

Wakefield

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Comment text:

Please see attached file

Attached Documents:

- response-to-draft-recommendations.docx

9 September 2024.

Dear Sirs

I read the draft recommendations report with great interest and to note your reasonings, particularly in respect of the Knottingley, Pontefract North and Pontefract South wards. On reflection I wish to comment on the draft recommendations for the above three wards.

With respect to Knottingley it seems that your recommendations will keep the ward boundaries as established by the 2003 review. I note in Appendix A that between 2023 and 2029, as a consequence of house building in the ward, it is envisaged that the electorate will increase by 2000 yet, because of overall population growth throughout the Wakefield Council area, the actual variance from the average number of electors per councillor will reduce from -16% to -10% by 2029. Even in 2029, when compared against all the wards, Knottingley will remain an outlier: the only ward with a 10% variance, whether negative or positive.

Turning to the two Pontefract wards, then the variance remains unchanged for Pontefract North at +5% for the period 2023 to 2029 whilst for Pontefract South the variance will increase from 6% to 8%.

Through reference to the recently adopted "Wakefield Local Plan to 2036" it can be determined that most of the land still available for the building of new homes within Pontefract lies within the Pontefract South ward (ie areas HS10 and HS20). Whereas within the Pontefract North ward then of the identified housing sites few have yet to be developed whereas the process of house building is either complete or is very close to completion on the larger sites eg HS15, HS16 and HS17. This means the increase in electorate will have been included in the quoted 2029 figure for Pontefract North.

Therefore, I suggest that if one looks beyond the reference year of 2029 then in the case of Pontefract South ward as the new housing is built then progressively year by year the number of electorate in the ward will increase, the variance will become higher and the ward's electoral equality will worsen. This means that Wakefield Council's proposal to the transfer of polling district 12NH from Pontefract North to Pontefract South is of questionable validity and should not be made.

Looking at the large differences in the variances between the two Pontefract wards and the Knottingley ward then a more equitable distribution of electorate ought to be possible than those set out in the draft recommendation. I feel that between these three wards the aims that the Commission's review sets out to achieve are not being satisfied. It is difficult to see how an 18% numeric difference in variances for 2029 between the Knottingley ward and the Pontefract South wards indicates electoral equality.

I am surprised that Wakefield Council, in its response, did not put forward proposals that would better achieve the overall goals of the review for the electorate equality between the three wards. Therefore, it was understandable for Cllr T Hames, in the original consultation round, to suggest the transfer of electorate from Pontefract North to Knottingley plus some movement polling districts between the two Pontefract wards. The overall result from Cllr Tames proposals would have been a re-balancing between the two Pontefract wards and the

Knottingley ward to better reflect good electoral equality, with each councillor representing, more closely the same number of electors and as stated in the Commission's aims. Though his proposal would have resulted in a major change in the variance of Knottingley ward from -10% to +8%

As I see it the weakness of Cllr T Hames suggestion was his proposal for the transfer of Castle No 2, Polling District 12NB, to the Knottingley ward. There is no common community connection between Castle No 2 Polling Districts and Knottingley whereas the suggestion I submitted: to move the area to the West of the M62 and upto Holmfield Lane, Darkfield Lane and Stumpcross Lane and Sowgate Lane had the merits of both community links and a long historic link.

I have not been able to find access to the polling district data, but as a resident of the area would estimate that about 700 houses would be moved between the wards. Assuming 2 electors per house that would increase the electorate in the Knottingley ward to 13,800 in 2029 and mean the negative variance would be reduced to 0%.

I ask that you reconsider the proposal I made in the earlier consultation round to move the area to the West of the M62 and upto Holmfield Lane, Darkfield Lane and Stumpcross Lane and Sowgate Lane into the Knottingley ward. This would restore the boundaries of the former Knottingley Urban District Council.

I can understand your view that ward boundaries ought to be clearly identifiable, and the benefits of using natural features such as rivers, or man made features such as major roads and railway lines. However, it will not always be possible and in the case of continuous built up areas then less readily identifiable features will have to be used, eg a stream, a minor road where one side is in one ward and the otherside in another ward. There must be the important rider that some degree of flexibility is necessary in the decision process

I can see that using a desk based virtual tour, it would seem that the M62 motorway could lend itself as a clear and identifiable boundary between communities. The problem with any desk based virtual tour is that it only gives a partial picture. It is impossible to determine whether or not a community is split by such a clear and identifiable feature and so the virtual tour being an incomplete picture could result in a ward boundary that will result in damage to a local community's identity, its strengths and its interests.

Wakefield District is not a dense urban area with a continuous built up area. Generally there are green spaces that separate the towns and villages in the District. Though recent new developments means there has been some incursion into the green spaces and so a blurring of the built up area between settlements.

The M62 was built through an available corridor of green space between settlements, for instance between Pontefract and Castleford. The exception was Ferrybridge where the M62 has split the village into two parts, but within the community the two parts have continued to be regarded as one village.

There is value in the use of historic boundaries, which in themselves bring a long established feeling of belonging to a community. Even in its comments Wakefield Council recognises that communities are reflected by their historic boundaries.

Ferrybridge's boundaries are long established. As you carried out your virtual tour you would have noted the name change on road between Pontefract and Ferrybridge at the Stump Cross, a scheduled monument, listed by Historic England. To the west the road is called Ferrybridge Road and to the east the name is Pontefract Road.

The Stump Cross dates to the 11th or 12th Century and marked the boundary between All Saints Church, Pontefract and St Andrew's Church Ferry Fryston (the old name for Ferrybridge at that time and not to be confused with the present day Ferry Fryston in Castleford). To the north of then Stump Cross the boundary followed Dakfield Lane and then Holmfield Lane then through Fryston Hall to the River Aire. Southwards the boundary follows Stump Cross Lane to the Wash Dike from where it follows the Wash Dike eastwards. These are still the parochial boundaries.

Upto the 1930's the area around Stump Cross would have been open fields with a couple of farms on the Ferrybridge side. By 1939 housing had been built in Ferrybridge along the south side of Pontefract Road between the Liquorice Factory (now the Limetrees estate), and the area on the north side upto Darkfield Lane, known locally as Myson Chair, by the builder Askam.

The blurring of the boundary around Stump Cross did not occur until the late 1950's when Pontefract Borough Council built the Orchard Head Estate as Coal Board housing as miners were transferring from mines closing in the North East and Scotland. The eastern extent being Darkfield Lane and the southern extent being Ferrybridge Road. It would be about 20 years later before the Manor Park Estate was built to the south of Ferrybridge Road and the west of Stump Cross Lane.

This is not the first time that the suggestion that "Myson Chair" be transferred back into the Knottingley ward has been made. I note that in the Boundary Committee for England's Final Recommendations report, February 2003, that Bill O'Brien, who at the time was MP for Normanton, proposed that electoral equality would be improved in Knottingley ward by including the Myson Chair area. Mr O'Brien had the benefit of good knowledge of local feelings and associations as a resident of Ferrybridge and having been a Councillor on Knottingley Urban District Council.

To be fair I will point out a quirk in that the postal address for the Myson Chair area include Pontefract. My parents moved to Askam Avenue whilst I was a child in the mid-1960's and I thought the address was unusual as it included Pontefract Road. Pontefract. Then at a children's stamp club meeting a speaker from Royal Mail explained that the postal address needed to indicate the delivery office for the mail and for where I lived then the delivery office was Pontefract whilst the rest of Ferrybridge had Knottingley in the postal address because it was the delivery office. Since that time I have always been wary of using a postal address as a true indication of a place's name.

I recall the first time I voted, shortly after the formation of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, at Orchard Head School and being directed to the room for Knottingley ward voters. The polling station was being used for two wards. That splitting remains to this day even though Myson Chair is now in the Pontefract North ward. To me that suggests there would not be administrative problems on polling days should Myson Chair be transferred to the Knottingley ward.

In putting forward a suggestion you ask whether there being good links and about public transport. It is the case that the links are equally good to Pontefract and Knottingley and it is the same bus service that serves both places.

Having spoken to others I would re-state the point I made in my original submission about connections with Ferrybridge. People are registered with the Ferrybridge Medical Practice and others are registered with the doctors in Knottingley. There are pupils who attend Willow Green Academy in Ferrybridge, and older pupils who attend the De Lacy Academy in Knottingley. As a member of the Parochial Church Council for St Andrew's in Ferrybridge I know the Church is being used by people who have moved into the area and live around Myson Chair. Some have made a comment about it being part of living in a village and not a town.

It is worth bearing in mind that Ferrybridge was a local authority in its own right until 1937 when it was incorporated into Knottingley Urban District Council. I got the impression, having relatives and friends of the family who were involved in local politics, that somehow Councillors for Ferrybridge had been able to maintain a feeling of being "independent" and of maintaining the village community. Something that continued to the formation of the Wakefield Metropolitan District Council. Certainly I felt that Ferrybridge was a different community to Knottingley. Though described as unparished it seems to me that there was an informal Parish Council and I feel it is something not understood by the current Council

I think there is a strong case to support the inclusion of the area I have described as to the West of the M62 and upto Holmfield Lane, Darkfield Lane and Stumpcross Lane and back along Sowgate Lane to the M62. This area has a historic connection that dates back to the 11th/12th Century and community connections are still exist with both Ferrybridge and Knottingley. Between Pontefract North, Pontefract South and Knottingley it will create wards with electorates that are more equal in number

NB I have suggested Sowgate Lane as the boundary rather than the historic Wash Dike as it is more identifiable, but could see a case for using the railway line that runs between Pontefract Monkhill and Knottingley as the housing development South of the railway line is very recent.

Yours faithfully

