

CONCERNS ON THE REVISED PROPOSALS FOR BOUNDARY BETWEEN SOUTH DOWN AND LAGAN VALLEY IN RELATION TO THE GRANSHA WARD

This submission is being made on behalf of the Officers and Members of Skeogh Loyal Orange Lodge Number 861 (being 17 members), sitting in Skeogh Orange Hall, 114 Diamond Road, Dromore. The hall in which our organisation meets is comprised within the northern portion of the Gransha Ward currently within the Lagan Valley Constituency.

As an organisation, our members welcome the opportunity to respond to the commission's revised proposals published on 17th November 2022 and to highlight our serious concerns on the plans to transfer the northern portion of the Gransha ward from its current constituency of Lagan Valley to South Down.

It is our strong and deeply held belief that if followed through, this plan would result in the real and damaging breaking of local community ties in the area, leaving 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 enacted the Commission's proposals would deny a seamless and coherent community – spanning northern portion 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 this view and set out what we 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 into 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 with no consequences to any of the Commission's other revised proposals.

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 tract of land including 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.

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 the area in question 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, bringing to an end 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 portion of the Gransha ward described 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 area 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 serves as a principal feeder School for Dromore High School – the nearest post-primary School to the area – which lists Fair Hill Primary as one of only 3 'Category A' priority status schools in its admission criteria, with the 2 other 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, 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 area 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.

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)

Finally in regards to 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.

Alternative proposal – Maintain the current boundary in Gransha

Given the very real and deeply damaging breaking of community ties which would result from the commission revised proposals, leading to severer disruption to communities in the area, we believe 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.

In terms of the effects of this change, this would wholly address the issues and concerns that have been outlined in relation to the break of community ties and disruption from 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 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 breaching 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 and therefore within the legal limit permissible for Lagan Valley – would have no wider impact on the Commission's revised proposals. The splitting 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 for 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 affected in the northern part of the Gransha Ward. 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 our firm conviction that the commission should revert to the current boundary and keep the Gransha Ward split between Lagan Valley and South Down in its final recommendations. Particularly as this would be consistent with the Commission's decisions have applied in other areas wards including Donaghcloney and Banbridge East.

We therefore look forward to the Commission's due consideration of the agreement and evidence presented in this submission and the publication of it's Final recommendations incorporating this change.

Yours Sincerely



**SECRETARY
SKEOGH LOL 861
FOR AND ON BEHALF OF 17 MEMBERS OF SKEOGH LOL 861**