

# BLACKBURN AND DISTRICT TRADES UNION COUNCIL

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## Response to consultation on

### Proposals for local government reorganisation in Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool

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Blackburn and District Trades Union Council is a local Trade Union body, registered with the Trades Union Congress, comprising delegates from Trade Unions with members working or living in the Boroughs of Blackburn with Darwen and the Ribble Valley.

Our area of responsibility consequently overlaps, in whole or in part, the Parliamentary constituencies of Blackburn, Rossendale and Darwen, Ribble Valley, and Pendle and Clitheroe.

We approach this consultation without much enthusiasm, because it appears to represent a policy for which there has been very little local demand and which is perceived as a top-down project by a government that should be concentrating on other things.

Yes, there are longstanding concerns that both Lancashire and/or East Lancashire would benefit from having a "stronger voice", and there are doubtless both Councillors and business lobby groups who feel that bigger councils will be both more effective and have more "clout". We lean, however, towards being somewhat sceptical of the proposition that changes to Local Authority structure might significantly impact geographical inequalities. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies has recently commented ([Tackling regional inequalities: lessons from new research | Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) Jan 2026 ) *"Many of these disparities are highly persistent. For example, most places that were struggling with low wages and employment rates 20 years ago are still struggling today, and the same is true for areas that were flourishing"*.

As we observed in our own 2022 article ["Levelling up" - public investment needed to address geographic inequalities - Blackburn and District Trades Union Council](#):

*".....the current shape of the British economy owes much – as do so many things – to the impact of the Conservative governments of the 1980s. As David Smith put it, in his 1989 book "North and South": **"The consensus economics of the 1950s and 1960s, in which both Conservative and Labour governments undertook active Keynesian policies of demand management.....and assigned a key role to regional policy .....was willingly abandoned by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.....The relative decline of the North, held in check by policies deliberately designed to direct economic activity to the regions, could not survive the abandonment of such policies.....or an overall economic policy stance which had as an important side-effect a second body-blow to Britain's traditional staple industries"**.*

*"Cotton had, indeed, already gone into decline. But policies that were aimed at moving downwards the post-War "wage-share" of national income proved also to open up a new era of inequality on a national scale.*

*"A "productivity gap" between Regions, that had narrowed since the early years of the 20th Century, began to widen again in the 1980s, alongside the decline in the "wage share" and the post-War growth in personal inequality as measured by the GINI coefficient".*

A commitment to national renewal with enhanced public investment to drive industrial strategy would be much more useful than any redrawing of Local Authority boundaries.

We understand the temptation to seek economies of scale to mitigate the financial pressures still bequeathed by austerity and by the increasing proportions spent on statutory and demand-led services and other expenses that must be covered, such as adult and children's social care, homelessness and waste disposal (as well as financing costs such as debt servicing).

The recent Audit Office Report [Local government financial sustainability - NAO report](#) noted that these demands are also growing disproportionately: *"Significant demand pressures include the numbers of eligible children, and greater reliance on taxis to meet individuals' needs, which has meant a 106% increase in the costs of home-to-school transport for children and young people*

*with special educational needs and learners with learning difficulties or disabilities from £0.86 billion in 2015-16 to £1.76 billion in 2023-24 in real terms. Similarly, the number of 18- to 64-year-olds requesting adult social care support is increasing compared with those aged 65 and over. In 2023-24 the average cost of long-term support for working-age adults was £1,696 per week compared with £951 for those aged 65 and over. For temporary accommodation, the increased demand and greater reliance on more expensive private accommodation has contributed to spending on temporary accommodation nearly doubling (93% rise) from £1.10 billion in real terms in 2015-16 to £2.13 billion in 2023-24".*

But some of these things are a knock-on of previous bad policies, like eviscerating our Council House stock, and none of them will go away simply because boundaries are changed.

We prefer solutions that acknowledge and address problems directly, rather than promise a generally enhanced efficiency that don't always seem to work. Dr Norman Chorn makes some interesting points as to why economies of scale can fail to deliver, especially in a "service" environment: *"The economy of scale hypothesis is based on a manufacturing context where the key challenge is to produce outputs at the rate of customer demand. In service provision, the challenge is to design a system that absorbs the customers' demand for variety"* ([Economy of Scale is a Myth](#)). *"Yes, there are efficiency gains in the costs of many of the individual activities, but the overall costs of the exercise are usually higher due to what has become known as failure demand. Failure demand is the additional demand that arises from the organisation's inability to meet the customers' needs properly the first time, and the rework required to fix the problem caused"*. You can end up with problems both for "internal customers", and for the public as service users.

Local Government is, besides, something more than just a matter of organisational efficiency. Or rather, we might say that to be at its best it needs to address the question of scale from a democratic as well as from a delivery standpoint. Democratic structures are in part the "senses" a Local Authority needs to work effectively, and scale can be self-defeating in this aspect also. There is a particular concern that bigger Councils will mean bigger wards, and that this will lead to the nerves of the organisations becoming numb - a sort of democratic neuropathy.

We are nervous about the potential impact on town centres should the process of centralisation mean that some of them lose jobs in the process. We are annoyed that this significant exercise appears to be forging ahead without any attempt to establish industrial relations guiderails along with recognised Trade Unions. At the very least there should be an accompanying foundation of no compulsory redundancies, agreement with regards to redeployment and earnings protection parameters, and a guaranteed transfer of trade union recognition and facility time to all new Unitary Authorities, Strategic Authorities, Combined Authorities, and Mayoral Combined Authorities.

In assessing the options now before us, one of our reference points has been the extent to which we might reasonably mitigate "diseconomies of scale". We think that one way of doing this is for the new Council boundaries to make some sort of "sense" in terms of the history and internal connections that give an area a certain quality of being a specific place, as perceived from both outside and from within.

We want to comment on the options exclusively from our own view of our part of Lancashire, and that means for us two things are of central importance.

The first is that there is a degree of singularity and separateness about East Lancashire.

The second is that it would be unacceptable to define this without including the Ribble Valley.

We would consequently be uncomfortable with any solution that bolted together East and West or failed to include at least the "core" of the Ribble Valley within an East Lancashire structure, whether this be one East Lancashire Council or two, with the Ribble Valley's key connections being recognised as being with Hyndburn and Blackburn. We suspect that some of the options put forward represent an understandable fear of losing local autonomy, but they have ended up as creations from "The Island of Doctor Moreau".

We think, in this respect, that there is a need to have some regard for how patterns developed over time have either reflected, or created, a modern identity, even whilst the society within our area has been transformed so much since the original framework was established. We believe that the present is influenced by our history, and that in the case of East Lancashire the character of our area has roots in the early medieval period.

No one knows when the land referred by the early Anglo-Saxons as "Inter Ripam et Mersham" was divided up into "hundreds" or "wapentakes", but the most plausible guess is that it would have happened in the 10th Century as the Kingdom of England took over the Danelaw. It is during the reign of Edgar that we begin to see these terms reflect a wide understanding of how localities were organised. George Molyneaux, in his "Formation of the English kingdom in the Tenth century" (p152) comments that: *"Given the ubiquity of the terms "hundred" and "wapentake" in the legislation of Edgar and his successors, it is hard to account for the absence of at least the former word.....from the fairly copious legislation of Alfred, Edward the Elder and Aethelstan, unless one posits a major substantive change during the intervening years" and "whatever prior existence (some) hundreds and wapentakes may have had, it appears that it was from the mid-tenth century onwards that they became really significant..."*.

One of these Hundreds was the "Hundred of Blackburn", the administrative area that was the foundation of East Lancashire today.

It is tempting to understand this Hundred as a location that was then seen, as it were, from the point of view of a southern power consolidating itself northwards. From that perspective it represented the outmost capillaries of settlement pushing into the central uplands, characterised by a uniform type of occupation. Many of the internal roads kept to the uplands and ridges, but there were settlements *"huddled together within the valleys or on the lower slopes, each already forming a nucleus of irregular fields"* (N J Higham "A Frontier Landscape"). In Domesday Book the area was recorded as part of Cheshire, and ecclesiastically its two parishes of Whalley and Blackburn were the most northern part of the Mercian Diocese of Litchfield. Blackburn may have been selected as the best meeting point - for one of the functions of a "hundred" was a meeting every four weeks - not because it was central, but because it was the most convenient place for people coming "down" the two main valleys.

John Wallis gave a marvellously miserable description of the territory in his "History of the Church in Blackburnshire": *"Two valleys running up into bleak forbidding hills; at first sight, little else. Who would wish for such a land as this? Who would care to plough and sow it, to gather its scanty harvests, should they ripen? Who for this would leave the rich lowlands, and pass abstemious days, sodden with rain, isolated from north and south, and east and west?". "Nature herself had indeed ensured for Blackburn shire the rough outlines of unity by ringing it round with obstacles to travellers and roads"*.

Whether by chance, or because the tenth century English recognised it, the area, whilst largely changing in style (to become the “Honour of Clitheroe”) does appear to have retained a degree of internal consistency. Pastoral farming supplemented by the sturdier crops of oats and barley and, over time, the domestic cloth manufacture that pastoral farming seems to have been better suited to allowing time for. There was some sense of similarity to its industries prior to the Industrial Revolution (see John Swain "Industry before the Industrial Revolution"), and they formed a common foundation for the spread of cotton weaving, with the main towns developing similar industrial features.

This industrialisation meant that the area could no longer be seen as isolated and out of the way, but through it, and through subsequent re-industrialisations and depressions, it has retained a degree of self-containment as a travel to work area.

Our internal connections and settlement patterns largely follow the armature set by Wallis' "two valleys". The "core" of the Ribble Valley is built around the A666/A59 and the accompanying rail line from Blackburn of Clitheroe. The M65, the Leeds-Liverpool canal and the rail line towards Colne go up the other valley. Darwen connects to Blackburn by a shorter southward valley, down which the A666 continues alongside the rail line to Manchester. Rossendale connects more to Accrington and Burnley. There is a historical connection between the "tops" of the two valleys, linking Whalley with Accrington and Burnley and skirting the foot of Pendle Hill. If British and Scandinavian placenames are mapped, you see that they stretch along this, following the line of the River Calder (which joins the Ribble at Whalley). Burnley was part of Whalley parish. There are also historical links with Bowland, particularly along the line of the Hodder.

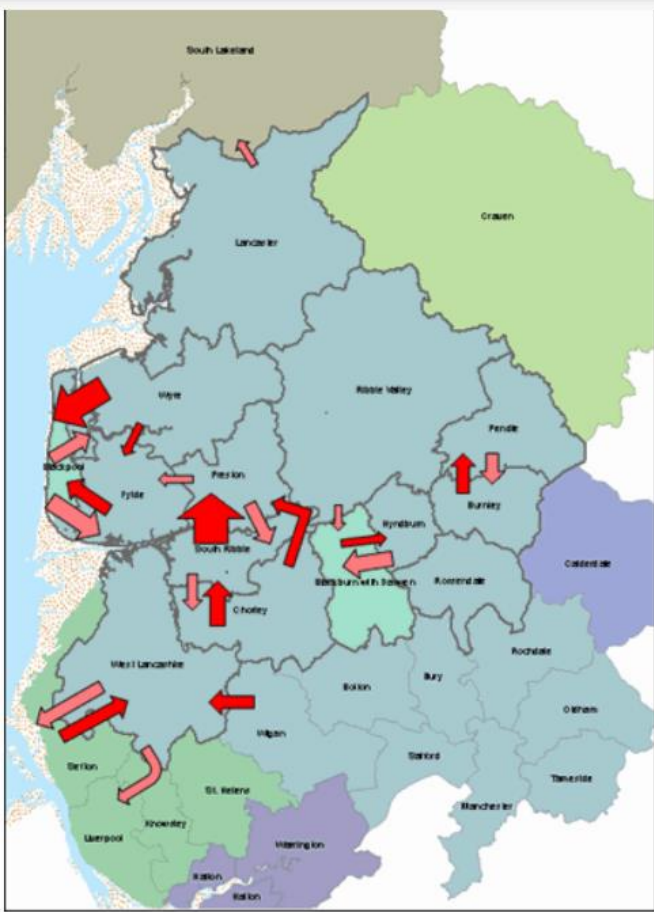
Although it argues for a "Four Council" model, fusing the Ribble Valley with Preston and Lancaster, the document "Options for Local Government Reorganisation in Lancashire Strategic business case for a four unitary model" actually presents evidence supporting recognition of East Lancashire's economic inter-connections (p17):

*"The 2021 Independent Economic Review used mobile phone data to explore how, within Lancashire, people move around for work using a novel “correlation clustering” algorithm to group neighbourhoods which send their workers to similar places. This reveals seventeen economic clusters in Lancashire, the*

*largest (in terms of work visits) being around Preston, followed by areas around Blackpool, Blackburn, BAE Warton, Lancaster and Burnley. Notably, the Samlesbury Enterprise Zone, located between Preston and Blackburn, represents a major hub for advanced manufacturing and innovation activity closely linked to BAE Systems. These clusters were then grouped into bigger movement corridors by connecting clusters to the places they send most workers to. This revealed four main economic corridors in Lancashire. These corridors are all North-South corridors (even though most of Lancashire's population live on a broadly East-West axis). The Review highlighted that policy in Lancashire needs to reflect these movement patterns, strengthen corridors; labour market policy should generally reflect where people are moving around within Lancashire"*

The Ribble Valley, Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen were grouped together in "Corridor C", which reflects the decision of the "2019 Lancashire Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) Toolkit", published by the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, to define "Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Rossendale and Ribble Valley" as one of six Lancashire "Travel to Work Areas (TTWA)", each TTWA representing "*labour markets in which the residents of each local area are most likely to work*". The Report dealing specifically with the Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Rossendale and Ribble Valley TTWA said that: "*The vast majority of jobs are filled by local people, with over two-thirds of residents in work being employed within the TTWA*". On p14 it expanded on this by saying that "*Based on data from the 2011 Census, a total of 67% of residents live and work within Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Rossendale and Ribble Valley (50% work in their home local area and 17% work within the wider TTWA)*".

Information from the 2011 Census has also been used to show net commuter flows between the Lancashire districts, which we think reinforces the picture painted above.



### Lancashire districts and neighbouring authorities, from 2011 Census

South Lakeland	←	Lancaster	3,016
Wyre	←	Fylde	3,353
Wyre	←	Blackpool	4,902
Wyre	→	Blackpool	10,119
Fylde	←	Blackpool	7,312
Fylde	→	Blackpool	5,367
Fylde	←	Preston	3,320
South Ribble	→	Preston	13,492
South Ribble	←	Preston	5,186
Charley	→	Preston	4,770
Charley	←	South Ribble	4,071
Charley	→	South Ribble	6,537
Blackburn with Darwen	←	Ribble Valley	3,126
Blackburn with Darwen	→	Hyndburn	3,351
Blackburn with Darwen	←	Hyndburn	6,278
Burnley	→	Fendle	4,402
Burnley	←	Fendle	5,159
Selby	→	West Lancashire	5,220
Selby	←	West Lancashire	5,076
Wigan	→	West Lancashire	4,763
Liverpool	←	West Lancashire	3,042

Source: Office for National Statistics: 2011 Census: Table WU03UK

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We suggest that there is not a great deal of linkage westward with Preston and West Lancashire, with commuting being principally to "border" sites around Salmesbury, such as BAe and the InBev Brewery (which we ourselves look to have delegates from).

The 2021 Independent Economic Review's "Deep dive: Economic Geography and the future of towns" has charts showing outwards work trips from various districts. The "glass wall" between West and East Lancashire is clear:



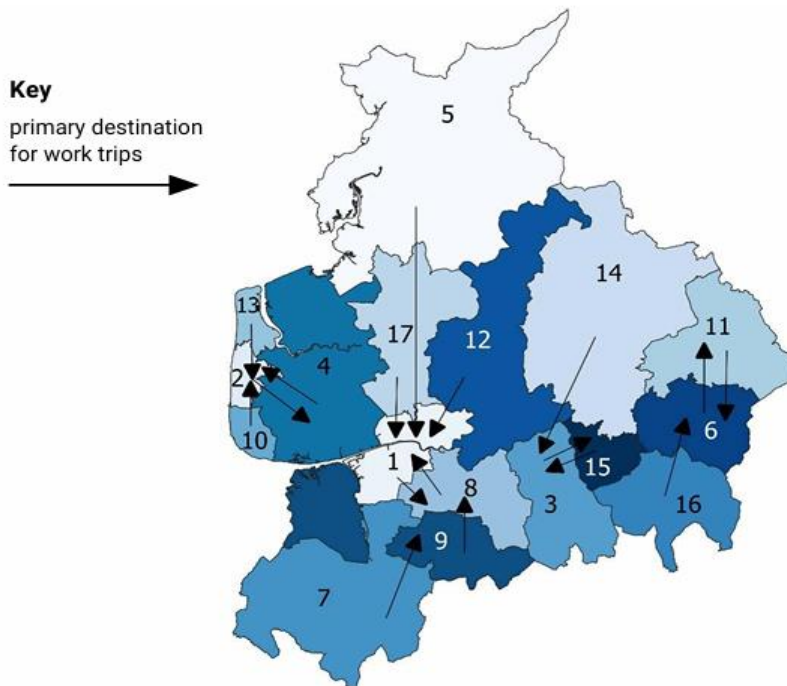
Origin in Blackburn with Darwen

● Trips 2011 ● Trips 2019



Ribble Valley links with Preston seem to relate more to the Longridge (12) than the Clitheroe (14) side. The movements seem to show stability from the 2011 picture given above.

**Figure 12. Primary destinations for trips leaving each cluster**



The map, above, shows for each cluster, where it sends the most trips to. This indicates which other cluster it is most closely connected to. For example, zone 11 and zone 6 both send the most trips to each other.

Lancaster and the Ribble Valley are not at all well connected. You can have a very scenic drive over the Forest of Bowland. Otherwise, you must head south first, to get on the M6.

If I may add an element of personal anecdote: when I was a steward at a large hospital in the Ribble Valley in the 1980s and 1990s, I regularly had a need to see members in their own homes, when they were away from work for some reason. The well-thumbed A to Z Street Atlas in my car was that for "Blackburn/ Accrington/ Burnley", and A to Z clearly saw this as a "natural" area to cover. When I later joined DWP I again found myself travelling around the offices in the same patch.

The Ribble Valley is integrated with East Lancashire not only through being part of the TTWA, but also by being part of a common residential area. This is because some Ribble Valley villages are, to all intents and purposes, suburbs of Blackburn. It is also because, as "The Independent" put it on 16/11/2019, the Ribble Valley *"is where those made rich on South Lancashire's textile industry moved for breathable air and green space"*. Figures from a Blackburn with Darwen Council document from 2013, commenting on the Ribble Valley's then "Core Strategy", quantified net migration from Blackburn with Darwen to the Ribble Valley as follows:

Stage	Annual net migration	20 year net migration	Source
Past net migration 2001-2011	+480	9,600	2013 Housing Requirement Review (Post 5.8) Table 3.3

and anticipated that this would rise, since new Ribble Valley housebuilding was partly intended to attract new residents to the Borough. People with a past in other parts of East Lancashire are not a rarity.

Many public services are already aligned to an East Lancashire Footprint, understood as covering Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Hyndburn, Blackburn with Darwen and the Ribble Valley.

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust runs services at Royal Blackburn Teaching Hospital, Burnley General Teaching Hospital, Clitheroe Community Hospital, Pendle Community Hospital and several community health buildings.

The "Place-Based" Partnerships set up by the NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board have taken current Council Boundaries into account. So, there is a separate Place-Based Partnership for Blackburn with Darwen. The "Lancashire" Place-Based Partnership, however, is sub-divided into three "localities", one of which is East Lancashire: Burnley (2 PCNs), Hyndburn (2 PCNs), Pendle (2 PCNs), Rosendale (2 PCNs) and Ribble Valley (1 PCN).

That division of East Lancashire between Blackburn with Darwen and the rest is mirrored by some other organisations. Home-Start in East Lancashire covers Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Hyndburn and the Ribble Valley. Citizens Advice East Lancashire covers the same Districts.

We are ourselves considering the possible benefits of moving to a similar designation, that would match that also of the Chamber of Commerce.

The Eastern Division of Lancashire Constabulary covers Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale.

One very particular marker of our self-containment has been the (now admittedly weakening) survival of the East Lancashire "island of rhoticity" (['Strong r' in danger of disappearing across North of England, study finds - BBC News](#)).

But we don't want to give the impression that we are happy to sit in splendid isolation. What is important to us is now is that we often find ourselves putting forward ideas for development and investment that are based on a perception of East Lancashire needs, and that these objectives don't really place all that much emphasis on improving links with either West Lancashire, and none on improving links with Lancaster.

We have, for instance, advocated there are four main strategic objectives relating to the transport connections of East Lancashire specifically. One is the re-establishment of a direct rail link between Blackburn and Liverpool. The second, and somewhat linked to this, is the objective of having an East Lancashire Rail Freight terminal (with a direct connection to the port of Liverpool). The third is the re-opening of the Colne-Skipton rail line. And the fourth is improving cross-Pennine Major Road linkage from and to the M65 (whether this be by "extending" the motorway or by improving the route towards Halifax, from Jct9. When the recent "Northern Powerhouse Rail" proposals came out, we were not alone in saying that they had "nothing for us".

This East Lancashire focus also influences what we see as other priorities for investment and the local application of industrial strategy – such as the potential benefits of having a major plant alongside the M65 or have having an east Lancashire site as part of the Digital “Catapult” network.

Cross-referencing our observations above with the various options presented, we draw the following conclusions.

### **1) The County Council proposal of two unitary Authorities, for "North" and "South" Lancashire**

We object to this because it would both split off the Ribble Valley from East Lancashire and establish a West/East mismatch. It seems to lack any "organic" rationale. We agree with Blackpool Council's view, in "Our Lancashire, Our Councils: Putting people first – councils that change lives", that it would be "too remote from communities, and too cumbersome to deliver real change and transformation".

### **2) The Chorley, Lancaster, Preston, Ribble Valley, South Ribble, and West Lancashire proposal for 4 unitary councils**

We object to this because it would split off the Ribble Valley from East Lancashire and also attempt to create an entity covering part of our area that seems to have no real coherence. Once again, Blackpool seem to us to put the matter well: it would create *"a Lancaster Ribble Valley-Preston Council lacking a firm grounding in any locality. Labelled as the “university corridor” due to M6 and West Coast Main Line connecting the two cities, neither of these routes directly serves the Ribble Valley"*.

### **3) The Burnley and Pendle proposal for 5 unitary councils.**

This would best address our concerns about excessive size, and it could be argued that it does fit to some degree with East Lancashire's travel to work patterns. It would, however, mean that there would still be a need for the "middle" and "east" councils to have some form of collaboration in order to promote and advance East Lancashire objectives. It would also retain the misalignment of Parliamentary Boundaries and Local Government Boundaries, with the MPs for Rossendale and Darwen and Pendle and Clitheroe dealing each with two Councils.

#### **4) The Blackburn with Darwen, Fylde, Hyndburn, Rossendale, and Wyre proposal for 3 unitary councils**

One small benefit of this option not being selected is that we might escape the "Pennine Lancashire" moniker, a "re-branding" proselytised by the Manchester entrepreneur Tony Wilson that has never secured much local affection. On the other hand, it would be the clearest assertion of an East Lancashire identity. What is something of a worry is that there is a history of attempts to promote "joined up working" between the East Lancashire local Councils under the "Pennine" banner and yet this has not led to them finding any consensus on possible future structures, with their preferences being spread across three of the different proposals.

#### **5) The Blackpool ("alternate") proposal for 4 unitary councils, based not just on combining existing Districts but on more complex boundary changes in the Ribble Valley.**

It may be argued that the reasons we have given for seeing the Ribble Valley as part of East Lancashire apply more strongly to those areas south of the Ribble that this proposal would add into the proposed East Lancashire Council, but if something like this is done it should be considered that the Longridge side of the Ribble Valley looks more to Preston than to Lancaster and so some such division would fit better with the "original" 4 Council idea of a "North" Council incorporating Preston and Lancaster, but with just "north" Ribble Valley being merged into this. It would not be as neat as it may look at first sight, however, when you think, for instance of how much settlements to the north east of the District, like Waddington and West Bradford, radiate with Clitheroe. It would also introduce the problem of how to "divvy up" the Ribble Valley's current resources and facilities. The Authority has, moreover, only recently come through a bizarre constituency review, and would be left with even less synchronisation.

Our preference, then, from the East Lancashire perspective, would be for East Lancashire to be structured as envisaged in either the five or the three council proposals, with the possibility of the various Salmesbury "works" being wholly within the East Lancashire boundary.

We do reiterate, however, our concerns that both options could result in local communities feeling that they have even less control over their local government.

We take seriously the work of Sacha Hilhorst - [How the Labour heartlands lost their faith in politics | LSE British Politics](#) - who has written "it is difficult to overstate just how much people generally loathed politics", and find it hard to believe that two combined centripetal developments - this reorganisation on top of the Lancashire Combined Authority - are going to be the answer to people feeling that nobody listens to them.

Ian Gallagher  
Secretary  
Blackburn and District Trades Union Council

**13.03.2026**