

Appendix 3.1

Case For Change: Proposal A

Amber Valley being part of the northern Unitary
Council

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A

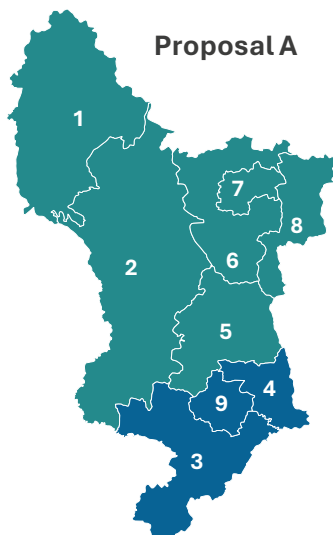
Proposal A: Amber Valley being part of the northern Unitary Council

Summary

Proposal A proposes the creation of two Unitary Councils in Derbyshire, using the existing District and Borough Councils as the foundation for reorganisation. Under this model, Amber Valley would be included in the northern Unitary Council.

This approach draws on existing district boundaries as a foundation for Local Government Reorganisation. Whilst new administrations and structures will be established from 1 April 2028, using current boundaries helps to reflect existing communities and local identities, providing a degree of familiarity for residents during the transition.

The population levels under Proposal A meet the Government's criteria for establishing two balanced and sustainable Unitary Councils. Furthermore, consultation respondents who support reducing the number of councils in Derbyshire, as well as those who agree with the Government's broader plans for Local Government Reorganisation in England, are significantly more likely to favour Proposal A. For example, 45% of respondents who support reducing the number of councils also support Proposal A¹.



Unitary 1: Amber Valley, Derbyshire Dales, High Peak, Chesterfield, Bolsover, North East Derbyshire (584k)

Unitary 2: Derby City, South Derbyshire, Erewash (494k)

A north/south split of the county, with Amber Valley being part of the northern unitary

Proposal A also emerged as the most favoured proposal overall among consultation respondents, with 36% supporting Proposal A, compared with 34% for Proposal B and 21% for Proposal A1 (consulted as Option C)¹.

Note:

1. All references to the consultation are based on the total number of respondents and are not weighted by the population of each council area. While weighting can help adjust for differences in population size or response bias, applying such weights could obscure variations in engagement levels between council areas.

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

It is important to note that Proposal B1 has not been subject to public consultation.

Support for Proposal A is particularly strong amongst Amber Valley residents, where 54% of respondents agreed with this model. This reflects a clear preference and a shared sense of identity with communities in the proposed northern Unitary Council. Notably, 24% of all respondents to the Derbyshire wide consultation live in Amber Valley, despite the area representing only 11.9% of the county's population, thus indicating a strong desire among Amber Valley consultation respondents to express their views and concerns. This is likely due to Amber Valley's unique position as the only area that could fall within either Unitary Council or potentially be divided between them. The future we are working towards is one where two councils stand side by side, each financially sustainable and equally strong. They are designed not as competing authorities, but as complementary partners both resilient, both capable, and both committed to delivering for the communities they serve.

Proposal A delivers a strong foundation for growth by carefully balancing population and economic strength to equip both Unitary Councils with the tools and resources they need to ensure residents prosper. This vision is rooted in the character of place by reflecting established local identities, supporting community cohesion and neighbourhood empowerment. The new councils will reflect the identities of their local areas, aligning naturally with the community infrastructure links that people rely on and the economic geographies that shape opportunity.

Proposal A respects the existing district boundaries that people recognise, ensuring continuity while providing a foundation for service transformation and efficiency. By creating councils that are ready and able to further embrace devolution which has already commenced with the establishment of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA), we place the region in a position of strength able to act quickly, unlock investment, and deliver benefits that reach every resident and business. This is not just reorganisation; it is the opportunity to shape councils that are future-ready; designed to deliver growth and opportunity at pace and secure the benefits of devolution through rapid economic growth.

Proposal A is a less complex and deliverable route to reorganisation. It respects existing district boundaries, reflecting also the views expressed in the consultation by Amber Valley residents and avoids the additional costs of disaggregation and unnecessary complexity and disruption, meaning Derbyshire can move at pace to attract investment, commence transformation and help deliver the benefits of devolution to residents.

Criteria 1: The establishment of a single tier of local government for the whole area

By establishing two balanced councils of scale, Derbyshire has the opportunity to redesign services around communities, cut out duplication, and modernise the way local government works. This is not just about changing structures, it is about creating councils that are smarter, more efficient, and more responsive to the needs of residents.

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

Proposal A enables:

- Alignment with key partners such as the NHS, police, and fire services. For Proposals A1 and B1, the disaggregation of district services would introduce additional complexity in aligning with the proposed new structures.
- Modernisation of services, with councils able to invest in new technologies, streamline processes, and deliver better outcomes for residents.
- A fair balance of resources, ensuring both the north and south can make bold, future focused decisions to improve services, invest in communities, and support economic growth.
- Removal of the existing Local Planning Authority boundaries within the Housing Market Areas would eliminate the need for formal cross-boundary agreements such as Statements of Common Ground and Duty to Cooperate. Planning applications and Local Plans could proceed more quickly under these single governance structures, accelerating housing delivery.

This transformation is about creating fit for purpose councils that are financially resilient, democratically accountable, and capable of driving improvements in everything from social care and housing to climate action and local infrastructure.

Proposal A provides a strong overall population balance between the North (584k) and South (494k), meeting the MHCLG key criterion of a minimum population for Unitary Councils. This compares favourably against Proposal B, which has less balanced population numbers. (North 455k South 622k) Proposal A also achieves a closer alignment in Gross Value Added (North: £13.7m; South: £13.1m), when compared to base Proposal B (North £10.6m South £16.3m)

By working with existing district boundaries, this avoids complex redrawing required for Proposal A1 and B1 and maximises the opportunity for a quick and smooth transition, unlocking the benefits of reorganisation to commence transformation and help deliver the benefits of devolution.

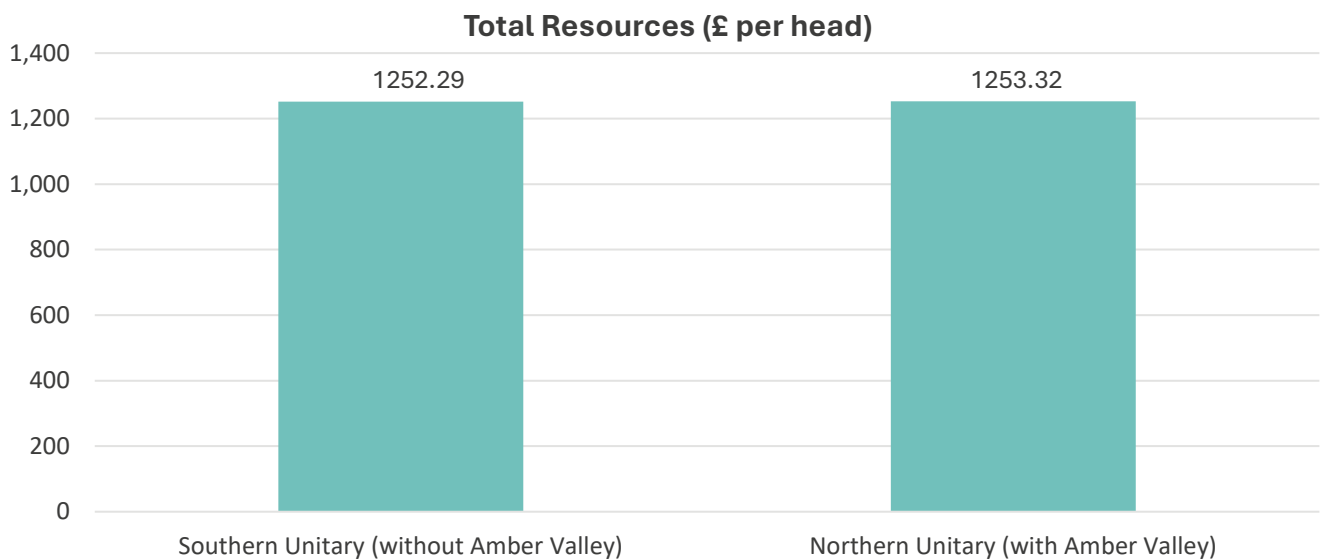
Criteria 2: the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

Proposal A offers a strong foundation for financial stability. The financial analysis indicates that breakeven is achieved in Year 4, after which cumulative savings exceed implementation costs. This represents a payback period of 3.55 years making it one of the least complex and least costly proposals to implement. This Proposal Also has a shorter payback period compared with other more complex proposals which have the added burden of disaggregating across district boundaries. As this proposal does not seek to split a district, it reduces the projected one-off disaggregation costs of implementation by approx. £1 million Furthermore, proposal

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

A will have sufficient reserves to implement reorganisation, drive delivery and sustain transformation.

Proposal A	Unitary 1	Unitary 2	Total
Population	583,555	494,354	1,077,909
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Annual savings (from year 6)	23,819	20,178	43,997
Implementation Costs (one off)	(33,785)	(28,621)	(62,406)
Disaggregation Costs (one off)	(1,624)	(1,376)	(3,000)
District Disaggregation (one off)	0	0	0
Payback (years)	3.55	3.55	3.55



*data used in 2026/27 forecast funding allocations

Whilst the options appraisal is grounded in technical analysis, there are also several nuances that a technical assessment alone cannot fully capture. For example, whilst Proposal A doesn't have the most equally balanced Council Tax base (North: 195k; South: 147k), it does have the most balanced income per head of population (North: £1,253; South: £1,252), when all sources of funding are taken into account, thus demonstrating a model that avoids over-reliance on any single income source or area. This balance enhances overall efficiency, builds capacity for transformation, and ensures both councils are well positioned to withstand financial shocks and invest in service improvement and local priorities

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

Criteria 3: the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services

As the two Unitary Councils proposed under Proposal A will be similar in population size, we would expect the high-quality services currently delivered by the existing councils to form the basis of future technology led transformation to achieve improvements in service delivery and substantial efficiencies, freeing up resources for reinvestment.

Under Proposal A, both Unitary Councils would have broadly comparable levels of economic resilience and social wellbeing. The northern area records slightly lower levels of deprivation (0.11 compared with 0.12 in the south), a lower unemployment rate (3.6% compared with 4.0%), and lower crime levels (66 incidents per 1,000 residents compared with 88 per 1,000 in the south). These figures indicate that while the northern unitary performs marginally better on some social and economic indicators, the overall position across both areas is broadly balanced. This balance supports the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the county, ensuring that neither council faces disproportionate levels of need or challenge.

By maintaining this balance, Proposal A creates two strong and capable authorities, each able to plan and deliver services effectively, respond to local priorities, and invest in prevention and improvement initiatives that promote long-term social and economic resilience.

Although the challenges vary across the two areas, for example, levels of homelessness and the proportion of children under 16 in relative low-income families are higher in the southern Unitary Council, this is balanced with the proportion of residents aged over 65 which is greater in the northern Unitary Council; these differences reflect potential variation in the types of services being accessed, rather than any overall imbalance in demand. Taken together, the two councils would be broadly equal in terms of service pressures, available resources, and opportunities for improvement. This balance places both councils in the strongest possible position to prioritise the delivery of high-quality public services, tailored to the needs of their communities.

Criteria 4: a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

Whilst the options appraisal provides a strong technical foundation, it is equally vital to appreciate the sense of place, lived experience, distinct identities, histories, and community values that cannot be fully captured through data alone. To support this, consultation has been undertaken to ensure that local perspectives and priorities are fully reflected alongside the technical evidence.

The engagement activities with both residents and stakeholders are detailed within the core document.

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

The results from the public consultation found that there was a higher level of engagement from Amber Valley residents, as the one district that could be placed in either the northern or southern Unitary Council or split between the two. Overall, the results of the consultation identified that 36% of the total Derbyshire wide respondents favoured Proposal A, compared to 34% for Proposal B, and 21% with Proposal A1 – consulted as Option C (Proposal B1 has not been the subject of public consultation), with Amber Valley respondents notably more likely to express a level of agreement with Proposal A (54%)¹.

Respondents were asked during the consultation process to explain their answers, to help understand the reasons behind their level of agreement with Proposal A. A total of 62% provided further explanation.

Key themes emerging from these responses include:

Logical or natural division: Some felt Proposal A represents a clear and logical split, making geographical sense and reflecting existing local identities and connections. Respondents highlighted that the north and south of Derbyshire are naturally distinct in terms of needs, identity, and infrastructure. This view was particularly strong among Amber Valley and Derbyshire Dales respondents.

Fair and balanced: Some respondents noted that Proposal A provides a more balanced split in terms of size, workload, and resources, creating a clear and fair division between the north and south. This perspective was again most common among Amber Valley and Derbyshire Dales residents.

Maintains local council boundaries: Some respondents valued that Proposal A avoids splitting existing local councils, a particular concern raised in Amber Valley. They emphasised that dividing current council areas could be complex and undermine the potential benefits of reorganisation. Respondents also noted that Proposal A aligns well with existing services and partnership arrangements, reducing risk and supporting continuity in delivery.

Rural focus: Some respondents expressed concern about being part of a new council dominated by a large urban centre such as Derby City, fearing this could result in rural inequity or inconsistency in service access. This was again a particular concern among Amber Valley respondents.

Finally, respondents who support reducing the number of councils in Derbyshire, as well as those who agree with the Government's broader plans for Local Government Reorganisation in England, are significantly more likely to favour Proposal A. For example, 45% of respondents who support reducing the number of councils also support Proposal A.¹

Note:

1. All references to the consultation are based on the total number of respondents and are not weighted by the population of each council area. While weighting can help adjust for differences in population size or response bias, applying such weights could obscure variations in engagement levels between council areas.

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

Criteria 5: support devolution arrangements

Proposal A proposes that the two similarly sized Unitary Councils become equal partners and constituent members of EMCCA, working collaboratively to support the elected mayor's missions. By fostering genuine partnership and joint ownership, this model strengthens collective leadership, enhances the region's strategic capacity, and ensures that both councils contribute equitably to delivering inclusive growth, resilience, and innovation across the area

Criteria 6: enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

Proposal A is in a strong position to build on relationships with residents to further enhance community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment, for example through the establishment of Neighbourhood Area Committees for local decision making which aligns closely with the Government's ambition to strengthen decision making at neighbourhood-level.

Much of Derbyshire is also parished, and there will be opportunities to explore the creation of further parish councils where there is community demand. The parishes can play a vital part in local democracy, particularly in advocating for their local areas. All Councils within Derbyshire have significant experience of engaging with residents, partners and stakeholders, which will be hard wired into the new Unitary Councils at establishment, and which will ensure true local engagement and empowerment of Derbyshire residents. Additionally, Proposal A has gained support from the Amber Valley MP.

MP for Amber Valley: *"I recognise as MP for Amber Valley that the technical assessment of the proposals for local government reform which have been developed by the Districts and City Council in Derbyshire, identifies that any of the four proposals will lead to the creation of sustainable unitary councils. However, it is my view that only Proposal A reflects the reality of the lived experience of local residents and respects their wishes, which have been so clearly articulated through public consultation. I take the view that any proposal which seeks to divide Amber Valley between different unitary councils would have a significant negative impact on the provision of services for its residents during the transitional period. Furthermore, any such division would place a significant additional burden on Amber Valley Borough Council through the need to disaggregate services, facilities, staffing and data, which following 14 years of austerity the Council does not have the capacity to implement, thereby placing reorganisation in Derbyshire at risk".*

Note:

1. All references to the consultation are based on the total number of respondents and are not weighted by the population of each council area. While weighting can help adjust for differences in population size or response bias, applying such weights could obscure variations in engagement levels between council areas.

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

Council size

The proposed Council size for the Northern Unitary is 92 councillors and the Southern Unitary is 70 councillors.

Conclusion

Proposal A presents a compelling pathway for Local Government Reorganisation in Derbyshire. It offers a balanced and deliverable model that aligns with MHCLG's six criteria, ensuring both financial sustainability and community representation by placing Amber Valley within the Northern Unitary Council. Proposal A also respects existing district boundaries aligned with the principle of utilising existing boundaries as the building blocks for new Unitary Councils. Additionally, this proposal reflects the preferences of consultation respondents¹.

Proposal A also supports strategic alignment with EMCCA, enabling Derbyshire to maximise its influence and access to devolution funding. Importantly, Proposal A is less complex to implement than other proposals that require disaggregation, offering a rapid payback period and minimal disruption to existing structures. Based on the views of consultation respondents, particularly from Amber Valley residents¹ Proposal A offers a fair, efficient, and locally grounded solution that empowers neighbourhoods, strengthens the regional voice, and lays the foundation for sustainable growth and transformation across Derbyshire.

Note:

1. All references to the consultation are based on the total number of respondents and are not weighted by the population of each council area. While weighting can help adjust for differences in population size or response bias, applying such weights could obscure variations in engagement levels between council areas.

Appendix 3.1: Case for Change Proposal A (cont.)

Council approving this Proposal as their Final Proposal for Local Government Re-organisation in Derbyshire.

This is proposed by:

Amber Valley Borough Council



Signed 

Leader: Councillor Chris Emmas-Williams