reject a “Barmston and Sulgrave” designation. Similarly, residents of High Usworth, Donwell, Blackfell, Lambton, Oxclose and Glebe will be offended if the names of other nearby “villages” are bestowed upon their new ward. **There is no objection to the “Washington” designation being used.**

Current Wards.

The 5 current **Washington** wards are based upon simple “compass point” descriptions – **Central, North, South, East and West.** The general geographic description of these points is correct but there are divergences from precise compass positions. This is mainly because Washington Development Corporation (the “quango” which had responsibility for planning the Washington New Town in the 1960’s and 70’s) designated and named districts or

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“villages” within Washington as centres of population. These villages and districts matter to residents – all have their own identity and characteristics.

Roughly, the current wards comprise of the following “villages” and centres of population:
Central – Washington Village; Biddick; Glebe; Columbia; Washington Town Centre and part of Lambton.

North – Concord; Sulgrave and part of High Usworth.

South – Rickleton; Ayton; Oxclose and part of Lambton.

East – Harraton; Mount Pleasant; Fatfield; Barmston (including Teal Farm).

West – Springwell; Donwell and part of High Usworth; Albany and Blackfell.

The Boundary Commission proposals are:

- A “**Riverside**” ward. To replace the current “South” Ward. This would include Rickleton Village, Harraton Village, and Fatfield Village. Mount Pleasant on the South side of the river and “Teal Farm” down to what used to be “Waterside” or Washington Staithes. The ward boundary would extend through the Waterfowl Park to the A19.

The Labour View.

Residents tell us they would be content to be called “**Washington South Ward**”. The River Wear is a common geographical feature linking this proposed new ward. It also lies to the South of Washington. But to adopt the name “Riverside” would risk confusion with places elsewhere in Sunderland and other cities. Sunderland Council have now designated an area in Sunderland, to either side of a new central footbridge “**Riverside Sunderland**” – this increases the risks of confusion.

- An “**Albany and Biddick**” ward to replace the “Central” Ward. This would comprise of Albany Village, Biddick Village, Glebe Village and part of Lambton Village. It would include Washington Town Centre and Biddick Academy.

The Labour View.

Residents from Glebe and Lambton are particularly resistant to the name “Albany and Biddick”. Looking for suitable name for the new ward, we examined common geographical features linking Albany, Glebe, Lambton and Biddick Villages, including the New Town Centre. The villages all border on park land, most notably Princess Anne Park. (“Albany Park” is not in Albany but in Concord – nevertheless this amenity is adjacent to Albany village). We therefore suggested a name of “Parkview Ward” to a variety of residents – they preferred “**Washington Central Ward**”.

- An “**Ayton and Springwell**” ward to replace the current “West” Ward. This would include Springwell Village, Blackfell Village, Oxclose Village, Ayton Village and part of Lambton Village.

The Labour View.

Folks from Blackfell and Oxclose are disturbed that their villages should be ignored in the new Ward title. Blackfell was an ancient West of Washington moorland, with a later colliery. Similarly, Oxclose was an historic farming then colliery site, East of the current Oxclose village. There is no compelling reason why Ayton should have more prominence than Blackfell or Oxclose in naming the new ward. Using “**Washington West Ward**” with the new boundaries is now more geographically correct.

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- A “**Barmston and Sulgrave**” ward to replace the current “East” Ward. This would include Barmston Village, Columbia Village, Washington Village and Sulgrave Village. This would include the original Washington Village, the old Washington and Usworth Stations and extend out to the East to include Nissan and other factories.

The Labour View.

This ward should be called “**Washington East Ward**”. No matter which “village” or district of Washington residents live in, they recognise that “The Village” is the historic centre of Washington. It incorporates Washington Old Hall, the War Memorial and the original historic churches – the Village should not be overshadowed by New Town creations like the modern Barmston or Sulgrave! Like Columbia, both Barmston and Sulgrave lie to the East of “The Village” and Washington.

- A “**Concord**” ward. To replace the current “North” Ward. This would include Concord Village, Donwell Village and what was historically High Usworth.

The Labour View.

Concord was the name given by the Development Corporation to “New Washington”. It has a totally different character to the more northerly parts of High Usworth, which also embraces Donwell and the historic Usworth parish church. Residents are happy with the “**Washington North Ward**” designation.

What’s in a name?

Some of the names chosen by the Washington Development Corporation for villages and districts were deliberately ahistoric, perhaps reflecting a 1960’s mindset. They sought to obscure Washington’s industrial past and to emphasise the connection between Washington (the ancestral home of George Washington) and the United States of America. **Concord** and **Albany** replaced “**New Washington**” while **Columbia** replaced **Washington Station**. **Sulgrave** was used for the Eastern part of **Usworth** because George Washington’s ancestors moved to Sulgrave in Northamptonshire centuries before migrating to America!

Meanwhile, the ancient names of Ayton, Fatfield and Biddick were appropriated for new villages to the North of those original settlements. Some historic names associated with parts of Washington were obscured. This included Usworth which had been used locally since written records began. Other names, particularly from industrial times – “New Washington”, Washington Station, Usworth Station, Havannah, Waterloo and, of course, the recently closed Collieries were removed from the map of the modern town.

Background to the local village and district names

In Anglo Saxon times settlements at “Wessington”, Usworth (originally Useworth), Barmston (Berneston), Biddick (Bigdyke) and Fatfield formed part of the Northumbrian Bishopric of Durham. With the Norman conquest, through the Middle Ages and into Victorian times “Local Government” was conducted by the “Prince Bishop”, the established church and nobility.

In feudal times most families lived bonded as serfs to the land and the nobility. More of the population of the early Washington arrived as “immigrant” families from elsewhere in Britain or Ireland, to work initially as bonded labour in the coal mines.

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Coal mining changed the geography of the town – at least 43 pits were sunk within the current town boundaries. Early pits were built on the banks of the Wear at Ayton, Harraton, the original Fatfield and North Biddick. A “**New Washington**” was developed from 1777, North of **the original Washington Village** to house workers of Washington Colliery (this was an early “super pit” with at least 10 different workings). Springwell developed when pits were sunk in the 1820’s. **Usworth Colliery** was created in 1845 – with the nearby district of **Waterloo** named in celebration of the battle of 1815. Washington **Glebe Colliery**, sunk on church land near Washington Parish church, was the last local pit developed in 1901.

The banks of the River Wear from Ayton to “**Waterside**” or “**Washington Staithes**” housed the platforms built to load up coal onto keel boats - “sea coal”, mainly for London and the South of England. Railways replaced the Rivers Wear and Tyne as the principal means of moving coal and residential districts were defined around **Usworth Station** and **Washington Station**.

Councils and Democracy

In 1888 local government was introduced. A Chester-Le-Street Rural District Council was created with wards, based on Church of England Parishes at Washington, Usworth, Barmston and Harraton/Fatfield. Women could not vote, nor could most working-class men. The enlarged local population campaigned for a **Washington Urban District Council** which was instituted in 1922 with wards at **Springwell, High Usworth, Usworth Colliery, Washington and Washington Station**.

This UDC lasted until 1974 when, amidst protests from the local population and Council, Washington was absorbed into Sunderland District council. Washington was originally divided into 2 geographically based electoral wards, based upon the compass points of “North” and “South”. Over time, with successive Boundary revisions as the population increased under Washington New Town, this was changed into the current compass points configuration of Central; North; South; East and West.

Names Matter.

We have tried proposing names for the 5 wards for Washington as “**Riverside**”; “**Parkview**”; “**Springwell and West**”; “**The Village and East**” and “**Concord and High Usworth**”. Washington people reject them as vehemently as “**Riverside**”; “**Biddick and Albany**”; “**Springwell and Ayton**”; “**Barmston and Sulgrave**” and “**Concord**”.

The people of Washington are content with ward names of **Washington Central; Washington East; Washington North; Washington South and Washington West**. **They are geographically correct and, within each ward, the distinct communities, with their own place and character, are given due prominence.**

Populations and even geography can shift and change over time. A precise depiction of the town which surrounds us, while recognising the history that has gone before plays a part in this. Hopefully this submission will help the Commission reach popular, fair and accurate conclusions.

Kevin Roddy (Secretary)

Washington and Gateshead South Constituency Labour Party