

Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is reviewing the electoral arrangements for Northumberland County Council and has published its draft proposals to increase the number of elected members by two to 69, increase the number of divisions by two to 68 and change the boundaries for most divisions, with only 13 staying the same.

The following text will be used as part of Seaton Valley Community Council's response to the draft proposals.

CRITERIA

The LGBCE aim to propose a pattern of divisions for Northumberland County Council which delivers:

- **Electoral equality:** each 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.

A good pattern of divisions 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.

SVCC RESPONSE

It is our belief that the proposals for Seaton Valley contradict the LGBCE's own criteria for delivering a good pattern of division. Our concerns are summarised as follows:

Electoral Equality

Whilst the changes do support the criteria for balancing elector numbers and the number of councillors at county level, this comes at the expense of the criteria for community identity and effective and convenient local government.

Community Identity

New Hartley is an easily identifiable community with a natural boundary and common interests including schools, community association and organisations, shops, churches, transport, services, and administration.

The village of New Hartley has good transport links with the surrounding areas within Seaton Valley, particularly Seaton Sluice, with which it shares historical links, school catchment areas and a church of England parish. The new proposals seek to 'draw a line' through the middle of New Hartley, putting the sense of community at risk and dividing these common interests and history as well as some services and infrastructure.

The new divisions also propose to link the existing Newsham division in a new division of New Delaval and New Hartley. There are two large fields between these areas, which have no transport links or public pathways, share no services, or common infrastructure with New Hartley.

Effective and Convenient Local Government

Splitting New Hartley, further dividing Seaton Delaval, and proposing a new division to include Newsham, which is currently part of Blyth, does not simplify administration or support effective and convenient local government.

Seaton Valley Council's nine councillors currently provide balanced representation of three councillors per ward. The new divisions will result in less balanced representation across the Seaton Valley area, more complexity at county/MP level, and potentially more confusion for electors in determining who is responsible for what, particularly because Blyth and Seaton Valley Councils have different systems and processes in place.

Conclusion

Whilst the existing boundaries and three wards within Seaton Valley may not achieve the ideal balance of electorate numbers, the existing arrangements protect the community identity and provide effective and convenient local government for our residents.