

Wed 08/04/2009

I would like to make the following written submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission review of the revised recommendations on the new council boundaries and ward boundaries.

I would like to make the following proposals.

Proposal 1

Benraw Gardens, Benraw Green, Benraw Road, Dunmisk Walk, Fruithill Court and Fruithill Park should come out of Falls Park ward into Andersonstown ward using the natural boundary of Kennedy Way. These streets are a central part of the Andersonstown community.

Proposal 2

To provide the space in Andersonstown ward to make proposal 1 feasible, I would propose that Finaghy Road North, Trench Avenue, Trench Park, Ladybrook Gardens and Ladybrook Park should come out of Andersonstown ward into Ladybrook ward as these streets are part of the Ladybrook community.

Proposal 3

To provide the space in Ladybrook ward for proposal 2, Willowvale Avenue, Suffolk Drive, Suffolk Crescent, Suffolk Avenue and Stewartstown Road should all come out of Ladybrook ward into Stewartstown ward to join the rest of the streets in the Willowvale estate which is part of the Stewartstown community. Suffolk Residents Association works in all these streets.

Proposal 4

To provide the space in Stewartstown to allow proposal 3 to go forward, Cois Cluana Park, Conor Close, Conor Rise, Rosgoill Drive, Rosgoill Gardens, Rosgoill Park, Shaws Avenue, Shaws Court, Shaws Park, Shaws Place and Shaws Road should also come out of Stewartstown ward into Shaws Road ward.

Rosgoill Community Association works on community development in this area and is part of the Upper Andersonstown Community Forum based in the community of the Shaws Road ward.

The residents of these streets are very closely linked to facilities in the Shaws Road ward.

Proposal 5

To achieve proposal 4, the following streets would come out of Shaws Road ward.

Corrib Avenue, Dungloe Crescent, Lenadoon Avenue and Naroon Park would be moved out of the Shaws Road ward into the Collin Glen ward as these streets are a central part of the Lenadoon community and are affiliated to the Upper Lenadoon Residents Association that is part of Lenadoon forum. The natural boundary in this situation is the Shaws Road.

Stewartstown Avenue, Stewartstown Park and Stewartstown Road would come out of Shaws Road ward into Stewartstown ward as these streets have no natural affiliation with the area in the Shaws Road ward. These streets are part of the Stewartstown area.

The streets coming out of Stewartstown in proposal 4 will provide the space for the inclusion of Stewartstown Avenue, Park and Road in the Stewartstown ward as requested above.

Proposals 1 through to 5 are all inter-connected and will allow the ward size limits to remain within their recommended maximum while also keeping communities together within West Belfast in the new ward boundaries.

I hope the Commission will give serious consideration to these proposals.

Proposal 6

Bingnian Way and Bingnian Drive should come out of Shaws Road ward into Andersonstown ward, as these streets are an integral part of the Andersonstown area. They are also part of the Bingnian/Bearnagh residents association in the Andersonstown area.

Glenshane Gardens, Slieveban Drive and Slievegallion Drive and Navan Green should come out of Shaws Road ward into Andersonstown ward. These streets are part of the Andersonstown area and are also part of the Slieve Residents Association that is affiliated to the Link community forum, an umbrella group for community associations in Andersonstown.

Proposal 7

The section of Mizen Garden that is in Collin Glen ward should move into Stewartstown ward to keep this street together. This will only affect around 10 houses and would have no impact on ward sizes.

Proposal 8

Cloona Park, Cloona Avenue and Cloona Crescents should all come out of Ladybrook ward into Twinbrook ward. These streets are part of the upper Dunmurry Lane area, which identifies itself with the streets contained in the Twinbrook ward. The Colinglen River is a natural boundary in this situation.

If these 3 streets were moved into Twinbrook ward, they would not cause Twinbrook ward to go above the recommended maximum ward size limit.

Proposal 9

The space left by the removal of the streets in proposal 8 from the Ladybrook ward would allow Ladybrook Park to come out of Stewartstown ward into Ladybrook ward because this street is the main thoroughfare in the Ladybrook area and is the centre of that community.

Proposal 10

Glengoland Avenue, Gardens and Park should be moved into Stewartstown ward. This would keep the Glengoland estate together as a community.

If the whole of Glengoland was moved into Stewartstown ward, as proposed, there would be space created to move Colinvale and Merrion Park from Stewartstown ward into the Poleglass ward. These estates are in Poleglass and are a central part of the Poleglass community.

These two moves would be a straight swap and would not affect any other proposals made in this submission. The moves would balance the Poleglass and Stewartstown wards, keeping both within the recommended maximum ward size limits.

Proposal 11

I would ask that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner consider the use of Irish language ward names alongside the English version in the West Belfast wards named below;

I would recommend that the following ward names be adopted; - Falls should become Ceantar na bhFál · Clonard should become Cluain Ard · Beechmount should become Ard na bhFeá · Ballymurphy should become Baile Uí Mhurchú · Turf Lodge should become Lóiste na Móna · FallsPark should become Páirc na bhFál · Andersonstown should become Baile Andarsan · Shaws Road should become Bóthar Seoighe · Collin Glen should become Gleann Chollan · Stewartstown should become Baile Stíobhaird · Ladybrook should become Sruthán na Bantiarna · Poleglass should become An Poll Glas · Twinbrook should become Cill Uaighe · Lagmore should become An Lag Mór · Dunmurry should become Dún Muirígh

In making this representation I would argue that;

- * Such a move would be in accordance with both local and E.U. law, as well as international best practice;
- * There is a clear demand for such a move, as demonstrated by the submissions on the provisional recommendations;
- * There is a natural geographic, historical and current social justification for recognition of Irish language ward names in certain areas, and
- * There is a precedent for such a move by the Commissioner.

The refusal of the Commissioner in his report on the revised recommendations to consider the merits of recognising the Irish language version of ward names (in many cases, the original names) is regrettable.

I would query some of the Commissioner's reasoning. For example:

* Why does the Commissioner believe that the Local Government Boundaries Commission is not an "associated body" under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages? Is this the Commissioner's opinion, or was he told this, and if so, by whom?

* Referring to the Good Friday Agreement, the Commissioner reports that his difficulty is in assessing whether there is "appropriate demand" for such a move. How does the Commissioner justify this statement, considering the already well documented concentration of Irish speakers and institutions in many wards, and in light of the fact that over three quarters of respondents in Belfast (82% by one estimation) called for Irish language versions of wards to be recognised?

* How does the Commissioner justify his approach to Irish language place names in contrast to his willingness to recognise the ward names of Blackstaff and Duncairn "for reasons of history and geography/heritage of the area and the associations which local residents have with the name" (Paragraphs 3.1.22 & 3.1.23 from Revised Recommendations), especially considering that in both of these cases the decision was made on the request of only two submissions?

The Commissioner could again, if he wished, take one simple step towards recognising the identity of a large portion of our society, and the cases of Duncairn and Blackstaff demonstrate that it is within his power and remit to do so. Such a small move in recognising Irish ward names would have the knock-on effect of affording to Irish speaking and nationalist communities a greater sense of ownership of the democratic process.

I believe that the ward names should reflect the growing and vibrant Irish language community in west Belfast where there are many Irish language nursery schools (Naiscoileanna), primary schools (Bunscoileanna), and an Irish medium secondary school (Colaiste Feirste).

There are also Irish speaking areas including the Gaeltacht Quarter, (An Ceathru Gaeltachta), and the Shaws Road Gaeltacht. There are many Irish language groups, Irish language classes, Irish language businesses and thousands of Irish language speakers in west Belfast.

There are Irish language cafes and restaurants.

Translink publish their bus timetables in both Irish and English and the West Belfast Black Taxi Association displays its destination signs in both Irish and English.

Many of the streets in west Belfast have bilingual street signage, erected by Belfast City Council, and the bilingualisation of ward names in west Belfast would be widely welcomed within the community.

In the wards I am proposing are named bilingually, the two main political parties, Sinn Féin and the SDLP, have the support of over 95% of voters.

Both parties are firmly in favour of an Irish Language Act (Acht na Gaeilge) which would give the Irish language equal status to the English language in the North of Ireland.

I hope you will look positively on this proposal given the overwhelming support within these wards for this proposal.

Support for Commission Decision on New Council Boundary

In addition, I would like to express my complete support for the decision of the Boundary Commission to keep the Poleglass, Lagmore, Twinbrook and Dunmurry wards in the new Belfast council boundaries. This decision has the support of the overwhelming majority of the community represented in these wards.

Conclusion

I hope you will give full consideration to the proposals I have made.

Is mise le meas,

Bill Groves