Hello,

Following extensive consultation with local residents and Parish Councils across the current Low Furness ward, it is clear that local people believe Low Furness should be kept (in some form) as a single-member, rural-facing Council ward, covering the villages and communities that sit in-between Barrow, Dalton, Ulverston, and the Coast.

Single-member wards give a direct line of responsibility and accountability for residents and parish councils to engage with their local member, to ask questions of them, and to receive updates from Council. That accountability is too often lost or diluted in larger multi-member wards.

The current Low Furness ward covers the Aldingham Parish, and the Urswick, Bardsea, and Stainton Parish, as well as the Swarthmoor ward of Pennington Parish. Using the 2031 electorate projections, this existing ward will have too many electors for a single-member, due to expected growth in the next decade, with the planned developments around Ulverston and Swarthmoor. As such, the current ward boundaries will need to change.

The villages, hamlets, and farms of Low Furness have always been treated in separate warding arrangements from the nearby towns of Barrow, Dalton, and Ulverston for good reason. Our villages and communities have deep links between and within them. Larger villages such as Great Urswick and Bardsea act as service hubs for our other smaller villages and hamlets, with their pubs and restaurants, and with the local primary school situated in Urswick. It is quite clear from talking to local residents, that they see themselves as part of a rural community surrounded by farms, open countryside, country lanes, and the coast, sharing similar issues and challenges, and separate from the nearby towns. A larger proportion of the population across Low Furness is older, many families work in local agriculture and fishing, and local children attend the local Low Furness primary school in Urswick. These factors all contribute to a clear sense of a rural community, with intense community, family and historical ties, which define Low Furness as distinctly separate from its neighbouring towns.

Aldingham & Urswick parishes should be kept in the same Westmorland & Furness Council ward, separate from the nearby towns, and grouped with the neighbouring rural parishes of Lindal & Marton and/or Pennington Parish (excluding Swarthmoor) in order to maintain a rural-facing ward, knitting together local villages and communities with shared issues and characteristics. I have canvassed opinion on this suggestion with local Parish Councils and residents who are also supportive of keeping rural parishes together, distinct from nearby towns. There is a real fear that our villages and hamlets would very much be drowned out in a massive 3-member town-focussed ward.

Proposals:

The nearby towns of Barrow, Dalton, and Ulverston should be kept separate from the villages, hamlets, and farms of Low Furness.

Barrow: the current warding arrangements (5x 3-member wards) are all within the permitted electorate variance, meaning no change is required.

Ulverston: the current whole-town ward is too big for 3-members and too small for 4-members. To reach the permitted variance, the Swarthmoor ward of Pennington Parish could be absorbed into the Ulverston warding arrangements. Swarthmoor sits across the A590 trunk road with a regular bus service into Ulverston, has large suburban and urban-style housing, and indisputably sees Ulverston as its major service centre.

Dalton: the current warding arrangements split the southern part of the town into a 2-member “Dalton South” ward with the nearby village of Newton, and a 2-member “Dalton North” ward with the northern part of the town joining the nearby village parishes of Askam & Ireleth Parish and the Lindal & Marton Parish.

The parish of Askam & Ireleth is planned to see significant growth by 2031. As a result, Askam & Ireleth Parish can become a single-member ward, aligned with the parish boundary, and giving good electoral equality and improved representation of the local community. 2024 electorate: 2723 (0% variance), 2031 electorate: 2886 (+1% variance).

Lindal & Marton Parish, currently lumped into a “Dalton North” ward, is a rural-facing Parish that sits between Dalton and Ulverston, covering the villages of Lindal, Marton, and the associated hamlets, farms, and houses that sit between. My proposal would therefore be to include the Parish within a rural-facing, single-member Low Furness ward, sharing similar rural issues and challenges, separate from the nearby towns.

With regards Dalton town, I would propose this can form a standalone 2-member ward for the town itself, excluding the nearby villages and neighbouring parishes. The whole Dalton Town Council area includes the nearby village of Newton, and totals an electorate of 6664 at 2031 projections (+13%). A 2-member ward covering the whole Dalton Town Council area could be too populous. I’d ask the LGBCE to consider two options here, either an exception to the usually permitted variance, allowing a 2-member ward to be formed to cover the whole Town Council area, both Dalton and Newton, or to split Newton village (circa 273 electors) away from Dalton town and into a rural-facing Low Furness ward instead. This would leave a 2-member Dalton ward which covers the town itself, but excludes the surrounding farm, farmland, hamlets and Newton village which sit south of Long Lane, which also acts as Dalton town’s development boundary, and include the village within a single-member rural-facing Low Furness ward instead.

Low Furness: **Aldingham Parish, Urswick Parish, Lindal & Marton Parish, plus Newton village, could constitute a new Low Furness ward.** There would be a 2024 electorate of 2902 (variance: +6.8%) and a projected 2031 electorate of 3012 (variance: +5.9%). This would tie together neighbouring villages with similar issues, and meet the requirement for strong community cohesion and a sensible local geography. The ward would be co-terminus with several roads and lanes linking the villages, hamlets, and farms together. Importantly, it would be workable within the 2031 projected electorates as well as respecting local community ties and recognising our village identities as being distinct from that of nearby towns.

Alternatively, Low Furness: **Aldingham Parish, Urswick Parish, Lindal & Marton Parish, plus Pennington Parish ward, could constitute a new Low Furness ward.** There would be a 2024 electorate of 2957 (variance: +8.8%) and a projected 2031 electorate of 3067 (variance: +7.8%). As above, this would similarly tie together neighbouring villages with similar issues, and meet the requirement for strong community cohesion and a sensible local geography. The ward would be co-terminus with several roads and lanes linking the villages, hamlets, and farms together. Importantly, it would be workable within the 2031 projected electorates as well as respecting local community ties and recognising our village identities as being distinct from that of nearby towns.

I’d ask the LGBCE to reject any proposal that looked to morph Low Furness into any of the nearby towns (Barrow, Dalton, or Ulverston). There is a real fear that our villages and hamlets would very much be drowned out in a large 2 or 3-member town-focussed ward, and would feel detached and overlooked as a result. I have tried to present detailed analysis in the logic I have laid out above, with the aim of assisting the LGBCE through this Ward Boundary Review, and meeting the tight variances laid out in the guidance. I firmly believe that the interests of the residents of Low Furness are best served in a single-member, rural-facing ward, covering the villages and communities that sit in-between Barrow, Dalton, Ulverston, and the Coast.

Thank you.