

# THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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## Comments on the 2023 boundary review

### About the City of Durham Trust

1. The City of Durham Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, founded in 1942, whose objects include
  - preserving for the benefit of the public the amenities of the City of Durham and Framwelgate and its surroundings
  - preserving and maintaining public rights of way in the neighbourhood of Durham
  - encouraging public co-operation in the protection of objects of natural beauty and interest, and buildings of architectural or historical value
  - assisting the development of urban or rural community life
  - organising exhibitions, publishing pamphlets and other like literary works
  - initiating or taking part in meetings and lectures or social events having these objects in view.
2. The Trust has around 400 members, over 80% of whom live in the City of Durham or its vicinity. Most of the remainder retain an affinity with Durham despite having moved away. Beyond the formal membership there is widespread public support for the Trust based on the shared community in which we live.
3. By resolution of its 1974 AGM the Trust's area of concern is that of the former City of Durham District Council, which covered the same area as that of the present City of Durham parliamentary constituency.
4. The Trust participates in consultations where it feels it has a contribution to make in pursuance of its objectives and where it has a relevant local perspective. There is a list of recent responses on the Trust website at <https://durhamcity.org/our-work/consultations/>. In doing so we aim to enlist the support of the MP for the City. It is helpful that there is a recognisable community to which the Trust and the MP can relate. We believe that this is something any boundary revision should aim to preserve.
5. Like the Boundary Commission for England, the Trust is a politically independent and impartial body. Our concern in making these comments is to preserve any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies, and to avoid the inconveniences attendant on such changes. We have a local perspective and we are here drawing attention to factors that might have escaped the Commission operating, as it does, at a national level.

### About the City of Durham

6. Durham is a city with at its centre the Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site. It is a transport hub, with bus routes radiating in all directions and cross-town journeys often requiring a

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change. The bus station is so important that it is currently being rebuilt to fit it for 21<sup>st</sup> century travel.

7. The built-up area of Durham is surrounded by villages, mostly former mining villages, all of which see the City as a focus.

## **The Initial proposals**

8. What is striking about the proposed new City of Durham constituency is that the City itself is at the far west of the constituency. Durham Cathedral is less than a mile from the western boundary. The settlements of Langley Moor, Meadowfield, Brandon, Ushaw Moor, Bearpark and Witton Gilbert, all with close connections to the City, are in two constituencies – Bishop Auckland and North West Durham – whose main towns of Bishop Auckland and Consett are where the existing MPs have their constituency offices. Durham Services, on the A1(M), is actually in the Newton Aycliffe and Sedgefield constituency.
9. On the other hand the proposed new constituency has taken in Houghton-le-Spring, Hetton-le-Hole and Easington Lane. All of these towns and villages are in a different city – Sunderland – and have very little connection with Durham City. A lot of an MP's casework involves dealing with local authorities, and by including the three Sunderland wards of Copt Hill, Houghton and Hetton the MP's workload has been increased. In the supporting documentation for the Review, the Boundary Commission identifies that these wards are linked to the City of Durham via the A690. While this is true, this is in effect where the links with these wards end. There is no shared history with the City of Durham in recent memory. The Commission's argument about including wards that are linked to the City of Durham by A class road links equally applies to the wards it has excluded: Coxhoe (the A177); Brandon (the A690); and Witton Gilbert (the A691).
10. In terms of public services, leisure, transport and health, residents of these Sunderland wards are more likely to look to Sunderland for these services. Equally, including these three wards in the City of Durham creates potential electoral issues, as the constituency will cross local authority boundaries, which raises serious questions around the returning officer and electoral authority that will have responsibility for the constituency.
11. There are only a small number of students from these three wards who attend Durham Sixth Form Centre and New College Durham. Far more go to other, nearer educational establishments both within these wards and into Sunderland.
12. In terms of public transport links, while there is a network of public transport that does link to the City of Durham, the links that lead into Sunderland are far more frequent and well established.
13. Equally, in terms of health, Sunderland Royal Hospital would remain the more well-connected Accident and Emergency hospital for these wards, with the A690 leading directly into Sunderland, with no need to pass through another urban centre to access this.

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14. The links that these wards have with the surrounding towns, villages and urban centres to the south of Sunderland are significantly stronger than those with the City of Durham, and it seems clear that in terms of shared governance it would be much more sensible for these to be included in other constituencies that share history, have more interlinked and similar communities, and more well established transport links. Simply put, the proposed removal of the existing wards from the City of Durham, and the inclusion of Copt Hill, Hetton and Houghton do not respect the ‘flow of life’, and do not create a constituency that is balanced and reflective of the communities within it. Equally, while Durham is a small city, the wards that surround it (see paragraph 16 below) are very much part of the city. These proposals do not simply shift the boundaries within a recognised and interconnected urban area, but instead create a new constituency out of two different areas that would not make sense for the residents of either.
15. We believe that the initial proposals are inconsistent with Rule 5 in Schedule 5, which provides for a number of other factors that the Boundary Commission may take into account in establishing a new map of constituencies for the 2023 Review, in particular:
- Special geographical considerations, including the particular size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
  - Local government boundaries as they existed on 1 December 2020;
  - Boundaries of existing constituencies;
  - Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies; and
  - The inconvenience attendant on such changes.

## **Our alternative**

16. The new constituency needs to be built from the centre out. At its core should be the wards of Elvet and Gilesgate, Neville’s Cross, Durham South, Framwellgate and Newton Hall, Belmont, Brandon, Deerness and the Witton Gilbert part of Esh and Witton Gilbert. The electorate here would be 54,981. To these core wards we would add Sherburn (6,722 electors) and Coxhoe (9,779 electors), bringing the total electorate to 71,482.
17. The first five of these are rightly proposed to remain in the City of Durham Constituency. In particular Durham University’s buildings are spread over the first three wards, so in the course of a day a student could attend a lecture in the Teaching and Learning Centre (Neville’s Cross), then walk the 200 metres to the Bill Bryson Library (Durham South) and later on visit Durham Students’ Union (Elvet and Gilesgate), 700 metres from the Library. The University’s colleges are spread fairly evenly between the three wards and students live in all three. Durham University is a major institution and community, and as such it must not be split between constituencies.
18. **Brandon** is proposed for inclusion in the Bishop Auckland constituency, with which it has no links whatsoever. It is what the Commission has termed a “detached part” because to travel

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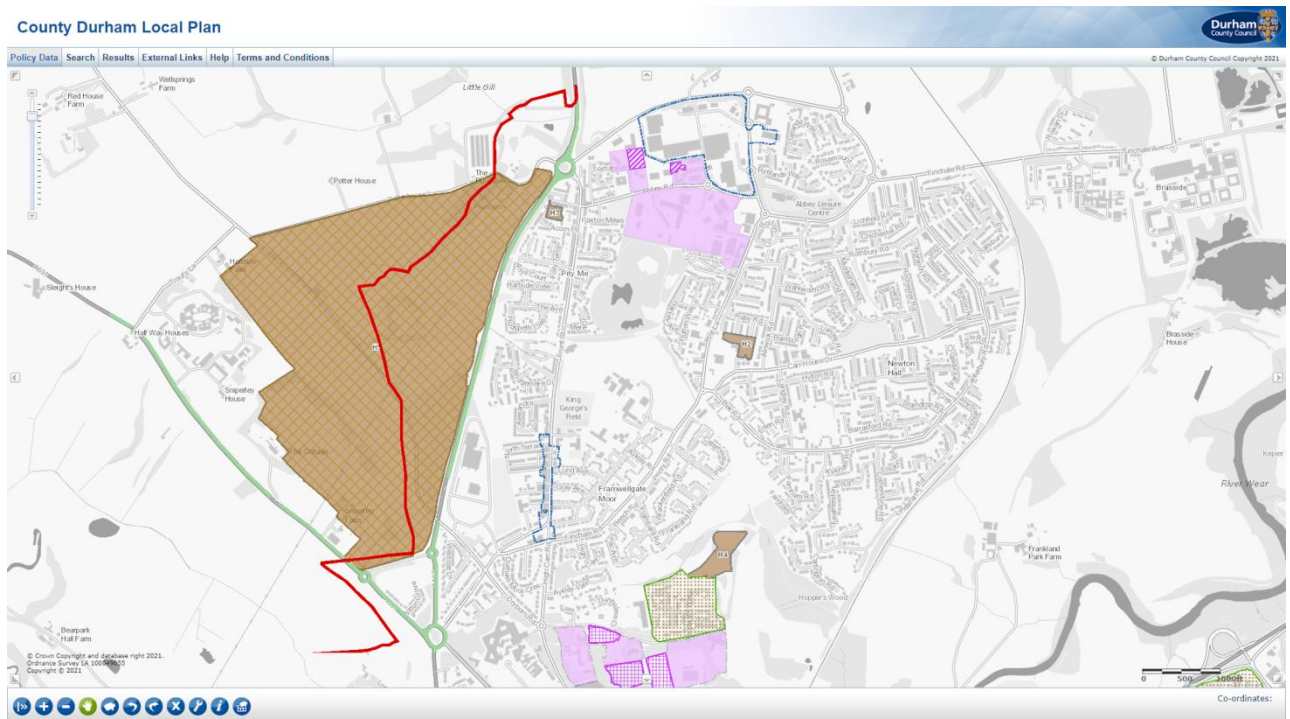
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by public transport to the main towns of Bishop Auckland and Barnard Castle would involve a change of bus in either Durham City or Crook (North West Durham).

19. While it may appear that the Brandon ward is separated from the City of Durham by the main arterial route to the west of the city centre, the A167, this ward is in effect part of the city, separated only by a small stretch of green space and a main road. There is also a history of shared governance between Brandon and Durham City, dating back to the formation of the City of Durham Council, formed in 1974, which is undoubtedly part of the shared identity as residents of the City of Durham. The constituent towns in this ward (Langley Moor, Meadowfield and Brandon) have historic links to the city centre that include public transport; education; employment opportunities; leisure activities; shopping; health services and shared governance.
20. In terms of education these proposals would create a situation where secondary school pupils have to leave their constituency to go to school and in relation to those who may travel to school in the Deerness ward, actually cross two constituencies to get to school. Those students who attend New College Durham, the nearest Further Education College; the Durham Sixth Form Centre or indeed Durham University would also need to leave their constituency to do so. Changing the boundaries in the proposed way would have no effect in terms of building stronger educational ties to the new constituency.
21. Equally, the city centre would remain the focal point for leisure activities, with Langley Moor effectively a five-minute bus journey from the city centre. Indeed, Langley Moor, Meadowfield and Brandon are completely interconnected, effectively forming one large conurbation, and are located on what is one of the major and most well-used bus routes in the constituency.
22. University Hospital of North Durham (UHND) would remain the main centre for health services (and the only nearby Accident and Emergency department), rather than the smaller Bishop Auckland hospital. Other health services that constituents may have cause to access, such as CAMHS and St Cuthbert's Hospice for those who need palliative care, would be located in a different constituency under these new proposals.
23. **Deerness** ward reaches right to the edge of the City, in fact its easternmost point is on the A167 directly opposite the Johnston School. Although it does stretch quite a way to the west, beyond Esh Winning there are very few houses, and the settlements of New Brancepeth, Ushaw Moor, Bearpark and Broompark all have direct local bus services into the City. Like Brandon, there is a history of shared governance. In fact, the links to the very heart of the city date back as far as the mid-13th century, when Beaufort Priory was used as a retreat for the priors and monks of Durham Cathedral.
24. Although this ward contains a secondary school, many pupils from across the ward use other schools across the existing constituency, including St Leonard's Catholic School, Durham Sixth Form Centre or New College Durham. And the situation with health services mirrors that in Brandon.

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25. This ward is also a “detached part”. To travel by bus to the main town, Consett, from any of the settlements in Deerness ward involves a change in Durham and a journey of around 90 minutes each way.
26. The village and civil parish of **Witton Gilbert** forms part of the Esh and Witton Gilbert ward, and the parish extends so close to the City that it includes most of the Sniperley Park & Ride site. However, at its eastern end, it is very much part of the North West Durham constituency.
27. There is a particular complication in that a new housing has been proposed for an area north-west of Durham City on what was Green Belt land. The proposed boundary between North West Durham and the City of Durham cuts right through this area. The consequence of this is that this new community will be split between two constituencies, and there could very well be some houses where the boundary runs through the middle of the house. Including Witton Gilbert in the City of Durham Constituency would resolve this. This map, from the recently



approved County Durham Plan, with the boundary superimposed, illustrates this problem:

28. We note that that the Boundary Commission has indicated that it does recognise that there may be circumstances where splitting wards will make it easier to achieve a scheme of constituencies that better meets the ‘Rule 5’ statutory criteria, and we argue that this very much the case for the village of Witton Gilbert. Specifically we propose that polling district DMB and its 2,056 electors should be part of the City of Durham constituency, with the remainder of this ward and its 4,328 electors remaining as in the initial proposals.
29. At the last Boundary Commission review of constituency boundaries it was proposed that Witton Gilbert was removed from the City of Durham constituency and this was very much

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resisted by local residents. It is beyond doubt that they consider the village to be part of the wider setting of the city.

30. As with the other areas mentioned, wider transport links will all be accessed by the short trip into the city, and again, while public transport links do exist within the ward as it reaches into the North West Durham constituency, the proximity to the city centre means that this is very much focussed in this direction.
31. In terms of education, the majority of children from Witton Gilbert will access secondary or further education within the newly proposed City of Durham constituency, again necessitating the movement of children across constituency boundaries. For health services, the University Hospital of North Durham is a seven-minute direct bus ride away and therefore will remain the focus of services, despite this being in a different constituency under these proposals.
32. As part of this submission, we have, where possible, used what the Boundary Commission refer to as the 'building blocks' of this review – the ward boundaries. However in this instance, the Esh and Witton Gilbert ward seems to be one of convenience. There is little to tie the village to the wider ward. Indeed, beyond Langley Park, the ward has little in the way of urban areas or villages, with the most westerly villages almost impossible to reach while remaining in the ward. There are clear historic and practical reasons why the village of Witton Gilbert should remain in the City of Durham constituency.
33. The Boundary Commission recommends that **Sherburn** ward should continue to be in the City of Durham constituency and we concur. Children from this ward attend schools in the City for their secondary education and again the local hospital is the University Hospital of North Durham.
34. We cannot agree that **Coxhoe** should be removed from the City of Durham constituency. While geographically more distant than the previous wards, Coxhoe also looks inwards to the City of Durham, and also includes the large village of Bowburn, which is inextricably linked to the city. Residents of both Bowburn and Coxhoe will continue to gravitate towards Durham City for leisure activities, employment opportunities, health services and education services.
35. In terms of education, children from the ward will access a number of secondary educational establishments, however children from Bowburn will largely utilise Belmont secondary school, which would remain in the City of Durham constituency. While children from Coxhoe may in small numbers move to secondary schools in the newly proposed constituency, there will still be a strong tie between the ward and the City of Durham.
36. In terms of wider transport links, the ward straddles the A1(M); however for rail links, residents will still need to access the City of Durham. Public transport services, as with the other ward are all based on journeys into and out of the city.



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37. Equally, health services; leisure; employment and shopping all remain focussed on the city, with the major out of town shopping centres clustered around the Durham, and the city centre remaining the largest nearby urban area for leisure activities.
38. We are aware that the above proposals will have a knock-on effect. We have therefore proposed alternative boundaries to some of the affected constituencies in the North East region. As far as possible we have tried to respect existing areas that have a shared history, shared governance, similar access to services and similar communities.
39. Changing the boundaries in such a way will on the whole respect historic links and recognises how people's lives are directed and focussed by the services they access, and the infrastructure they use. As mentioned elsewhere, these changes, especially as they relate to the City of Durham constituency, reflect the 'flow of life' for local residents.
40. As part of this proposal, it has to be recognised that the number of electors that are required under Commission's terms of reference means that major changes to constituencies to the south of the region are more difficult to achieve. The following proposals however address all of the constituencies that would be affected in the wider region.

<b>Proposed Constituency</b>	<b>Sum of Electorate</b>	<b>Including Witton Gilbert</b>
Bishop Auckland	74,302	74,302
City of Durham	69,412	71,468
Darlington	70,446	70,446
Newton Aycliffe and Sedgefield	71,957	71,957
North Durham	70,989	70,989
North West Durham	73,045	70,989
Seaham and Peterlee	69,768	69,768

41. In more detail the wards to be included in these constituencies are shown below. The ones that have been moved from the original proposals are shown in italic.
42. Proposed Constituencies with Wards

<b>Proposed Constituency</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Sum of Electorate</b>
<b>Bishop Auckland</b>	Barnard Castle East	6,979
	Barnard Castle West	6,656
	Bishop Auckland Town	6,057
	Coundon	3,177
	Evenwood	6,458
	<i>Sildon and Dene Valley</i>	9,630
	Spennymoor	8,848
	Tudhoe	7,044
	West Auckland	6,545
	Willington and Hunwick	6,861
<b>City of Durham</b>	Woodhouse Close	6,047
	Belmont	10,129

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	Brandon	7,635
	<i>Coxhoe</i>	9,779
	<i>Deerness</i>	9,479
	Durham South	2,204
	Elvet & Gilesgate	5,740
	Framwellgate Moor & Newton Hall	10,315
	Neville's Cross	7,409
	Sherburn	6,722
	<i>Witton Gilbert</i>	2,056
<b>Darlington</b>	Bank Top & Lascelles	4,590
	Brinkburn & Faverdale	4,875
	Cockerton	4,775
	College	3,425
	Eastbourne	4,697
	Harrowgate Hill	4,843
	Haughton & Springfield	4,842
	Heighington & Coniscliffe	3,531
	Hummersknott	3,145
	Mowden	3,192
	North Road	4,323
	Northgate	2,509
	Park East	4,685
	Park West	3,500
	Pierremont	4,249
	Red Hall & Lingfield	3,163
	Stephenson	2,984
	Whinfield	3,118
<b>Newton Aycliffe and Sedgfield</b>	Aycliffe East	6,420
	Aycliffe North and Middridge	8,406
	Aycliffe West	5,358
	Bishop Middleham and Cornforth	2,884
	<i>Blackhalls</i>	6,245
	Chilton	3,429
	Ferryhill	8,125
	<i>Passfield</i>	3,426
	<i>Peterlee East</i>	5,415
	<i>Peterlee West</i>	6,131
	Sedgfield	6,370
	Trimdon and Thornley	9,748
<b>North Durham</b>	Chester-le-Street East	3,006
	Chester-le-Street North	3,071
	Chester-le-Street South	5,991
	Chester-le-Street West Central	5,811
	Craghead and South Moor	5,737
	<i>Houghton</i>	9,886



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	Lumley	5,727
	North Lodge	3,020
	Pelton	10,227
	Sacriston	5,638
	Stanley	6,361
	Tanfield	6,514
<b>North West Durham</b>	<i>Annfield Plain</i>	5,891
	Benfieldside	6,488
	<i>Burnhopfield and Dipton</i>	6,333
	Consett North	5,874
	Consett South	3,598
	Crook	9,277
	Delves Lane	6,232
	<del>Esh and Wotton Gilbert</del>	4,328
	Lanchester	6,085
	Leadgate and Medomsley	6,830
	Tow Law	3,435
	Weardale	6,618
<b>Seaham</b>	<i>Copt Hill</i>	9,027
	Dawdon	6,098
	Deneside	5,435
	Doxford	7,856
	Easington	5,710
	<i>Hetton</i>	9,171
	Horden	5,393
	Murton	5,817
	Seaham	5,365
	Shotton and South Hetton	6,802
	Wingate	3,094

43. Points to note within these proposals:

44. **Bishop Auckland** constituency will regain the Shildon and Dene Valley division, which given the proximity to Bishop Auckland reinstates the close links between this centre and Bishop Auckland itself.

45. No changes are proposed to the **Darlington** constituency.

46. These proposals will shift the **Newton Aycliffe and Sedgfield** constituency to the east and include the urban centre of Peterlee. This not only makes the constituency viable, but there are reasonable transport links to the east of the constituency, and there are links between the east of the existing constituency and the proposed divisions in terms of community ties. In terms of wider transport links, these new divisions are well served by the A19 as a major route north and south.

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47. While the **North Durham** constituency would not be changed dramatically, it would lose Burnopfield and Dipton back into North West Durham alongside Annfield Plain, but would gain Houghton to the east of the constituency. Houghton division has significantly more ties to this area than to the City of Durham and is a major urban area that is already to the east of the existing North Durham constituency.
48. For reasons as described above, the **North West Durham** constituency would lose Deerness division, would regain Burnopfield and Dipton and also gain Annfield Plain, which already has strong links to Dipton, currently in the existing North West Durham constituency.
49. While the **Seaham and Peterlee** constituency would lose Peterlee (and therefore be renamed Seaham under these proposals) these changes make sense in terms of the constituency links. The divisions it would gain (Copt Hill and Hetton) have significantly stronger links to this constituency than the city of Durham, the urban areas these divisions include act as hubs for the towns and villages within this new constituency, and this constituency is well served by transport links in the wider Sunderland travel to work area.
50. We believe that these proposals go a significant way in protecting current and highly valued community ties, and both reflect and protect the way the way that people live their lives. While we have avoided as far as possible the splitting of wards, in terms of the City of Durham there are clearly compelling reasons to do so. This plan puts forward a robust, credible and sustainable group of constituencies for the North East that meet the criteria set down in the Commission's terms of reference, respect as far as possible local authority boundaries and avoid splitting wards as far as possible. There is every reason to believe that these changes will provide as little disruption as possible to the affected communities, and should be supported.