



ELECTORAL REVIEW OF HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Response to the Local Government Boundary
Commission for England's draft recommendations for
revised Ward Boundaries for Halton

February 2019

Introduction

This document represents the Council's formal response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations for revised Ward Boundaries for Halton, published on 4 December 2018.

The Council is disappointed that the Commission did not accept its proposals submitted at stage 2 of the process. The Council felt its proposals satisfied the three statutory criteria the Commission is required to follow. However the Council is pleased to confirm that it is satisfied with the majority of the Local Government Boundary Commission's draft recommendations for Halton but is putting forward, in this submission, some proposed boundary adjustments.

The Council believes the changes proposed maintain existing communities and settlements as much as possible so that they retain their identities and local cohesion. Council Members have been invaluable in this process, with their local knowledge of the wards and communities they represent. A cross party working group of Members led on this important work, consulting all Members throughout the process.

It is the Council's view, based on the Commissions own draft warding arrangements, that the changes proposed in this document accurately represent Halton's communities and provide a better balance of the electorate across wards, maintaining effective and convenient local government for everyone living in Halton.

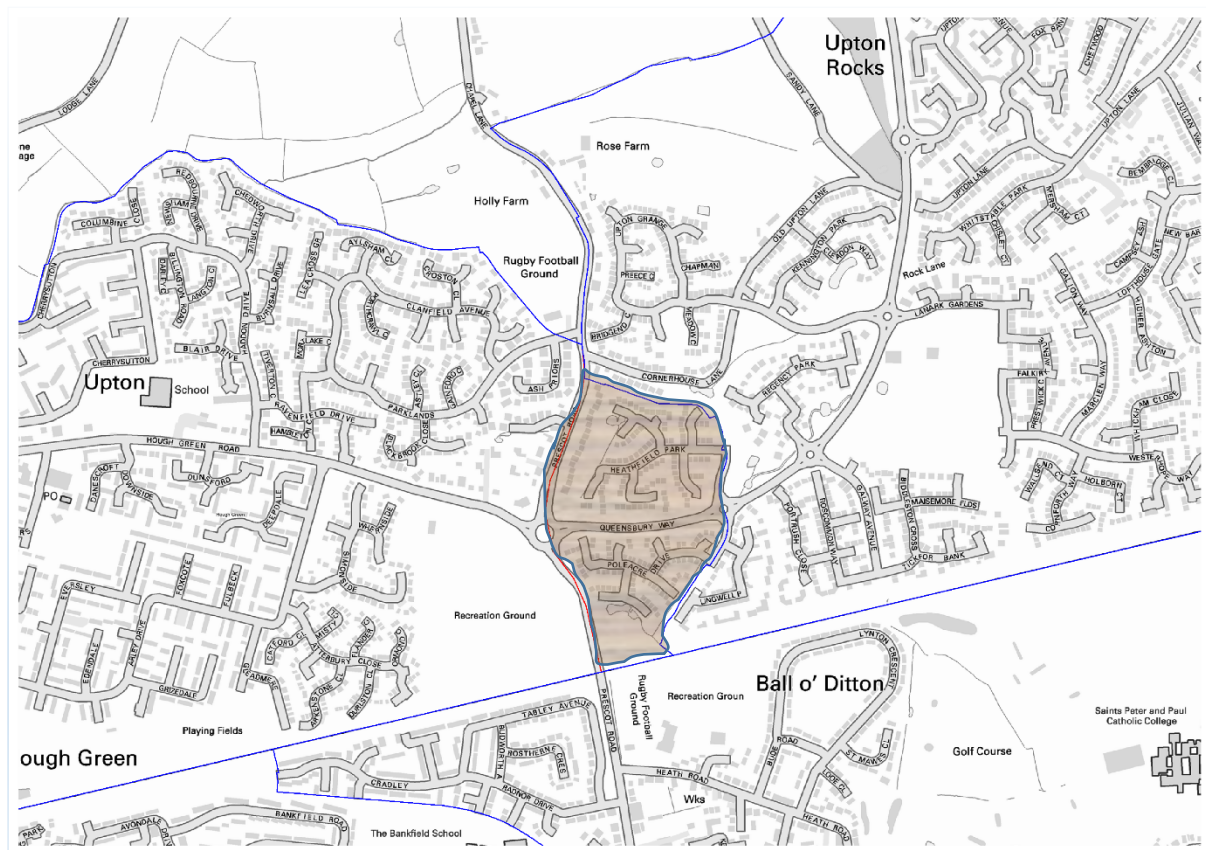
However, the Council would also like to express its concerns around the proposed arrangements for the parish areas in east Runcorn, in particular with Preston Brook and Vale Ward and the potential impact the Commission's draft proposals might have on this area of East Runcorn. The Commission's proposal in this area was something the Council had strived to avoid in its stage 2 proposals. It was the Council's view that warding arrangements should be based around only the parishes and the Council's plans for a single one member ward helped to best achieve this outcome.

Proposed Boundary Adjustments

The Council wishes to suggest that the following specific boundary adjustments be made to four wards in the Commission's draft proposals.

Proposed Hough Green/Birchfield Wards

The Council proposes that the Boundary between the proposed Hough Green and Birchfield Wards moves to Prescott Road (i.e. retains the existing ward boundary)



Evidence

It is felt that this is necessary due to residents in the areas containing Poleacre Drive & Heatfield Park having no community identity with residents in the rest of Hough Green but having a strong identity with those residents living in the proposed Birchfield Ward. This area forms part of the modern housing development known as the Upton Rocks estate rather than being a part of the more established Hough Green area. The Council therefore believes those residents would be better served by elected representatives who will also cover the proposed Birchfield Ward.

Some of the facilities that the area shares with Birchfield Ward include:

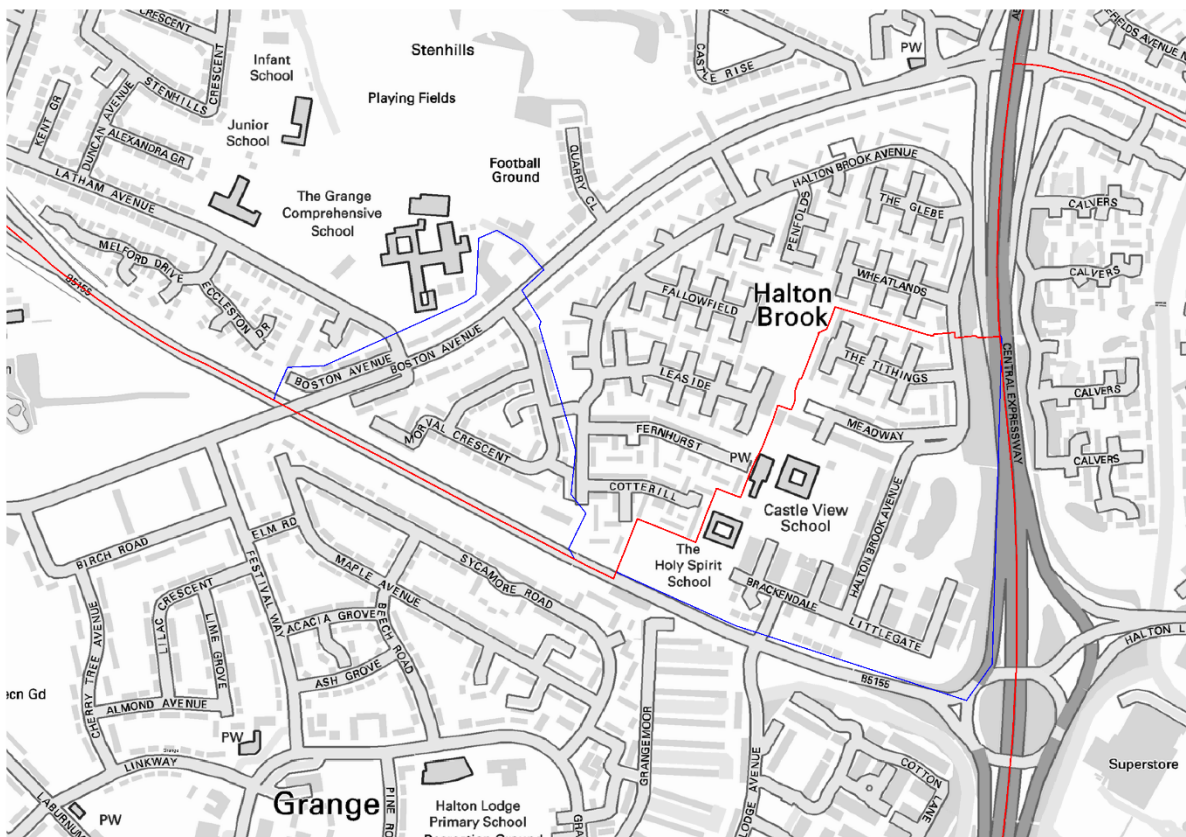
- Local shopping centre and Leisure facilities (Co-operative Shop/Observatory Public House)
- A large public park (Upton Rocks Park)

As a physical boundary it is felt that the proposal is confusing as it has a roundabout acting as a community gateway as well as a traffic gateway. It is felt that a stronger boundary is an extension of

the borough boundary down Prescott Road and Chapel Lane. This change would also include a strong natural barrier of the Prescott Road playing fields.

Proposed Bridgewater/Grange Wards

The Council proposes that the split dividing the Halton Brook estate, as proposed by the Commission, be removed. To ensure electoral equality it is proposed that this is balanced out by moving the area of Boston Avenue/Morval Crescent into the proposed Grange Ward.



Evidence

The draft proposals result in the Halton Brook estate being split between two wards, where previously it was within one. The Council recommends moving Morval Crescent from the proposed Bridgewater Ward to Grange Ward and moving roads in the Halton Brook estate that are proposed to be within the Grange Ward to the Bridgewater Ward.

Morval Crescent was built as part of the post war Grange estate development and was formerly within the Grange Ward until a previous electoral review. The Halton Brook estate was the first New Town estate built in Runcorn, following the designation of Runcorn as a New Town. The estate has only ever been in one ward. These changes will ensure community identity is better represented.

The 'swap' of these two areas would result in a minimal impact on overall elector numbers in both Wards.

Name Changes

The Council proposes that some ward names in the draft proposals be changed to better reflect those local areas affected by boundary changes. As much as possible, the Council favours retaining ward names that are currently in use so as to best reflect local areas and ensure continuity.

Appleton Chadwick Ward

As the Commission has removed the Chadwick area from the Council's Appleton Chadwick proposal it now makes no sense for the name to remain as Appleton Chadwick. **The Council proposes that the name should therefore be Appleton Ward.**

Kingsway Heath Ward

The proposed name should be changed to Highfield Ward. The ward contains only a partial element of the Kingsway road and none of the Kingsway estate. Highfield is more representative of the area as one of the most prominent thoroughfares is Highfield Road (which is also the address of the local clinic, Highfield Hospital).

Riverside and Town Ward

The Council proposes that the name should be changed to Central & West Bank Ward. The ward does not contain the area considered to be the 'town centre' of Widnes. Instead it contains the central industrial and large business areas of the town, as well as the largely residential historic area of West Bank.

Norton Ward

The Council proposes that the ward name should be 'Norton North Ward'. This would mean no name change for most electors in the proposed ward as it is largely the same as the existing Norton North Ward.

Preston Brook and Vale Ward

Brookvale estate and areas of Murdishaw form an altogether different community to the Preston Brook Parish area. These two principal communities share little similarity nor community identity which is a cause for concern for the Council.

If the Commission is minded to implement its draft proposals for this ward, **the Council believes that the name 'Norton South Ward' would better reflect the area.** However, see the Council's comments on this later in this response.

Old Town and Weston Point Ward

The term 'Old Town' receives mixed feelings from residents when it is used, which has resulted in the Council having a policy of not using the phrase "Old Town" in any of its street furniture/highway signage. The phrase is most commonly used to refer to the shopping area in Runcorn town centre and not the wider area. It is noted that the ancient village of Weston is not referenced in the draft proposed name.

Much of the electorate is currently within the Mersey Ward and the river is in close proximity to all areas of the draft proposed ward area. It should be noted that the Weston Point area was formerly in the Mersey ward.

The Council proposes that this ward should be named Mersey Ward.

South Runcorn Ward

The term South Runcorn is not currently used on highway signage, nor buildings or public infrastructure.

Beechwood is an established community with Beechwood School and Beechwood Community Centre being notable public buildings. The Heath School and the Heath Business Park are also within the proposed ward.

The Council proposes that ‘Beechwood and Heath Ward’ would be a more appropriate name.

Areas of concern

The Council wishes to raise a particular concern surrounding the Commission’s proposals for the four parishes to the east of Runcorn, in particular with the draft proposal to create a Preston Brook and Vale Ward. Due to the particular characteristics of the parishes in east Runcorn the Council had specifically tried to avoid the formation of wards that combine rural parishes with non parished urban areas.

The proposed Preston Brook and Vale Ward takes in Preston Brook Parish Council, some of Brookvale and some of Murdishaw. There are no community links between Preston Brook and the other two areas. Preston Brook currently lies in the Daresbury Ward along with the three other parish councils in East Runcorn. In its stage 2 response the Council specifically proposed a Council size of 55 members to accommodate opportunity for Preston Brook being a single member ward.

Preston Brook currently has very close links with Daresbury Parish Council area:

- They are both in the parish served by Daresbury Church. Preston Brook, therefore, forms a part of the faith community in the area.
- Children from Preston Brook pre-school historically become pupils at Daresbury School or Aston school (Aston is not in the Halton area).

The areas of Brookvale and Murdishaw have much in common with each other and other ‘new town’ areas than with Preston Brook:

- the heritage of the areas is quite distinct from the heritage of the Preston Brook area.
- both areas were part of the Runcorn New Town development from the early 1970s and consequently have developed an affiliation to schools, Faith groups and community facilities which are completely different to Preston Brook.

The creation of this new ward would result in dividing Brookvale and Murdishaw which already have a clear and strong identity. The Council believes that its stage 2 proposals would have better reflected local community identities in this area of Runcorn.

The Commission states in paragraph 58 “we consider these areas (Brookvale and Murdishaw Avenue) to be more readily accessible to and from Preston Brook”. The Commission states that this is because of the large roundabout known locally as the Murdishaw roundabout.

The Council wishes to highlight that the potential plans for the area close to this roundabout are uncertain. There is planned industrial/commercial development of the Whitehouse industrial estate which would result in increased HGV and other traffic thus creating a fluid but intimidating barrier between the two parts of the ward. The arrangements for the new proposed junction off the M56 (Junction 11a) would result in a complete revamp and change in status of the Murdishaw roundabout. This change in status could again severely hinder community identity and cohesion. This proposal, along with the existing physical barrier of the M56, would make travel across the proposed ward extremely difficult.

The parish councils in East Runcorn have discrete heritages. By linking the parish councils together in one form or another as proposed in the Council's stage 2 response, we would be protecting the distinct and discrete identities and allowing these identities to flourish. The plans for the transformation of the central areas of Runcorn around the railway station and the shopping/cultural areas would be enhanced by a commitment to the strengthening of the diversity of East Runcorn rather than the diminution of the heritage and identities that the Commission's proposals would bring.