[TC – 002]

**Concerns on the revised proposals for boundary between South Down and Lagan Valley in relation to the Gransha ward**

I welcome the opportunity to respond the Commission’s revised proposals published on 17th November 2022 and to highlight my concerns to the Commission’s plans to transfer the northern part of the Gransha ward from its current constituency of Lagan Valley to South Down.

Although no longer a resident of the area (although I still reside in Northern Ireland) I grew up there and have deep family ties going back several generations. My concerns are therefore grounded in my strong local links to the area and the belief that if followed through, this plan would result in a real and damaging breaking of local community ties. In particular I believe it would leave the communities in the northern part of the Gransha Ward isolated and cut off from their two natural centres of community life, the town of Dromore and Village of Dromara. In doing so if confirmed the Commission’s proposals would deny a seamless and coherent community – spanning northern part of the Gransha Ward, Dromore and Dromara – common elected representation in the NI Assembly and Parliament, causing serious inconvenience and disruption.

The remainder of this submission will present the evidence to support my view and set out what I feel is the compelling case for keeping the Gransha ward split along the current Constituency Boundary between Lagan Valley and South Down based on the factors the Commission may take in to account under Rule 5 – namely; boundaries of existing constituencies, local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies, and the inconveniences attendant on such changes.

In doing so this is made with full consideration of, and compatibility with, the Commission’s legal obligations under rule 2 – of each constituency having no less than 69,724 and no more than 77,062 electors – and no consequences to any of the Commission’s other revised boundary proposals.

I also understand that local community groups and residents have gathered a petition of more than 1150 signatures which has been submitted to the Commission via the sitting MP Sir Jeffrey Donaldson. This provides further important evidence of both the existence of local ties presented here and the breadth and depth of opposition to the disruption of these local ties which would be created by the proposed move to South Down.

**Background**

As set in the Commission’s revised report published on 17th November, under current boundaries the Gransha Ward is split between the Lagan Valley and South Down Constituencies following the 2014 reform of Local Government in Northern Ireland. Under these reforms the previous (1993) Gransha Ward – whose southern boundary is the basis for the current Lagan Valley Constituency boundary – was expanded down to Katesbridge leading to the current (2014) Gransha Ward’s split across Lagan Valley and South Down. It is to a large extent the area of the previous (1993) Gransha ward – minus a small area of land adjacent to Finnis now in the Ballyward Ward – which now makes up the northern portion of the current (2014) Gransha Ward and is the area this submission concerns. Approximately this covers the townlands of Kinallen, Ardtanagh, Leapogues, Skeogh, Drumillar, Aughnaskeogh, Carnew, Garvaghy and Gransha as well as the village of Kinallen and settlement of Waringsford (see map in Annex).

In terms of the history of Parliamentary and Assembly representation of the area defined above, it has been represented by the Lagan Valley Constituency and its attendant elected representatives for 25 years since 1997. That being the case it has had the benefit of the being linked together with the main centres of community life for this area, Dromara and Dromore.

Prior to 1997 this area was part of the South Down Constituency, but this was crucially along with the town of Dromore and its surrounds mitigating its separation from the village of Dromara which has been part of the Lagan Valley Constituency since its creation in 1983. Therefore, the commission’s revised proposals to separate this northern portion of the Gransha Ward from both Dromore and Dromara for its Parliamentary representation would be without precedent since the advent of regular boundary commission reviews when also considering the boundaries of the larger pre-1983 South Down Constituency. This offers the first illustration of the real and serious disruption the revised proposals would have on the area, ending generations of shared representation with Dromore and more recently Dromara.

**Local ties with the revised Lagan Valley Constituency**

As set out in the opening paragraphs, the northern part of the Gransha ward has deep community ties with the proposed Lagan Valley Constituency, especially the town of Dromore and village of Dromara. It also has important ties with City of Lisburn, the main population centre of the proposed Constituency, which will also be outlined.

Regarding the ties with Dromore and Dromara, this area of the Gransha Ward forms effectively a single continuous community with both, as evidenced through the key features of community life.

Starting with the provision of local services, in terms of Education and Schools, for Primary Education this part of the Gransha Ward is served by Fair Hill Primary School located in the village of Kinallen – which was a merger of Carnew, Gransha and Kinallen Primary Schools in 1997 with its catchment covering the area question. Fair Hill PS serves as a principal feeder School for Dromore High School – the nearest post-primary School to the area – which lists Fair Hill PS as one of only 3 ‘Category A’ priority status schools in its admission criteria, with the 2 other ‘Category A’ Schools located within Dromore town itself. This designation as a ‘Category A’ school means applications from pupils of Fair Hill are considered first before Pupils from any other schools – bar the 2 Primary Schools located in Dromore town itself – which is highly significant given Dromore High School is consistently oversubscribed. In addition to Dromore High’s proximity and admission criteria further evidence of the school’s importance can be seen by number of pupils attending justifying the provision of chartered Translink busses to transport Pupils from Kinallen and the rest of the northern Gransha ward area to Dromore High School.

Separately to Fair Hill PS, Dromara Primary also serves as an important Primary School in the area being the next nearest controlled primary School. Also in terms Selective Post Primary Schools, the Lisburn Grammar Schools of Friends and Wallace High School also draw a significant number of pupils from the area with this again to the extent of justifying chartered Translink services running through the village of Kinallen to Lisburn to serve these pupils.

In terms of Health care provision also, the nearest GP practice for the area is Dromara GP surgery (whose catchment covers this part of the Gransha ward). Alongside Surgery the nearest Pharmacy is also located in Dromara, serving as an important dispenser of prescriptions from Dromara Surgery with next nearest Pharmacies also located in Dromore. In addition to this Dromore also has a health centre which provides important health services to this part of the Gransha Ward including health visitor clinics for new-born babies and their parents. Further the nearest Hospital is the Lagan Valley hospital in Lisburn is also the site of the nearest emergency care through its (part time) A&E and out of hours doctor surgery.

Next turning to transport links, in addition to the chartered School buses already covered the only scheduled bus service serving this area of the Gransha Ward is the no.26 Ulsterbus Service running from Dromara to Lisburn via Kinallen (the largest village). As such the route represents an important means for residents seeking access to constituency offices of MLAs and their MP in Lisburn and providing a public transport link to Dromara. It should be noted that no such public transport links exist to anywhere in the proposed South Down Constituency.

Also looking at other local amenities, Dromore is the primary centre for the provision these, including hosting the closest leisure centre and library facilities. Additionally, Dromara is also the location of the nearest credit union branch office (of the Dromara and Drumgoland Credit union)

Considering Sports and civic society groups, the nearest football clubs to the area are Dromara Village FC and Dromore Amateurs FC, from which members are drawn. Similarly, the nearest Rugby Club is Dromore RFC. There are also other groups and organisations based in the Lagan Valley Constituency such as the Dromara history society which have members from across the northern part of the Gransha ward.

Finally in terms of Churches, the only Church of Ireland Church in the area, Garvaghy Church forms single united Parish with Dromara (St John’s Church).

**Alternative proposal – Maintain the current Constituency boundary in the Gransha Ward**

Given the very real and deeply damaging breaking of community ties which would result from the revised proposals, leading to severer disruption to communities outlined. It is my belief that the Gransha Ward should remain split along the existing Lagan Valley Constituency boundary.

The effects of this proposal would be to keep the northern portion of the Gransha ward in the proposed Lagan Valley Constituency and the remainder (including Killkinamurray and Katesbridge among other localities) in South Down (see map in Annex).

In terms of the effects of this change, this would wholly address the issues and concerns that have been outlined in relation to the breaking of community ties and disruption resulting from the changes to the existing boundaries, as set out as considerations under rule 5. They would also importantly be completely consistent and compatible with the Commission’s legal requirements under rule 2.

By way of short explanation of how this is the case, as set out in legislation each constituency is required to have no less than 69,724 and no more than 77,062 electors. Currently under the revised proposals Lagan Valley has 73,704 and South Down 74,370 respectively. The entirety of the Gransha ward has an electorate of 3,476. This means even if the entirety of the Gransha Ward was transferred – to clarify not proposed here – South Down would still be within the legal range (70,894) and Lagan Valley breeching it by only 118 electors (77180).

Therefore, maintaining the current split of the Gransha along the existing constituency – which would transfer a number of electors well below the number for the Ward as a whole – would keep both South Down Lagan Valley well within the legal range. By extension this would have no wider impact on the Commission’s revised proposals. Maintaining the split of the Gransha ward along the existing boundary would also be consistent with the Commission’s approach and proposals in other cases were wards straddle existing boundaries including e.g Donaghcloney and Banbridge East Wards.

This alternative proposal would also have little if any impact of the southern Part of the Gransha ward currently in South Down as this would maintain the well-defined and established constituency boundary as well as keep that area within its current constituency. It would also maintain that area’s community ties with its nearby localities (e.g. Moneyslane and Rathfriland).

**Conclusion**

As set out throughout this submission the current proposals have the potential for serious disruption to the communities in the northern part of the Gransha Ward currently in Lagan Valley. The breadth and depth of this view has also been demonstrated by the large numbers of signatures passed on to Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP. Given this and the fact that there is a clear and simple solution to prevent this real and damaging severing of community ties, which is also completely compatible with the Commission’s obligations under Rule 2, it is my firm conviction that the commission should reconsider its revised proposals in this instance and revert to the current boundary which keeps the Gransha Ward split between Lagan Valley and South Down. This is particularly compelling as this would be consistent with the Commission’s decisions have applied in other areas to maintain the current split wards including Donaghcloney and Banbridge East.

I look forward to the Commission’s careful consideration of the arguments and evidence presented here in this submission and the publication of its final recommendations incorporating the proposed change.

**Annex – Map of the northern part of the Gransha Ward**

‘northern’ part of the Gransha ward as defined in this submission which it is proposed should remain in Lagan Valley

Map

Description automatically generated

Ballyward Ward area of land adjacent to Finnis - previously this was part of the 1993 Gransha Ward. This is not included in the area defined in this submission and is not part of the alternative proposal.

Rest of the Gransha ward currently in South Down

The current Lagan Valley Boundary which splits the Gransha Ward which it is proposed should be maintained.