



# WINDERMERE TOWN COUNCIL

*Representing the interests of the communities of Windermere, Bowness and Troutbeck Bridge*

Review Officer (South Lakeland)  
Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Millbank Tower  
London  
SW1P 4QP

28th June 2016

Dear Review Officer:

## **Electoral Review of South Lakeland District Council: Response from Windermere Town Council to the draft recommendations**

I would like to begin our response by pointing out that Windermere Town Council has no political affiliations of any kind and all of our councillors are independent, unpaid volunteers, many of whose families have lived in this community for generations. They have a unique understanding of the local community and are democratically elected by them to serve on the Town Council.

The Town Council has taken a great deal of time to review the Boundary Commission proposals and understand the basic reasoning behind them. It is clear that, with the new electoral arrangements for SLDC, there is a need to move to 3 member wards. As a starting point, the Town Council would have preferred to continue with the 4 member ward in Windermere & Bowness, that currently works very well, but do recognise the reason for 3 members.

It is the proposals for the new ward boundaries which give rise for huge concern. The Town Council is fundamentally opposed to the proposal to shift a substantial part of the north of our town (Applethwaite & Troutbeck) into the Ambleside and Grasmere ward. It is inconceivable that this will bring any of the benefits which the review is supposed to deliver. One of your stated aims is that the pattern of the division should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities. The proposals, in their current format, ride roughshod over the historic basis of our community. The original name for Windermere was Birthwaite, which forms a large part of Applethwaite ward which you propose to detach from its historic roots. The settlement of Windermere, Bowness & Troutbeck Bridge has always had a single identity and community. There are neighbourly links to Ambleside and Grasmere but there is no community link between the two settlements, which have a completely different history and evolution.

Much of the vibrant heritage of Windermere is actually based in the Applethwaite ward. This includes Elleray Woods and Orrest Head (gifted to the Town Council by a local family), Millerground, where many of our older residents learned to swim in the lake. Applethwaite contains our transport hub - the bus and train station. It contains one of our main parish churches - St Mary's. It contains large hotels, our main supermarket and businesses with the Windermere brand and identity. It is also the site of our secondary school, the independent Windermere School and some vital community services - St Mary's surgery, our only Cumbria County Council elderly person's care home, 5 sheltered housing schemes, our town post office and sorting office. Moving these facilities into another community's ward area shatters our physical and

geographical identity and cuts the community in half. In addition, it will cut in half the town's conservation area.

The new boundaries you propose take most of Windermere lake out of Windermere. This is inconceivable to local people and will seem bizarre to visitors and tourists. The lake bed of Windermere was actually bequeathed to the Urban District Council of Windermere (the forerunner of the Town Council) in the early part of the last century. It is only through local government reorganisation and a specific Act of Parliament that the current situation has arisen, whereby it is managed via a partnership of SLDC, Windermere Town Council and Lakes Parish Council. Once again, by passing Windermere lake to Ambleside & Grasmere, your proposals ignore a vital part of our community's identity. The lake must remain within the Windermere & Bowness administrative area.

Another of your stated aims is that the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government. Currently, the District Council ward is geographically recognisable to the electorate, having almost coterminous boundaries with the parish area. Shifting a large part of north Windermere to Ambleside & Grasmere will cause a huge amount of confusion. Imagine living and working on Main Street, Windermere, which is regarded as a central location, and receiving a ballot paper titled Ambleside & Grasmere. The proposals, as they stand, run the risk of diminishing local democracy rather than enhancing it, as few residents living in the town of Windermere are likely to have any interest in voting for Councillors who represent wards which would become parts of Ambleside and Grasmere, villages which lie, respectively, 5 & 9 miles to the north of the town of Windermere.

We call upon the Boundary Commission to set aside these proposals, which make no sense locally. Our proposal is that the Windermere & Bowness wards retain the current boundaries but move to having 3 members elected to SLDC rather than 4. We realise that this creates some difficulty in meeting your third stated aim of ensuring that each district has roughly the same number of electors and that there would be a disparity of approx 1,400 between Windermere and Ambleside & Grasmere. We believe that this disparity is perfectly defensible. Ambleside and Grasmere is a sprawling rural area of small settlements and two small rural hubs. Windermere is the largest urban settlement in the Lake District National Park. Therefore, it seems to us perfectly appropriate that there is some electoral disparity. After all, these are just numbers. The alternative is to split a community in half and create problems of identity and democratic effectiveness for generations to come.

Yours sincerely

**Mrs Julie Wright**  
**Clerk to Windermere Town Council**