

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS, COUNCIL HOUSE, VICTORIA SQUARE,
BIRMINGHAM, B1 1BB**

ON

FRIDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY TWO

Before:

Ms Margaret Gilmore, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Thank you very much for coming. We have another full schedule today; certainly this is proving one of the fullest if not the fullest hearing in the country so far. Thank you for your interest. Just to remind you that anybody who speaks will be filmed and that we request that everybody gives their name and address where possible. That is it really. Sitting next to me I have Sam Hartley, who is from the Boundary Commission, so if we have any administrative issues or clarification that is needed he will deal with that. Sam, is there anything you need to say about fire alarms?

MR HARTLEY: None due today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am going to start this morning with calling Mr Aaron Blake-Knight, please.

MR BLAKE-KNIGHT: Thanks very much. My name is Aaron Blake-Knight. I am a resident of Kings Norton in South Birmingham, currently under the Northfield constituency. First of all I would like to say thanks very much for the opportunity to speak today in regard to the local government boundary review; in particular as I said within Northfield. Starting off, I would like to say as a resident in Kings Norton I was slightly concerned with the reviews and the figures that were given for the new boundaries that were written up. The figures are from 2015, if I think that was correct. It has not taken into consideration area-wise the huge amount of people that have signed up this year for the European independent referendum. The figures of the boundary, they have also not taken into consideration the amount of people that were lost through individual registration, however I know public consultation has been very, very widespread. It is really good that so many people have actually come back and taken part in this.

My main concern is, whether we like it or not, these reviews are deemed to be stuck with it and go ahead. However, there are some merits, particularly within Northfield and the ward of Kings Norton going to Brandwood. Historically Kings Norton in the old parish spread as far as Maypole, up through Brandwood and even further afield under the church of St Nicholas. There are borders within Kings Norton and the Brandwood side when we are going into the new constituency where we have actually shared as local residents and local activists a really good cross-working party to make sure that people in Kings Norton are part of the community, not only within Northfield but also on the borders. Those people that I know locally and within the general area at large, we have worked really hard with the people who live on the outskirts, such as myself, looking towards the houses into the city centre. It is a true reflection on the new boundary although previously all of the constituencies were lumped together sort of like in blocks round the city, the first time I saw it, and we have the great swathe going diagonally, I thought it is really good, it is a really, really new way of trying to get

community cohesion. There are people in the south of Birmingham in these blocks of where we are at the moment who have no idea how the inner city parts of Birmingham live, how the residents in the inner city parts of Birmingham are, but the new constituencies in those diagonal blocks actually make us look that we have not got all that difference in social problems, economic problems, and I think that doing that will actually make the communities more cohesive. That is it, thanks very much. Any questions?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just for clarification, what you are saying is although you have had this traditional community link with Kings Norton, which is across the border here on the right at the bottom, (indicating), you actually are happy with the new layout which sends you along. You do not feel that that broken link is going to cause to a problem?

MR BLAKE-KNIGHT: No, I do not, because you cannot move Kings Norton from where they are historically within sort of like Northfield and Bournville; they are there, but just because we are on a different side of the border it does not necessary mean that because we are going into a new area of constituency Brandwood in with Springfield ward it does not mean that people are still not going to go to Cotteridge shopping, people at still not going to go to Northfield shopping just because there is somewhere else, another boundary.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Just wait there. Are there any points of clarification needed? Any questions?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible comment)

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I would just like to point out, as ever, that we have to stick within our remit, that the law is the law, that we have to stick with the data we have been provided with, that we have been told that we have to reduce constituencies, et cetera. However much you say about the rules it will have no influence or effect on the work that we are doing here. Can I call Cllr Brett O'Reilly please.

CLLR O'REILLY: I really do appreciate the opportunity to speak. As you say, I am Cllr Brett O'Reilly. I have been Councillor for Northfield Ward since 2012. My address is 8 Varlins Way, Kings Norton B38 9UX.

Just to add some context to my submission this morning, it is as a local representative having represented the area of Northfield for over four years, but also in terms of local knowledge as a resident I am quite proud to tell people on the doorsteps that I have lived in the constituency as it currently stands for my entire life, so having seen a number of changes over the years and sort of understanding the issues that we faced around changing communities. I completely appreciate what you have just said in terms

of denoting the fact that the Commission has to work within the rules but I do think it would be remiss of me not to state that based on the conversations I have had with residents in my own ward that I think there are a number of people that are significantly upset by the way in which the rules have been laid out. I know that that is not something that the Commission would control directly, but there is a big issue around the data that the boundaries have been drawn up on, the data obviously being used from 2015 as opposed to post referendum or even if it was taken from pre referendum when there was a huge spike in voters registering. That does create a problem and I think that that is also overlaid by the fact that we have had one of the most turbulent years in politics, certainly in my lifetime. Not only that, we have had local boundary reviews in Birmingham, we are now looking towards Brexit and to have such an arbitrary figure placed on the number of MPs without actually looking at need, and doing it based on a five per cent tolerance just seems completely out of step with the process that we went through for the local boundaries in Birmingham, which were proposed based on communities. Actually, although the number of councillors was set to reduce in Birmingham the actual number was slightly variable so we ended up with 101 because that reflected natural communities. To say that we set a number of 600 for MPs and that magically gives us the right formula for representation across the country just seems completely bizarre. If we could not do it at a local level in Birmingham with a set number of councillors, to say we can do it nationally with MPs is quite frankly beyond the pale.

I will leave that there and move on to the discussion around the actual boundaries themselves. I think like most people the boundaries that we see there for the south of Birmingham are quite far removed from what we are used to; we are used to operating in constituency blocks, if you like, very similar socio-economics, very similar demographics, and, to be frank, in Northfield you could almost argue that it is largely mono-cultural as opposed representative of the city. After getting over the initial shock of seeing Moseley and King's Heath included in the constituency proposal for Northfield, when you drill down it actually starts to make sense to have more diverse, more mixed wards within a constituency. If we take Northfield, for example, I think the BME population Northfield is round about 14 per cent and that is pretty much reflected in the other wards surrounding. If we look to Moseley and King's Heath I think we are closer to about 40 per cent, thereabouts, so it would give a real opportunity to bring communities together and I think that was always a criticism with the boundaries as they were previously, they were probably arguably very inward looking and it does provide that opportunity for cohesion.

Just to comment on the individual wards, I think you would be hard pressed to find anyone that would argue that Longbridge and Northfield do not go together. I think they are inextricably linked and have a shared history. We have, for example, the Austin village in Northfield that is historically part of Longbridge and the heritage there. I think you would be hard pressed to find anyone that would disagree on that. I think the discussion then moves on to what is the logic and what is the thinking behind these

boundary changes. When we look to Bournville, Moseley and King's Heath, moving away from the constituencies that we have been used to, what it does do is it provides a route into the city centre and one of the frustrations from residents that I have spoken to over the years has been that they feel very much detached from what goes on in the inner city. I am sure that is reciprocated in the inner city wards towards the outer city and communities believing there is a lack of understanding, so certainly bringing those wards together in a constituency does provide that opportunity.

Just in terms of transport links I think it would be again difficult to argue anything other than wards that are linked directly by transport and there are clear routes through public transport, good road infrastructure, through rail certainly for Longbridge, Northfield and Bourneville, so there are clear links and there is clear infrastructure that would bring people together in that setting.

I think it is important also to talk about the historical context of Kings Norton where I live actually proposed to move into Brandwood, and again I think that adding Springfield to that gives you another dimension again in terms of the diversity and the cohesion around that. Talking from a city council perspective, it will also make for more balanced representation and decisions, because whereas at the moment it seems to be quite a zero sum gain between MPs in the inner city and MPs in the suburbs, actually again it provides that opportunity for an objective balanced view because MPs, when making representations to the council, and councillors alike would have to work together across a much more diverse area.

There are a couple more things I would like to say. Again, just going back to the whole process, I think if we were going to move to the system that has to be across the city I do not think you could have Northfield as a block, for example, and then have other longer thinner constituencies across the city, I do not think that would make any sense. I think if we are going to go down this road this kind of layout should be across the board because I do not think that the cohesion argument stacks up if you then say we are going to have the odd block here and the odd block there; I think it needs to be pretty well uniform across the city.

The other point is if we do go to blocks then a logical argument would actually be to largely keep Northfield as it is and bring in the parts of Rubery that currently sit in Bromsgrove. That could be an argument, but, as I say, that completely flies in the face of what I have been discussing this morning. I think if the logic is that we are going to look to a model that provides greater opportunities for community cohesion then this largely fits in with that kind of agenda. I would like to see that reciprocated across the city.

There is one further point that I would like to raise, and that is around the splitting of wards. I am pretty sure it is in the Boundary Commission guidance that wards would only be split under exceptional circumstances. I think that is absolutely right. Again,

with the political turmoil that we have seen certainly over the last 12 months, but in fairness in Birmingham this has been going on, we have had the Kerslake review, we have had the review going on around boundaries, and one thing that people will be familiar with is these wards as they currently are, so if we are moving into new constituencies I think it would be wrong to start splitting these wards because then when you overlay that with the new ward boundaries quite frankly people will not know where they sit and who their representatives are and it really overcomplicates local democracy. I cannot see any logical reason why any of these wards in the south of Birmingham should be split. They do form natural communities, there is shared history, shared heritage with the wards, and there is also the transport infrastructure that links them together and provides that opportunity for cohesion.

That pretty well brings to a conclusion my submission, but I would welcome any questions on that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. We have one question here. Again, clarification on that.

MR PRATT: (Conservative Party) Through you, Madam Chairman, I have two quick questions. Firstly, I wonder whether you could clarify whether you live in the ward you represent.

MR O'REILLY: No, actually. I live in Kings Norton.

MR PRATT: Secondly, in terms of clarification you mentioned that Rubery flies in the face of the arguments you were making. I wonder if you could expand slightly on that.

MR O'REILLY: Absolutely. I would just slightly push back on that and say that my comments were clearly taken out of context. I was not saying for a minute that Rubery flew in the face of any cohesion agenda. What I was saying was if we move to a block model then on the current boundaries in order to make up the numbers you could argue, and I am sure some would argue, that the current four wards of Northfield with the inclusion of Rubery would actually make a sufficiently robust ward. What I was saying was if you are working on the basis that it is going to be long thin constituencies that provide cohesion opportunities across diverse wards then that is a different argument to what you would put if you were trying to bring Rubery into the constituency. I think there are two arguments, but, let us be absolutely clear, I would welcome Rubery as much as I would welcome Moseley and King's Heath, but I just think we have to be absolutely clear on what the agenda is around these boundary changes: is it just about arbitrarily meeting the figures set down by Government, which I have already commented on, or is it about providing the opportunities for cohesion on this agenda? That, I suppose, is what is being debated today but certainly I would not be saying that I would not welcome residents of Rubery into a Northfield ward if that is what was being proposed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any further points of clarification? (No response) Thank you for that, that was very useful. Could we call Cllr Peter Miller, please. While you are coming down, now that the hall is a little bit fuller I should say that we will be looking at this and I will be working on this with my colleague, David Latham, who is also an Assistant Commissioner and is sitting behind me here. (Indicates map)

CLLR MILLER: Morning, everyone. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I am a councillor for Kingswinford South and I have been for 16 years. I have been a member of the Party since 1970 – Conservative Party – and I am Conservative Chairman for Dudley South, so I think I have got a fairly good idea of where the area is. What I would like to say in my submissions to you is that we agree with the Kingswinford North and Wall Heath and Kingswinford South ward and Wordsley ward being together, because they are together – they are in a line together – Sedgley, Gornal, and Upper Gornal and Woodsetton are another three wards which have been joined together for many, many years and so needed. We think that Brockmore and Pensnett does come into the west, and with the few polling districts from Brierley Hill, I think by putting them into the Dudley South, will virtually return for something which I think we asked for, and I know I came to the Commission in 2000 and whenever it was now, or 1993-4, whenever it was --- to return virtually to the Dudley West, and this is virtually a return to the Dudley West, so we basically welcome, with that small amendment, with the few Brierley Hill polling districts in it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, just to clarify, the Brierley Hill, you would want to go back to ---

CLLR MILLER: The three polling stations.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry, I am just double-checking.

CLLR MILLER: Is it nine --- yes. It is the top end of Brierley Hill ward.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. I have got it. Thank you very much indeed. Yes.

CLLR MILLER: Okay. I think that is all, really, I want to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I understand completely. Thanks. A bit of clarification on my right, here. Would anybody like to make any comment on that? Not any comment, I should say. Any point of clarification needed?

MR RILEY: Councillor, you have supported the Conservative proposal for the ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry to interrupt. Could you ---

MR RILEY: Ian Riley.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR RILEY: Thank you. Councillor, you have supported the counter-proposal of the Conservative Party to create a Dudley West. That involves splitting the Brierley Hill ward.

CLLR MILLER: Yes.

MR RILEY: It is, in fact, I think, four polling districts that are proposed in the counter-proposal.

CLLR MILLER: Four.

MR RILEY: The Commission's rules say that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances, wards would be split. What are the exceptional and compelling reasons for splitting Brierley Hill and not splitting any of the other wards in the Black Country?

CLLR MILLER: Well, I think that is the one to split because it does go towards Stourbridge in the one part so it is obviously to put it towards Stourbridge, whereas the other part is, sort of, still the Dudley West part and is still considered as Dudley, whereas some of the other parts would be considered more Stourbridge, and in the tradition of the way things are locally, it would be considered as such.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I think that is a clear explanation. Any further points of clarification? Thank you very much, Councillor.

Cllr John Lines, please. Thank you.

CLLR LINES: Good morning. Thank you very much indeed. I am Cllr John Lines and I represent the Bartley Green ward. Your proposals, ma'am, as Halesowen, Bartley Green, Weoley and Selly Oak for the future boundaries ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would you just give your address?

CLLR LINES: I am sorry. 320 Adams Hill, Bartley Green, Woodgate. Thank you. I have lived there all my life, all my years, and I have been the local councillor since 1982, when Weoley ward was split. Bartley Green became one part and Weoley, the other. We in Bartley Green area have moved a little over the years. As I said, I have been there all my years. I have not lived in Birmingham all those years because, in fact, where I live was Halesowen, prior to the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and parts of Bartley

Green area, of course, have got Halesowen postcodes. We share schools and a college with Halesowen, by the people of Bartley Green, and of course, we have a large population of pensioners in Bartley Green, and our excellent bus services reflect that. In fact, we have 18, 21, 22 and 23 buses, and also, we have our own green bus, which goes from Bartley Green to Halesowen. Obviously, employment is important. Much of that is taken up in Halesowen by the people of my area. What we have not got in Bartley Green is a size shopping centre, so what we do, of course, is we share it with Harborne, Weoley Castle, particularly, and, of course, Halesowen, and there is no doubt about it, Assistant Commissioner, that we have a very strong connection with Halesowen and, of course, with Weoley Castle. When your proposals were known to me, I had intentions to actually consult with my constituents and I have been Chairman of the Ward Committee, which is a devolved committee of the City Council. I, in fact, met last night and I put the questions to my constituents. Needless to say, not 17,000 of them were at the meeting; a lesser number, indeed, and I put your proposals to them, and they were certainly in agreement with the joining up with Halesowen, and Weoley Castle, but much reluctance with the Selly Oak. There does not really appear to be any connection with Selly Oak and those areas, even in a small sense, so with regard to your submission, ma'am, we support all except the Selly Oak within the constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed for that. That is very clear. Any points of clarification? Questions from the floor? We have got one here.

MR BLAKE-KNIGHT: Good morning, Cllr Lines. Aaron Blake, resident in Kings Norton, 24 Muirfield Gardens. You said that you had had your local ward meeting, being the Chairman of the residents. How many members of the public were at that meeting?

CLLR LINES: We are very fortunate, Sir. In fact, if you look in the minutes of the meetings in the City Council, Bartley Green, with the exception of probably a couple of inner city areas, has one of the largest public participants attending the meeting, because they are lively meetings, and not only do we talk and debate, we also listen very carefully to what the people have to say, and they thoroughly enjoy attending. We probably get on average between 20 and 60, and some meetings, obviously, we get larger than that, but no matter how large or how small the numbers are, we take them seriously, we listen, and the example today is on passing that message on.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Anything further?

CLLR LINES: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. Could we now hear from Dr Barry Henley, please? A reminder: name and address, and just to let you know, we have got a really full agenda this morning, so hopefully, you can all keep to time.

CLLR HENLEY: Thank you. My name is Barry Henley. I am a local councillor for Brandwood ward. I live in Billesley ward. The reason I have come today is actually my memory of the last Boundary Commission Review of the constituency boundaries. I at that time was in what was the old Selly Oak ward, and we considered, when we had various meetings, that the boundaries proposed then were sensible and acceptable. However, at the public hearing, everything changed to a far less sensible arrangement of wards, which we have struggled with ever since to manage at election times. It made difficulties for representing the residents, and when I wrote and complained to the Boundary Commission, the Boundary Commission replied that it was my fault, because the changes had come about because nobody had come along to the public hearing and said what was proposed was acceptable, so the opponents' views were then incorporated into changes, which produced the unsatisfactory result.

So, today, I am here to make it clear that I, and my two fellow councillors in Brandwood, support the Boundary Commission's proposals for the new Brandwood constituency. I live in the constituency, in the Billesley part, and I represent the Brandwood part. I know it very well. The constituency now fits together. For those of us that cycle, you can get across the whole thing on the level using the Worcester and Birmingham canal, the Stratford on Avon canal, and the River Cole Valley, and it goes right the way through, so it is all links. Much of the area has historic links to Kings Norton parish and the borough, which was a late addition to Birmingham in 1911.

Another thing that we like is that you have had difficulty getting the correct numerical totals, so you have had constituencies, or you are proposing constituencies, that incorporate wards from outside Birmingham, but this one does not, even though it goes all the way from the inner city to the outer suburbs, and that is, in our view, in terms of the representation of the people, a very positive feature of the arrangement of Springfield, Billesley, Brandwood and Kings Norton, and the wards themselves are, in the main, logical, using railway lines and rivers for boundaries and municipal boundaries, including the Bromsgrove boundary, so all in all, it makes a sensible whole.

So, take those factors together. Good travel links, historic links with the Kings Norton, all the wards being in one municipality, logical boundaries, then we consider this proposal to be very satisfactory for a new Brandwood constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed for that, and just to point out how useful it is to hear that, because as you say, you can end up with a situation where you change things just because that is what you have heard.

CLLR HENLEY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, to hear some support is appreciated. Any questions? Yes? We have a question here.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley. Councillor, there is a counter-proposal before the hearing, which you may not be aware of.

CLLR HENLEY: No, I am not.

MR RILEY: Which proposes that your ward, Brandwood ward, should be split and part of it should go to the --- a new Hall Green constituency, and part of the ward should go to a new Northfield constituency, and the Commission's rules say that wards should only be split in exceptional or compelling circumstances. Would you think there would be any exceptional or compelling circumstances that would justify splitting the Brandwood ward into two separate constituencies?

CLLR HENLEY: Absolutely not. No, I cannot think of any reason why that would produce a better result.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. We will leave it at that. I am not sure that that was clarification, but either way, thank you very much for your time. Our next person is Josh Jones.

CLLR JONES: Hi. My name is Josh Jones. I am a councillor for Stockland Green ward in Erdington. I live there and have lived there on and off throughout the whole of my life.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And your address, please?

CLLR JONES: 14 St Thomas' Road, Erdington, B23 7RG. So, basically, I am here today much in the same vein as Cllr Henley, to speak in favour of your proposals for the Erdington constituency. I think that there have obviously been some problems with the fact that you have only been given a five per cent leniency on making your decisions, rather than a ten per cent leniency, because I think it makes it much harder to, kind of, link it with community boundaries.

Having said that, I think what you have come up with, kind of, keeping Stockland Green, Erdington and Kingstanding together and bring in, particularly, Oscott and Pheasey, which then links in with Oscott, is quite sensible. I mean, the reason I would say that is that Kingstanding and Oscott are very similar areas. Lots of people that live in Oscott would still consider that to be Kingstanding, but I think the main thing is that, kind of, Erdington and Stockland Green, kind of, very much feel like a core central part of Erdington. Whenever there has been an Erdington constituency, they have been major components of any Erdington constituency. Six Ways, which is really eponymous with Erdington, three of the six entries of Six Ways are entirely within Stockland Green, one of them is shared, and then the other two are in Erdington ward, so I think that if we look at it in that sense, then it makes a huge deal of sense. You have got, obviously, the community identity links there, you have got people from Stockland Green ward

regularly use Erdington as a place to shop, where people work, public transport links, public access, so I think you have tried to in-keep as much with the community spirit as possible.

I mean, there are some challenges, I would say, as well. Not with the size of the constituency, I think. Maybe if you were to go slightly higher, you could have had a slightly different situation but I think this is the best of what could possibly come about with the leniency that you have been given, so I support it for that reason and I also support it just because it brings together natural community identities. If you were to go to people in, say, Stockland Green and parts of Kingstanding, particularly the Perry Common area, they would very strongly identify with living within Erdington, so I think that is really important, because Kingstanding has been moved around quite a few times. As a ward, I think it has been in Perry Barr, moved over from Perry Barr to Erdington, then there were discussions about it being moved into Sutton New Hall in the previous Boundary Commission report last time, and it was very strongly felt that that had a strong identity sense with Erdington, just as, I think, Stockland Green does, Erdington does, and, I think, Oscott and Kingstanding have a strong identity, since you have got the Hawthorn Road shopping centre. That is very linked between the two. It runs as a boundary between the two wards, so really, for all those reasons, I am in support of what you have put together. I mean, I do think that the process of eliminating --- bringing the number of MPs down at a time when people are arguing that they want more democracy and more engagement is, kind of, reversing the trend of that, but that is neither here nor there. We have to live within what we have in front of us, so that is why I am supportive of it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Very clear. Anybody want to make a comment? It will be a point of clarification, yes? We will start with you at the back, and you.

MS JONES: Thank you. I am speaking, as well, in favour of those proposals for Erdington constituency. They are not ideal. Jane Jones, resident of Erdington constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ms Jones, I have got you down to speak in a couple of minutes, so do you want to speak? Do you want to take that, or ---

MS JONES: I did not know that I --- oh, right. Oh, you mean ---? I thought I was ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: To come to the podium, so shall we do that?

MS JONES: I could just contribute to Cllr Jones --- if I could speak separately ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, if you are just going to be a couple of minutes, why do you not come down and do that now, if we are happy with that?

CLLR JONES: Yes, that is fine with me.

MS JONES: Yes. Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Why do we not do that straight away, but before that, do you have a question? We will take the question. Thanks.

MR COMPTON: Gareth Compton, Erdington Conservatives. Do you think that the people of Tyburn regard themselves as part of Erdington, and if not, why not?

CLLR JONES: Well, I think the people of Tyburn, I think it depends on where they live within Tyburn, so I think you have got some quite distinctive groups. You have got Castle Vale, which is a huge, large part of Tyburn, where people would regard themselves more as living within Castle Vale as an entity within itself, then I think you have got the Erdington Hall Estate, where people would argue that they live in Erdington Hall. You have got the Pype Hayes Estate, where people very strongly feel that they live in Pype Hayes, so I think you have got different breakdowns and you have got community identities within Tyburn, so I think the main community identities are the Erdington Hall Estate, and people there would probably identify more with, say, what used to be known as an old Gravelly Hill ward. Then you have got Castle Vale, and I think people strongly identify with Castle Vale there. Then you have got Pype Hayes, which was an ex-council estate that has been knocked down and been rebuilt recently, and I think the people there would strongly identify with being part of Pype Hayes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you. So, Jane Jones, would you like to come just very quickly and take a couple of minutes giving your view?

MS JONES: Jane Jones. I am a member of Erdington constituency, born and bred in Stockland Green, although I do now reside in Erdington ward.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Your address, please? Could you give your address?

MS JONES: 40 Hart Road, B24 9ES. Okay. I was, as I was about to say, I might now live in Erdington ward, but my spiritual home is definitely Stockland Green, where I was born. My mother still lives there, my brother still lives there, and my eldest son resides in the ward. I did a straw poll of friends when I found out that --- these proposals are not ideal, but I am prepared to accept them. I think you have come up with a reasonably good job, considering the circumstances and what you have had to do with reducing constituencies, but what I do feel is that --- I have heard there is a counter-proposal to

go against your proposal and move Stockland Green from Erdington, and that is really what I want to speak to today.

Stockland Green --- when I did a straw poll of friends who still live in the area, who were born and bred there or live in the Erdington constituency, were absolutely aghast at the prospect of Stockland Green being put into Perry Barr constituency. As I said, I was born and bred there and at no time since I have lived in Stockland Green, apart from when I went to --- I did my postgraduate certificate of education, did I ever go to Perry Barr. There is no link whatsoever. I just do not see one. I do not see any reason why, in terms of community cohesion, you would take Stockland Green away from Erdington constituency. I do not believe for one minute that the new proposals are legitimate, because if you look at them, it basically brings Perry Barr constituency boundary almost up to the High Street of Erdington, and I find that proposal completely ludicrous, quite frankly. Stockland Green is, and always should be seen as, an integral part of the community of Erdington. Community cohesion in Stockland Green is a very strong thing. We are a very unique --- it is a very unique ward. Multicultural. There is very good community cohesion, there are lots of, you know, cross-cultural people getting together. It is a really nice place, but I do not see it as part of Perry Barr constituency, so I would stand here supporting this proposal of yours, and speaking against the alternative proposal submitted, which I think is, quite frankly, ludicrous. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions? No. Thank you for that. Really appreciate it. Very clear. Now, I think we will call the Rt Hon Liam Byrne, who is the MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill.

RT HON LIAM BYRNE MP: (Birmingham Hodge Hill) Thanks very much for making time for me this morning. Like most of my colleagues, I feel this an unfortunate process. The idea of cutting the number of Members of Parliament at the same time as increasing the undemocratically elected --- sorry, the undemocratic House of Lords, to record levels, is, I think, something of an affront to democracy, and I am afraid that the margins of five per cent that you have been given within which to try and draw boundaries are very tough.

However, within the constraints that you have been given, I want to support the proposals that you suggest for Birmingham in general and for Hodge Hill in particular, but I think the first point that I want to make really is to really endorse one of your founding principles, which is the principle of not splitting wards. Wards are not random lines on a map. A huge amount of work has gone into the development of those ward boundaries. Over a very long period of time, the Boundary Commission in particular has made an enormous investment over decades in getting ward boundaries right. They do reflect local ties, they reflect local identities, they reflect local histories and perhaps most important of all, they reflect local community bonds. They are not just lines on a map.

Now, when you split wards, you create two problems. You create representational consequences but you also create democratic consequences, too. So, when I was elected first in 2004, I served a split ward. I saw first-hand the representational consequences that followed. People do not know who their representatives are, it is very confusing, and when you are serving deprived communities, as many of us are in Birmingham, actually, you want the fastest line to access your representative, not a very confused picture, so it damages the service that democratic representatives can do for the people they serve when you have split wards.

There are also the democratic consequences, too, because, you know, over time, field operations run by political parties do grow up within ward boundaries, and those field operations from all parties are incredibly important in maximising the number of people who get out and vote. When you split wards, you just engender a degree of chaos that actually makes that business of voter communication and voter mobilisation much, much harder, so the principle that you have enshrined of not splitting wards, I think, is incredibly important, and it is a good building block. Now, I think within the City of Birmingham, the model that you have created of not splitting wards is basically a good one. I want to just talk about Hodge Hill and then, just from my experience as the regional minister for the West Midlands, say a word about the wider city.

If you look at Hodge Hill, you have created, within the Hodge Hill proposal here, a very balanced community, which is balanced in terms of ties of history, in terms of community connections, in terms of travel to work patterns, in terms of travel to shop patterns, and in terms of travel to school patterns. So, the basic integrity of the constituency that you have sketched out runs east-west and north-south, so from about the 1720s, you had the evolution of the two turnpike roads, which were the Alum Rock Road and the Washwood Heath Road. They basically run from at Saltley out to the old Moot Court, actually, in the Coleshill Hundred. I have got a pointer here. Excellent. So, if you look there at the Washwood Heath Road, and then the Alum Rock Road up here, these are the routes of the old turnpikes, basically, which ran from the mediaeval centre of Birmingham out to the, kind of, Coleshill Hundred, where the Moot Court was, over here (indicating). These old turnpike roads basically create the geographic integrity of the old Hodge Hill constituency there, and of course, the ancient boundaries, which were old parish boundaries, you have got the River Tame just along the north there, and then you have got the River Cole just along the south. So, this basic, kind of, east-west integrity is very, very old, and what you have had over the last century is the evolution of the community along and through that basic integrity, so C. B. Adderley, the last Lord of the Manor of Saltley, was the civic entrepreneur who basically laid out the old grid plan of Saltley around the LDV Coachworks here and Joseph Wright's old Metropolitan Coachworks, here. So, this is, kind of, 1870s onwards, then between the wards, you had the evolution of Hodge Hill here, and then post-war, you had the creation of Shard End. So, you have had a very even and steady evolution of the City of Birmingham spreading east between those two old boundaries. Now, at the last Boundary Commission, Bordesley Green was then, sort of, moved in to create a constituency that

gives you the balance of numbers that you have got at the moment, but there is a, sort of, north-south integrity to the constituency, which runs, kind of, up and down here, which is basically the Circular Road, and that was, I think, first designed into the Birmingham Plan in about 1913, when the city doubled in size and became Britain's second city for the first time. So, you have got a very strong and a very old, kind of, north-south, east-west integrity here. You have had the evolution of a community over the last century and that is why you have got such strong and persistent travel to work, travel to school and travel to shop patterns.

Now, demographically, you have also created what is a very balanced community, and for those of us who serve big ethnic minority communities, this is important. What we do not want are boundaries which create a, kind of, ghettoisation of ethnic minorities within the city, and what you have done by creating this constituency is, you have created an almost perfectly balanced constituency, so at the last census, this was a constituency that is 55 per cent Muslim, 45 per cent white working class, so it is a good balance, demographically, but it is also a good balance spatially because, of course, you have got, you know, the old inner city here, out to the old suburb here, and that basic pattern of demographic balance and constituencies that span the core out to the suburbs is a pattern that I see you have replicated in a number of the constituencies. We think that is good for community cohesion. We think that is good for community links, and of course, what you can see here, I mean, a bit like, you know, my grandfather's generation, after they came from Ireland, they began in the middle and they, kind of, moved on out. That is what you can now see with the Kashmiri community today, so there are about 1000, 1500, Kashmiri families now living in Shard End. You know, when I started representing the seat about ten, 11, 12, years ago, there were almost none, so you are beginning to see demographic balance now spread across that, kind of, east-west axis, so for all of those reasons, I think the model that you have got for Hodge Hill is a good one.

There are then just, sort of, two other proposals for Birmingham, which, kind of, caught my eye. One is obviously the proposal to move Sheldon out of the city, and I know that there are proposals to keep Sheldon within the city. The problem, obviously, with keeping Sheldon in the city is that you then have to split, I think, three wards. You have to split Brandwood, you have to split Springfield, and you have to split Brierley Hill in Dudley, and that is a disproportionate impact, when you are splitting wards in order just to keep one ward in the city. I do not think you can justify that on exceptional and compelling circumstances, which I think is your test, and, you know, for those of us who know Sheldon well, the community in Sheldon, you know, typically looks out to Solihull, both in terms of shopping, school runs and work, and so there are strong ties from Sheldon out to the east. It is much stronger, actually, than the ties from Sheldon to the city centre, so certainly, I do not think there are exceptional and compelling circumstances for splitting three wards in order just to keep Sheldon inside the city boundaries. I mean, the other note I would just make is that one of the wards that I think it is proposed to split in order to get Sheldon back into the city is actually the ward I

live in, of Brandwood, which is split arbitrarily between Hall Green and Northfield. There is no justification for splitting Brandwood. I mean, Brandwood is a good community. It is a strong community and it is a community with integrity. The second proposal that I just wanted to comment on was the idea of moving Tyburn into Erdington in return for moving Stockland Green out. I mean, I know a little bit about Erdington, just because it sits to my north. As you have heard from previous witnesses this morning, I mean, Stockland Green is very much part and parcel of Erdington, so again, I do not think there are these exceptional and compelling circumstances for changing the proposal that you have got as it is.

So, in summary, I think the proposals that you have got for Birmingham, despite my criticism of the constraints that you are operating under, I think you have maximised harmony, I think you have minimised change, and you have majored on the most important principle of all, which is preserving the basic building blocks of wards. I will stop there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any points of clarification from the audience? Yes? None whatsoever, and for me, it was very clear, as well.

RT HON LIAM BYRNE MP: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, thank you for your time. Much appreciated. Can I just check whether Mrs Parveen Hassan is in the room, down to speak? No? In that case, could we take Mr Gareth Compton, please?

MR COMPTON: (Conservative) Morning. Gareth Compton, Erdington Conservative Association, 93 Orphanage Road, Erdington, B24 9HU.

Broadly, I would like to speak in support of the proposal for the Erdington constituency with one reasonably significant proposed alteration. I mean, our general view is that we support the additions of Oscott and Pheasey Park wards to Erdington, and you will see from our handout that we think in particular the addition of Pheasey Park is a particularly good proposal. The oddity, in a sense, is that Pheasey Park was ever really considered to be part of Walsall. That is the strangeness of it. Pheasey Park is in a sense physically separate from Walsall. It is separated by a part of green belt from the rest of Walsall. Pheasey Park, I think, is the only ward in Walsall where everybody has a Birmingham postcode. If one looks at the area and drives through the area, it is clear that it lends itself, and has much more in common with, Kingstanding and Oscott than it does with what the areas on the other side of the green belt in Walsall, so we, for the reasons that you see in the handout, we support the addition of Pheasey Park to the Erdington constituency.

Broadly, since I know that you are inviting comments in support of your proposals as well as comments against your proposals, for very similar reasons, we think that it is sound to include Oscott ward in the Erdington constituency, although of course the counter-argument, in a sense, of where it sat before, in Perry Barr, could equally be made in respect of --- is exactly the argument that you have heard about Stockland Green not going into that area, because the reality of these areas is that whilst part of them are more closely connected to one particular area, so it would be foolish to deny that the northern part of Stockland Green looks closely, for example, to Erdington, the reality is that a very large and we think the larger part of Stockland Green also looks better towards Perry Barr, because what it really is is Witton, which is a broader, larger community, which is divided at the moment between two parliamentary constituencies.

So, turning to Oscott: Oscott is clearly, like Pheasey Park, in our submission, really part of the broader Kingstanding, Oscott, Pheasey Park community, and so for that reason, we support that part of the proposal. We equally support the retention of Kingstanding within the Erdington constituency, partly for the reasons that I have given, that Kingstanding, Pheasey Park and Oscott sit neatly together, relatively homogeneous, as I have said, but also, Kingstanding is, as it were, a closer link with the central Erdington core of the Erdington constituency. The transport links are exceptionally strong, cultural links are extremely strong, the education links are very strong, so we support the retention of Kingstanding within the Erdington constituency.

What we cannot see the logic of is removing Tyburn from the Erdington constituency, and what this really comes down to is a decision about whether Stockland Green sits better in Perry Barr or whether Tyburn sits better in Ladywood, and in our submission, one need only look at the map of the proposed Ladywood constituency to see the absurdity of including Tyburn within a constituency which would stretch from and include part of Smethwick, effectively, at Sandwell, all the way through the city centre, and then loop out to take in an area of Birmingham, which is an outer Birmingham area on the border of Sutton Coldfield, producing this obviously absurdly shaped constituency that reaches up to grab at what effectively is part of Erdington, because despite the, I hesitate to call it an answer, the comment made by Cllr Jones in defence of the contention that Tyburn is not part of Erdington, that it is a series of separate communities, it is a series of small communities, of course, like most of these large Birmingham wards are, but they look to Erdington. They most certainly do not look to Soho or to Sandwell, so, in our submission, in making that balance of where --- what would be more disruptive? What would be more unnatural? Including Tyburn in a Ladywood constituency, or including Stockland Green in a Perry Barr constituency? The balance very clearly, we say, favours returning Tyburn to Erdington and placing Stockland Green in Perry Barr. I have already alluded to what I say are the links between Stockland Green and Perry Barr. They are strong, in my submission. The Witton area is a wide area. Stockland Green is a --- it is currently the Birmingham ward --- is a strange ward, which also, like many Birmingham wards, incorporates a number of quite different and distinct communities, and whilst, as I have accepted, the northern,

the very northern part of Stockland Green probably does look to Erdington, there is a much broader part of the ward, which would happily look and sit within the Perry Barr constituency. I should say that, if one looks at the transport links between Tyburn and the Ladywood constituency, it is a particularly absurd constituency. One cannot physically get from Tyburn as a pedestrian from Tyburn into --- sorry, as a driver, from Tyburn into the Ladywood constituency, I think, without actually leaving that constituency and looping round.

So, for those reasons, I hope I have made it clear, we generally support the thrust of your proposal, but with the addition --- the alterations that I have suggested, and we have also proposed how this --- the knock-on effects at the very back of the last page, in fact, of our submission, how rather neatly this change can be made. Tyburn returns to the Erdington and Pheasey Park constituency. Stockland Green moves to Perry Barr, and Aston simply returns to where it is, which is in Ladywood. That would ensure, actually, that there is less disruption of current constituencies than with your proposal, which I say is another quite compelling reason why this rather neat shift, which does not split any wards, which retains the variance in constituent numbers that you are looking for, but actually maintains the status quo more effectively, is actually a better proposal. Obviously, I am happy to answer any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any questions from the floor here? Yes?

MR SAVAGE: Hi, it is Ricky Savage, 11A St Thomas' Road. That is Stockland Green. My question to Gareth: thank you for explaining your ideas. Have you actually consulted the people of Stockland Green in your ideas? First of all, I would like to explain that I am just a normal person ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can I just stop you there? Because you are also on our list ---

MR SAVAGE: Right. Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So you will get five minutes as soon as we can find a five-minute slot for you, but if we just ask the direct question, is that okay with you?

MR SAVAGE: Okay. Yes, okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And you can have your explanation later.

MR SAVAGE: Sure.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR SAVAGE: So, yes, have you consulted the people of Stockland Green?

MR COMPTON: It is for the Commission to consult, but insofar as a small organisation such as ours has consulted, we have consulted with our own members who live in Stockland Green, and they are wholeheartedly in support of our proposal.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? One more here?

CLLR JONES: Cllr Josh Jones. My question or point of clarification would be this. Where in Stockland Green would you say --- you say that there is obviously a dividing line between where people look towards, and some people look towards Perry Barr. I happen to just disagree with that argument, but where would you say that people don't feel that they are part of Erdington, as it has always been an eponymous part of any Erdington constituency, Stockland Green?

MR COMPTON: I think you must have misheard my submission, which I think fairly --- or I attempted, fairly, to try to explain that, in these artificially created large Birmingham wards, which incorporate a number of different communities, there will obviously be some that look more closely to a particular other area, and Erdington is a large area, and there will be others that look elsewhere, and my point is that the Witton part of Stockland Green, which accounts for a very large part of your ward, looks more and positively towards the other part of Witton, which is just across the border, currently, in Perry Barr.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, and thank you for your time and for explaining that, and we will have a good look at your presentation when we get a chance. Could we now move on to call Dame Caroline Spelman, the MP for Meriden?

RT HON DAME CAROLINE SPELMAN MP: Well, good morning, and first of all, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to express, orally, my views on the Boundary Commission proposals. While accepting, of course, the principle that constituencies do need to be of roughly equal size, there is a deep concern in my constituency over the decision to break up Meriden over four local authority boundaries. This is contrary to the Boundary Commission's declared objective of respecting local authority boundaries. The review states that the two constituencies could be reconfigured within Solihull borough, but the Boundary Commission, and I quote, "chose not to". It is only made clear later in the document that the problems of the adjoining cities of Birmingham and Coventry, in having too few electors for the existing number of MPs, are due to be resolved by breaking up other constituencies like Meriden. However, the splitting of constituencies across local authority boundaries will cause significant problems of administration. If an MP has just one or two wards in a city council area, they have very little leverage in discussion compared to MPs with several

or all their wards within it. The new North Solihull and Chelmsley Wood ward will only have one large ward of 16,000 electors from the City of Birmingham, and thus makes it very hard to get its voice heard in dealing with Birmingham City Council, which is, in any event, the largest local authority in our land, and in reverse, the Birmingham ward would have an MP, all the rest of whose wards would be in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull.

The new Coventry West and Meriden constituency would only have two wards in Coventry. In practice, almost all public services to Knowle and Meriden wards are provided by either Solihull, as in education, social services, and policing, or Birmingham, healthcare. Virtually none are provided by Coventry, except some patients from Balsall Common are referred to the Walsgrave Hospital in Coventry. Recently, the GPs in Solihull agreed to join with the clinical commissioning groups in Birmingham and the Heartlands NHS Trust covering Solihull is to be run by the University of Birmingham Hospitals Trust. Mental health services are provided by the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust. It is significant that Solihull chose to join the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and not the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP. Public transport is run by the West Midlands combined authority, but bus services to the rural areas of Meriden have proved very difficult to sustain, and cross-boundary services are very limited. The decision to split Knowle and Dorridge flies in the face of local ties. The two villages are seamlessly joined, and many organisations are jointly Knowle and Dorridge, such as the local cricket club. They have now created a neighbourhood forum for covering both villages, which has legal standing in our planning system. The catchment of the Arden Secondary School is drawn from both Knowle and Dorridge. Bus services run through both villages on a circuit to Dorridge Railway Station, and both villages orientate to Solihull as the nearest town for services, such as the urgent care centre, the library, the theatre, the shopping centre, and the Council House. The inclusion of Tanworth in Arden ward from the Stratford district in the new South Solihull and Shirley constituency will also leave one ward from another local authority marooned in the Solihull borough, and the administrative hassle of dealing with one ward from a two-tier authority. The county boundary of Warwickshire affects the provision of school places, emergency services, such as police and fire, and all council services, which are provided by either Stratford or Warwickshire, not Solihull.

The new names do present a problem for Solihull, which has striven hard not to use the term North and South Solihull, but rather to speak of one borough. This would undo years of work to help the most deprived wards of North Solihull feel part of one single local authority area. As residents, we understand the underlying problem is one of Meriden having a few too many electors but this can be addressed by swapping wards within Solihull borough, with Elmdon coming back to Meriden in exchange for Blythe. Historically, Elmdon was in the Meriden constituency anyway. The wider problem of solving the over-representation of the nearby cities could be resolved by adjusting the configuration of the Warwickshire constituencies, as was proposed at the last boundary review. This counter-proposal would join Coventry South to Kenilworth, to solve the

problem of the lack of electors in Coventry, which in turn avoids the break-up of Warwick and Leamington, which are contiguous, and bound closely by local ties, and that, in turn, avoids binding Warwick and Stratford, which have less in common and in turn, the knock-on effect of breaching the county boundary into Worcestershire. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of local authorities in a political climate of devolution, where power is being returned from the centre to the local level, producing more diversity. Ignoring these differences will confuse electors and create an administrative nightmare.

Finally, I have consulted with my constituents, and I will continue to do so, but again and again, they remind me that this is the second time the Boundary Commission has proposed breaking up the Meriden constituency and breaching the local authority boundary, which makes them understandably nervous that the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull is not being respected. I would suggest that it is less disruptive to breach ward boundaries than local authority ones. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. I think I am fairly clear on what you are saying. We have had some similar discussion yesterday. Are there any questions from the floor? Points of clarification? Yes, there is one here.

MR PRATT: Sorry, as it was not on the record, I am sure everybody knows but I think we just ought to have on the record the name of the Member of Parliament, because I do not think it was on the record at the beginning.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I thought I did actually say it. Yes, I thought I did introduce you as the MP for Meriden, so I think I did, but either way, we now ---

RT HON DAME CAROLINE SPELMAN MP: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed for your time. Thank you.

Okay, and if now, we could hear from Cllr Diana Holl-Allen, please?

CLLR HOLL-ALLEN: (Conservative) Good morning and thank you very much for giving the opportunity to address you today on this hearing. I am Diana Holl-Allen and I am Chairman of the Meriden Conservative Association. I am one of three councillors for the Knowle ward, which is in the Meriden constituency. On behalf of my association, I would like to make it clear that we fully support ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am so sorry to interrupt you. Could I have your address?

CLLR HOLL-ALLEN: My address?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR HOLL-ALLEN: Oh. Follyfoot, Bradnocks Marsh Lane, Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, B92 0LL.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry about that. Do carry on. Thank you.

CLLR HOLL-ALLEN: Quite all right. I am used to it. On behalf of my association, I would like to make it clear that we fully support the Government's policy to create parliamentary constituencies with an electorate of similar size. However, we are not happy with the proposed changes to Meriden, which sees this constituency torn apart, split over four local authorities, and breaks up strong community ties between two of the Meriden wards, namely Knowle and Dorridge, and Bentley Heath. As Dame Caroline Spelman MP has said earlier, it does not seem necessary to split the constituency across four local authorities, effectively having three MPs covering the Borough of Solihull: Solihull North, Solihull South, and Coventry West.

Looking at the borough as a whole, it would be possible to meet the Boundary Commission's criteria on constituency size by returning the Elmdon ward to the Meriden constituency and returning the Blythe ward to the Solihull constituency, as this has happened before anyway. This respects the local government boundary of Solihull Borough. The shortfall of electorates in Coventry West can then be met from Kenilworth, which has a strong local tie with Coventry, for example, their public transport, health and education services work together there. It is imperative that Knowle and Dorridge, and Hockley Heath, are kept together.

Let me give you a little bit of history. Knowle was originally part of Hampton-in-Arden, becoming a separate manor in 1276. The name came from the old English "cnoll", a small hill, and was spelt "Knoll". In 1849, the village was sold to the Everitt family, and Knowle evolved. Dorridge was a small area where other parts of the village of Knowle existed. It was really not much of a village at all then, just a few houses, but in a period of time, a train station was located, thus developing the area into another village. Over the centuries, Knowle and Dorridge have lived and worked together as one community, and this holds true today as much as ever, and I can, for example, quote that we do have the same schools. For example, the Arden Academy, and as Caroline has said, the same cricket club, the same train station, the same shops, and even the same local charities, and to repeat, in the last year, the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum Committee are doing a wonderful job to establish and look at the area of development for housing in the area of Knowle Village and Bentley Heath.

As a councillor for the Knowle ward, the people I meet on a daily basis in the community I represent are very upset at the thought of a boundary which splits them from the

parliamentary constituency. I do hope the Boundary Commission will seriously reconsider the change proposed by the Meriden constituency and respect the integrity of the Solihull borough, with two constituencies of equal size within.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do make no apology for repeating a certain amount that Dame Caroline has said, but we do want to emphasise the importance of --- please look at this again, we really seriously do not want to upset the people that we represent. Thank you very much indeed for allowing me to address you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions? Points of information? Thank you. Can we now hear, please, from Gordon Snelgrove?

MR SNELGROVE: Good morning. I am Gordon Snelgrove. I am a resident of Erdington constituency and I have lived in the area all my life. I have spent ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And your address, please?

MR SNELGROVE: It is 25 Goodison Gardens, Erdington. I am talking now about the proposals that I can see coming up on the screen, but I would like to concentrate first on the suggestion I have heard that in some ways, Stockland Green is not part of Erdington. I find that extraordinary. To me, Stockland Green forms a welcoming gateway to the village of Erdington, because I have always referred to it as a village. My parents did. It has always been a, sort of, almost but not quite, a community within itself. The road into Erdington passes through Stockland Green. It is, I would suggest, a natural and welcoming, if somewhat challenging, gateway into the village. The road links, the transport links, the railway links, all serve Erdington and further north. There is, and has been for some years, a vibrant and active community. It has survived. It has faced challenges. It still does, but notwithstanding the destruction of part of its shopping centre, i.e. Salford Bridge, when the M6 motorway was built and Junction 6, famously now called Spaghetti Junction, saw the removal of a well-loved and much used shopping centre. The community, however it was defined, back in those days, survives. It survives because it works, and its work is --- well, I would suggest, is putting a welcome face on the approach to Erdington. It has changed over the years. I have no doubt it will continue to change, but it is an integral part of what I understand to be Erdington.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. It is very important to hear about that sense of community. It has great influence when we make our decisions, so we are grateful for that. I can see it here on the maps I have in front of me, as well, exactly what you are talking about. Anything from the floor? Any questions? Thank you very much for your time, and now we would love to hear from Ricky Savage.

MR SAVAGE: Hi. Ricky Savage, and it is 11A St Thomas' Road, Erdington. Stockland Green. First of all, I would like to say, I am not a politician. I am not a councillor, an MP or anyone else like that. I am just a normal bloke who lives in a two-bed terraced house in Stockland Green, and my family has lived there since 2012. I am ex-Armed Forces. I have moved about a lot, and have eventually ended up in Stockland Green. Stockland Green is a really diverse community. It is one of --- over the last 20 years, since moving about so often, it is the first place I have ever felt truly at home, and to hear ideas from people such as Gareth basically saying that Stockland Green should not be part of the Erdington constituency, to me, is ridiculous. The people I speak with, my friends, my neighbours, colleagues at work, they believe Stockland Green is a part of Erdington. Erdington is literally a 20-minute walk away. It is a two-minute drive away. My wife last week took our daughter to the medical centre up on Erdington High Street. It makes no sense. Stockland Green, you know --- the whole of Stockland Green believes in this, and I would like to know where Gareth is getting his ideas from that Stockland Green wants to be part of Perry Barr. I do not know nothing about Perry Barr but I do know plenty about Erdington in the last four years that I have lived there, and I am proud to live there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. That is really useful information.

MR SAVAGE: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is great to hear from residents as well.

MR SAVAGE: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I just want to add one thing here from Sam.

MR HARTLEY: I just wanted to say to people who have spoken this morning, and obviously have been questioning some of the speakers, so I just wanted to be clear, and this is all on our website: there is a second consultation period next year. It will be the spring of next year, where you will all get a chance to see what has been submitted and what has been said, and there will be --- that is the opportunity then to put in your counter-claims, counter-evidence, against what people have said today, so it is really useful that you come along and say this, and we are looking forward to hearing more during the day today, but that is not it. There is the rest of the consultation, then there is a second one in spring, and that is your opportunity to cross-examine, effectively, what people have been putting to us during this consultation period.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very important. Thank you, Sam. That is great, and Sam is running the Boundary Commission at the moment, so --- just to say, is there anyone else in here now who wishes to speak, or who has a slot that I have missed? Clearly not. So, we are now going to take a break, and we have a pretty full

itinerary after that, so if we can all be back here at 10.50, please, and go from there?
Thank you very much.

Time Noted: 10.30 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 10.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, hello again. All ready to reconvene, and it would be great to get going immediately with our first speaker, who is Adrian Bailey, the MP for West Bromwich West.

MR ADRIAN BAILEY MP: (MP for West Bromwich West) Yes, thanks very much, and can I make it quite clear that I have not come to object about the substance of the proposed boundaries. Just for the record, however, before I go on to those, I just would like to say that I completely disagree with the basis on which they have been drawn up, but I recognise that does not come within your particular responsibility, but would just like to say that a system which reduces the number of MPs, effectively making them less accountable to individual electors, is anti-democratic. The increase, or the so-called cost savings, will have to be compensated by extra staff, and of course, this is in the context of the Government that is increasing the members of the House of Lords, therefore offsetting any potential savings in the reduction of MPs by bolstering up the costs of an unelected, undemocratic second chamber, but having said all that, I would just now go on to the boundaries as they have been outlined for West Bromwich West.

I said when I started that I was broadly in favour of them. That does not mean to say that I think they are ideal. I would have liked a constituency that was completely, shall we say, embedded in the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough, but I recognise that with the criteria that you had to work to, that is impossible. However, what has been done, and I think it is of benefit, is that you have not split any wards. If it is difficult dealing with two authorities, dealing with, shall we say, split wards, becomes even more difficult, as the parliamentary elected representative.

In addition, I think there are actually some advantages in the proposals for the Tipton area to go in with Dudley over and above the existing situation, where it is in West Bromwich West, and the reason for that is that the town of Tipton and the wards that comprise it border on Dudley and do not border on West Bromwich, and I think it is fair to say, the great majority of electors in Tipton feel far more identity with Dudley than they do with the centre of West Bromwich, and indeed, if you look at the facilities that they use in Dudley, there is the Castle Gate Leisure Centre, which is on the border but within the Dudley area, and comes within the new constituency. There is the Black Country Museum and Zoo, again, major centres, which many Tipton people identify with and use, and, of course, Russells Hall Hospital just comes within the constituency.

Probably more Tipton residents use that than they do the Sandwell hospital, and from the point of view of an elective representative, having a hospital that your residents and electors use, and you represent the same area, undoubtedly is an advantage.

I believe there are some possible counter-proposals. I have not seen them, so I cannot comment on those. I may put in a written submission afterwards on those, but overall, I think the Parliamentary Boundary Commission has done a decent job, given the difficulties it had to work to, and the changes are perfectly acceptable to me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. It is very important to us that we do hear the positive reactions as well as the negative ones, so that we can get a good balance. Is there any question from the floor on those comments? In which case, thank you for your time. We really appreciate it. We are now going to take Pat McFadden, please, the MP for Wolverhampton South East. Thank you.

MR PAT MCFADDEN MP: (MP for Wolverhampton South East) Well, good morning everyone. My name is Pat McFadden. I am the MP for Wolverhampton South East and have been for 11 years, and I am here today to make some comments about the initial Boundary Commission proposals for the new constituency of Wolverhampton South and Coseley, which comprises much of the existing Wolverhampton South East constituency but also two wards from the existing Dudley North constituency.

I acknowledge that the Boundary Commission has got a very difficult job to do here. It has been handed this task by Parliament; it has not chosen the quotas or the criteria itself, and therefore I look at the proposals in that light.

Like all parliamentary constituencies, my constituency of Wolverhampton South East has been through this process twice now – in a way, three times, because we had two maps in the last Parliament – but twice through this proposal, and I would like to focus my remarks this morning on the contrast in the approaches taken in the last Parliament to this one, and set out why I believe that the approach that the Boundary Commission has taken this time is much the preferable one.

The constituency of Wolverhampton South East is centred on the town of Bilston, and although Bilston has been part of Wolverhampton for local government purposes since the 1960s, it is a very distinct Black Country town, with a very distinct sense of history, identity and community, and if you asked anyone from Bilston, “Do you live in Wolverhampton?” the likely answer would be, “No, I live in Bilston”. So, I think it is very important for the Boundary Commission to understand that. In fact, previously, the constituency was called Bilston, and the name was changed as a result of Boundary Commission’s proposals --- boundary changes, some decades ago, but whatever the change of name, the point I want to make to you is that that distinct sense of history and identity and community has lasted and is still very, very strong.

Now, the proposal last time, in the last Parliament, for boundary changes struck at the heart of this sense of community and identity. Bilston, at that time, under the proposals, would have been split four different ways across three different local authority areas, and this would have destroyed any sense of coherence in political representation for people living in Bilston, and for that reason, it was fiercely opposed in the town. There was a very strong campaign called "Keep Bilston United", which went across political parties. It involved voices from churches, small business, community associations and so on, and some people said, "Well, the Boundary Commission will never listen to you", but thankfully, the Boundary Commission did listen, and the second map produced was a much more coherent proposal than the first map, and Bilston, in a sense --- the campaign was called "Keep Bilston United", well, Bilston, in a way, was put back together again in the second map. So, that is what happened last time.

Turning to the proposals this time, which were published in September, I am pleased to say that the mistakes of the initial map five years ago that was produced have been avoided, and I believe that the Boundary Commission has produced a much more coherent proposal this time around. Bilston has been kept together. The wards of Bilston East, Bilston North, Ettingshall, Spring Vale, all kept together in the new constituency. Looking south, the Coseley East ward, which is just south of Wolverhampton there, part of Dudley is already part of the Wolverhampton South East constituency, so I also welcome the fact that Coseley's place is recognised in the proposed new name of the constituency, and I think that is going to be welcomed in Coseley, so we already have a strong link with Coseley, the Coseley community has strong links with Bilston. It has been part of the same constituency for some years already, so extending the constituency southwards into Dudley to include the two new wards, as it were, of Sedgley, and Upper Gornal and Woodsetton, makes sense in terms of how the community has been represented up until now, so all in all, I believe when we look at the approach the Boundary Commission has taken to this area this time, compared to the initial proposals, and I stress, the initial proposals, last time around, these are much, much more coherent.

So, I am here today to speak in support of this proposal as it affects the area that we are talking about at the moment. I understand that some alternative proposals may have been submitted to you. I have not seen those, but one thing I would say when we are thinking about this issue of identity and community is that I think that the idea of keeping wards together is important, and splitting wards can have a damaging effect here. We already have constituencies which are crossing local authority boundaries. That can work. I have operated in that way, representing Wolverhampton South East already, because I already represent Coseley East, which is in Dudley, but I think if wards are split, that adds a further challenge to people's sense of coherence and identity. Now, the Boundary Commission has a job to do in producing constituencies which fulfil an electoral quota, and that is very important, but it is also important that these constituencies are coherent in terms of identity and sense of community, and political representation also matters in that sense, so I hope that is something that is

borne in mind as the different representations are made, but that is all I would like to say this morning.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mr McFadden. That is very useful indeed. Any points of clarification from the floor? In that case, thank you for your time. Much appreciated.

Mr Knight? Would you like to speak now? Mr Julian Knight, and a reminder: you are being filmed and that we need your name and address.

MR JULIAN KNIGHT: (MP for Solihull) My home address?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. Now, can we bring you round so everyone can see you if you are speaking? Or the House of Commons address is fine.

MR JULIAN KNIGHT: Thought so.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry.

MR JULIAN KNIGHT: Yes. That is fine. Julian Knight MP. Can I start?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Please do.

MR JULIAN KNIGHT: Thank you very much for giving me the slot today and also, you said about wanting to hear some positivity. I want to start with some positivity for you. I want to congratulate you for all the hard work you have undertaken in this pretty taxing issue of the boundary changes. There are some positives about what you have proposed for Solihull and I would like to touch on those first.

The incorporation of the name Shirley within the constituency name, which at the moment is down for Shirley and Solihull South, the incorporation of the Shirley name, I think it is a very important, very positive step. Shirley is a very distinctive community that, although it sees itself very firmly as part of Solihull borough, still itself sees itself within a twin town relationship with Solihull itself, and I think for a long time now, they have felt as if actually, they would be better, and I have had this correspondence from members of the public and also on the doorstep, that they would like to see the Shirley name recognised within the constituency name, so I want to pass on my thanks for that idea.

You have also mentioned within your proposals the idea of incorporating the Blythe ward within Solihull constituency. I think this is a very positive step and actually, already, many residents --- I receive a lot of correspondence from residents in Blythe, who think that I may be their MP, because Blythe itself very naturally looks northwards to Solihull, in terms of shopping and major services, and surrounded by the two sides of

the M42, the actual outlook of the ward is northwards to Shirley and then on to Solihull town centre, and the provision of major branded supermarkets is also in this direction.

The northernmost portion of the ward has the postal line of Shirley in the address, and so combining the ward of Blythe with Solihull and Shirley makes sense for local residents, who effectively see the divide of parliamentary constituencies in that area as very arbitrary indeed, and as I understand it as well, this also corrects a historic change that happened when it comes to Elmdon and Blythe, in that, in previous constituency boundaries, I believe that Elmdon has been in the Meriden constituency and that Blythe has been in the Solihull constituency, and this basically, then, returns Blythe to Solihull. The natural boundary with the M42 provides a natural break between constituencies, much in the same way that rivers traditionally used to shape constituencies. At present, Blythe is the only ward in the Meriden constituency which is south of Solihull and west of the M42. This creates a defined geographical boundary to a constituency. Since previous boundary revisions came into effect, there has been large-scale development of the Monkspath Estate within Blythe. These properties are of a housing estate style, both the detached and semi-detached style, in a built-up area, which shares more characteristics of the wards within Solihull constituency, which is and remains a borough constituency, than they do with the more leafy and rural areas which currently make up the county constituency of Meriden, so I think that the idea of moving Blythe within Solihull is a very natural step in that respect.

Now, one area which I think is probably less positive is the idea, basically, of crossing, overlapping, with Birmingham across Solihull borough. We have a unique status, Solihull's unique status in the edge of the West Midlands and Birmingham, whilst not being part of the city, because people choose to live here to be living in a town environment, so crossing boundaries with Birmingham is not overly welcome with local residents, and the Commission itself stated in paragraph 49 of the initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries, in the West Midlands document, that it would be possible to create two constituencies within the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council area, yet decides not to. I believe the Commission should look again to keep the area of Solihull Council between two constituencies with the ward swap of Elmdon for Blythe, and that itself would work out in terms of the numbers for both constituencies. I would also caution against any move as well to incorporate, for example, Sheldon within the Solihull constituency. Previous commissioned drafts in the last parliament, and the initial draft, had this in place. It was quite arbitrary at the time. Sheldon forming part of Solihull constituency, are wards --- would disregard the fact that Sheldon identifies with Birmingham and also, there is not as much natural crossover as there is, for example, with Blythe and Solihull constituency.

So, I think that, in the main, there are some positives. The recognition of Shirley. I think the Blythe ward within the Solihull constituency makes sense, but I and I would also mention as well that local councillors Alex Insley and Kenneth Hawkins also support the idea of Blythe coming within the Solihull constituency, but I would just reiterate the point

that Solihull itself, if it can possibly be made to have two Members of Parliament, as is supported by the local Green Party, I believe, in their earlier submission through Cllr Williams, I think that would be a really positive step and retain our uniqueness and the ability of MPs to better serve their constituents.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Just one point of clarification. You have not mentioned, but we have heard a lot of talk in the last two days about Dorridge and Knowle.

MR JULIAN KNIGHT: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you have any views on that?

MR JULIAN KNIGHT: Well, I think that Knowle is naturally part of the Meriden constituency. I think that there is a lot of alarm that I have picked up on amongst local residents about these changes. I think some of that is also washed over into Dorridge as well, in that regard, and we have seen a lot of --- you would have been presented, I presume, with petitions, or letters from local constituents as well, in Caroline Spelman, Meriden's constituency, and I completely understand the alarm that many of them feel at the idea, effectively, in terms of Knowle being pushed into a town that seems to be many miles away rather than the borough that they have identified with for a very long time indeed. I think that, in essence, I think that the idea of trying to keep two MPs within the borough is one, I think, that, as you state on page 49, I think it is something that we should try to look at again and potentially try to achieve.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Very clear. Any questions on this? Points of information? In which case, really grateful for your time for coming here today.

Could I now call Megan Williams, please?

MS WILLIAMS: Thank you very much for taking the time to listen to the views today, following the release of the initial draft proposals. I am a resident of Sheldon, and I have been living there since birth.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you give us your address as well, please?

MS WILLIAMS: I do have it written down. I have to say now?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You do, yes, I am afraid.

MS WILLIAMS: 42 Mardon Road. So, I have always considered myself a resident of Birmingham rather than Solihull, and I would like to see Sheldon ward remain in the

Birmingham Yardley seat as it stands. There are excellent schools in the area, excellent services, excellent links to Birmingham city centre. I have always used Heartlands Hospital, and to go shopping in Birmingham itself, so for me, it does not make sense to move a ward which falls under the boundaries of Birmingham and move that into a constituency which would primarily have the interests of Solihull at heart, so, obviously, into the new Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North, which has been proposed, the Meriden constituency. So, in the same way that I believe that Sheldon should remain a part of Birmingham Yardley, I would also like to see Blythe a part of the Solihull constituency. It seems that the M42 does provide a natural boundary, and I believe that, like I identify primarily with Birmingham, I believe that Blythe constituents would probably identify themselves more as a resident of Solihull. They would obviously use the services which Solihull has to offer, the hospital, and the links into Solihull itself.

Overall, I feel that the Commission should recognise the existing boundaries more and create two constituencies within the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, which the Commission said could be possible.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed.

MS WILLIAMS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Again, very clear for us. Are there any questions? Points of clarification? In which case, really grateful for your time. Thank you.

Is Hayden Walmsley here? Again, if we could get your name and address, please?

MR WALMSLEY: Yes, of course. Hayden Walmsley, 3 Crummock Avenue. Although a Nuneaton resident, it seems to me the Commission has got the north of Warwickshire relatively correct. I have lived mostly in Nuneaton but also I have had a lot of dealings both in terms of work and also through other residential, across Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, and to me, whilst the north of Warwickshire works pretty well, and the way it seems to me the Commission has worked to take Solihull, Warwickshire and Coventry together, I have got, certainly, a concern about the way the south of the county, Coventry and Solihull particularly, are developed.

So, if I can, if I may start, make some general points about, sort of, the Warwickshire area and then move specifically on to the Solihull area. The concern, it seems to me, is that Solihull as a borough was almost an afterthought in the initial drawings-up, particularly looking at the seats of --- within the borough have been ripped across three council boundaries, each seat, respectively, crossing a council boundary, namely, into Birmingham, Coventry and also into Warwickshire. A large number of friends and colleagues who still reside within the borough are incredibly unhappy about this. As we

have heard already from the town's MP, they live in Solihull because they feel not part of Birmingham. The council also, as I understand, locally passed a motion that I believe was unanimous, that supporting the idea, as we have heard already, the Commission's suggestion that it would be possible to have two seats within the Solihull borough and as the Commission acknowledged. As I said, keeping it better, simple transition between Blythe and Elmdon, a switch there would mean that the two seats remain within tolerance, and a number of my friends live in the Shirley, and again, as the Member of Parliament there said earlier, as we heard shortly before, Solihull, Shirley residents like the idea of Shirley being recognised within that and are remaining a Meriden seat. As we have already heard a little bit, the Blythe boundaries and the borders on the M42, which I regularly go up and down, are an incredibly --- well, a very clear boundary. You know, a three-lane, four-lane running section of motorway throughout the eastern border of the ward and the southern border of the ward, though slightly just beyond the southern border of the ward, make a quite clear distinction and quite notably forced to go upwards from there, and the facilities they use, police, shopping, other municipal sorts, are all in Shirley and then onwards into Solihull.

Again, we have heard a little bit about why Birmingham wards, namely, in the proposal, Sheldon, should not really cross into Solihull borough, and just the points I certainly would like to add, having been in Solihull, is that if you had an accident, all residents of Solihull, like those in Sheldon, would have to travel to Heartlands Hospital, which is within the Birmingham Hodge Hill constituency as is, or the current Birmingham Hodge Hill constituency, so it is not like any of those services are looking into Solihull, which does not have any Accident and Emergency facilities. Also, looking again at education and jobs, most residents in Sheldon being educated and continuing through there, and I know the Commission has asked us to look at, when we talk about proposals, the knock-on effect and impacts thereof, so I will briefly touch on that at the end now. Basically, the suggestion of two Solihull constituencies, a broadly existing Solihull and Shirley, and a Meriden with the single ward switch, would obviously have implications upon Coventry and the south of Warwickshire. I think they could be quite happily solved with essentially an independent Solihull and taking Coventry and Warwickshire together as an entity. They share a lot greater links. My local radio and TV station is all BBC Coventry and Warwickshire, the historic joins between the area, as well as transport links, health links, are all together, the university hospital in Coventry and Warwickshire based in Coventry being where we would all go for major and serious procedures, though across Warwickshire, there are lots of smaller A&E units for very urgent care.

So, in that regard, a Coventry South and Kenilworth seat would probably be a way to solve the issue of the Coventry Meriden join as proposed at present by the Commission. Keeping a Coventry North West seat broadly similar to what it is, with a couple of amends, and there being then a Coventry South and Kenilworth seat and the Coventry East, which takes the Coventry North East roughly with, sort of, Binley and Willenhall added from South Coventry.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, that is great. Anyone want to comment from the floor? Otherwise, thank you for your time.

MR WALMSLEY: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is really interesting and pretty clear. We have a little gap now. Lord Rooker, I do not know whether you would like to speak now? It is slightly ahead of your slot. Perfect. The floor is yours. I should, for the record, let it be known that, when I was on the board of the Food Standards Agency, Lord Rooker was the Chairman, but we have absolutely not discussed anything to do with boundary issues to date, and nor will we until the end of my term as an Assistant Commissioner with the Boundary Commission for England.

LORD ROOKER: That has completely ruined my declaration of transparency, which I will add to, but first of all, the name is Jeff Rooker. Address: The Barley Mow, Lower Broad Street, Ludlow, SY8 1PQ. You are quite right, Madam Chairman. We served on the Food Standards Agency together. You first interviewed me when I was a Home Office Minister in 2002, when you were the BBC Home Affairs Correspondent, and you would not stop asking questions. That was the first time we had met, but as you are quite right, we have never, ever discussed party politics in any way at all. The Food Standards Agency was a government department and I was not taking the Labour whip at the time.

Mine is a bit of an overview, really, this morning. I have not lived in Birmingham since 2003, but I have had a couple of pro bono jobs in the city that have kept me involved for a couple of years. Until this year, I was a governor of James Brindley School, which is the Hospital School in Birmingham, on 13 different sites, so it is a rather different school to others, and for nearly four years until September this year, I was the Chairman of the Neighbourhood Partnership Board at Castle Vale, which I will come to in a moment.

I just want to put one thing, that Birmingham, there has not been much criticism. I am here to support the Commission's views, by the way, in general. I have no proposals to change them, but I think it is important, because this is an innovation of going outside of the city in different areas, and I will touch on a couple of those, the fact is, during my lifetime, Birmingham has not been always self-contained. I mean, there are two wards, Oscott and Perry Barr, I think, Kingstanding at the time, but Oscott and Perry Barr, in my lifetime, were part of the Lichfield parliamentary constituency, so, you know, I do not have to go back to the Domesday Book. It is in my lifetime, there were those sort of changes outside of the city. I really appreciate the Boundary Commission respecting history, so far as Sutton Coldfield is concerned, and that applies as much to the Local Government Boundary Commission as anything else, because everybody knows the actual boundary there, going across back gardens and up alleyways, is preposterous in terms of modern conditions, but respecting that historical boundary is true. I have got one comment, because I have not seen submissions, but I did see something where

someone was suggesting the change of name. Now, the one thing about Birmingham constituencies, if you look up statistics about Birmingham constituencies, you can never get them in one place, because all of them begin with a B except for one. In other words, the prefix "Birmingham" is not in front of Sutton Coldfield, so it is never on the same list. It is always separate, and I have had arguments with people over this, where --- the psephologists or whatever they call themselves, about what the views are of Birmingham, and I say, well, actually, you have not discussed Birmingham because you have forgotten to look at Sutton Coldfield. It is part of Birmingham. I mean, the fact is, it is an integral part of Birmingham; has been since 1974. I would not argue about the "Royal", because I do not want to fall out with any friends in Sutton Coldfield, but "Birmingham Royal Sutton Coldfield", at least it would keep them all in the same area.

I think the Boundary Commission has done, I mean, frankly, a brilliant job. I think the proposals five years ago, I sent in submissions at that time opposing what was proposed, completely wrong, and I think, in some ways, I suspect the Boundary Commission has actually learned from that exercise, which of course was not fully completed because of the abandonment of the process. There was an opportunity for plus or minus 7.5 per cent but that was refused by the Coalition Government so the five per cent is rigid, and I fully approve of getting as much equality as possible in constituencies. It is grossly outrageous that there are some constituencies twice, and in one case, three times, the size of others. That means people do not have an equal vote, or their vote is not equal and it is correct that we try to correct that anomaly, so I am in support of the initial proposals and I just want to comment briefly on the three constituencies which I can claim a brief qualification.

Perry Barr: I was the Member of Parliament for what I have to say is the "old" Perry Barr, 1974 to 2001, I was born and grew up in that constituency and of course, it changed in 2010. I did not do any submissions to that boundary change, and it had changed from 1974, it changed in 1983 and changed in 1997. The basis was still there but there were fairly substantial changes. It is right I think to add Newton ward of Sandwell. It is an integral part, to be honest, of Perry Barr, from a person, shopping, transport point of view. Most people do not realise it is another constituency. It also has the advantage, from an historical point of view, joining up the Hamstead village, where the constituency boundary went right through the middle, so I think because of the necessity to get the numbers right, adding wards from outside the city to the city, I think, is the right way to go about it.

You will, I would imagine, have learned by now, Birmingham is unique in many ways but it is unique in the size of wards. The average wards, when I last checked, for when I did a submission to the Kerslake Review, are about 19,000 electors. The only comparable city in England is Leeds, where the average is about 15,000. London is about a third. The wards in London are a third the size of Birmingham, so in the metropolitan district councils of this country, Birmingham is way out on a limb with huge wards. Now, I am not going to defend or attack that, but because they are so big, each ward by definition

contains several communities. It is inevitable, you have heard this morning, the very seductive points made by the representative from Erdington, which I agree with 90 per cent of what he said, but the fact is, the size of the wards mean they will have more than one community. You cannot avoid that, and therefore, we have to live with it. We have got big wards, and therefore moving a ward makes a substantial difference to the boundaries, so I think the situation for Perry Barr at the present time is --- and I am really pleased the name has been retained, by the way, because, you know, people get upset about the names. One name can be chosen from one of the wards and with all the changes that have occurred each time, the name Perry Barr has been retained, so I thoroughly approve of that.

Erdington, that contains two of my --- well, I call "my" former wards. I was not the squire; I was the representative --- Oscott and Kingstanding, but in particular, again, I wanted to support the addition of Pheasey Park Farm, but as you have heard from one of the colleagues from Birmingham, it really is not part of Walsall, whichever way you look at it. I was at a school there recently, on the Peers in Schools event, where we go round to spread the word about the worthiness of the undemocratic chamber, which has been under severe attack this morning from my colleagues in the Commons, that we have a job to do, whilst we are there, we might as well do the job, but the fact is, Pheasey has got more in common with Oscott and Perry Barr than it has with Walsall. As he said, there are miles of green belt between Walsall, there are massive family links, shopping, everything else, for all practical purposes, so I think it is ideal, and by and large, 90 per cent of the population of Pheasey Park Farm is within about a mile, half a mile, of the boundary. The rest of it is basically green belt countryside, so it is very much that --- the line there, which is the Queslett Road, the population is just to the north of that (indicating). The rest of it is Barr Beacon and the farms around that part of the area.

The issue that has come up this morning figures on the next constituency, which is Ladywood, and my only comment on that is in the sense that, for the last three-and-a-half years, I have chaired the partnership, Neighbourhood Partnership Board of Castle Vale, which is part of Tyburn ward. It is at the far end, touching the boundary with North Warwickshire, I suspect, and it is probably 40 per cent of Tyburn ward in terms of population, but again, in Ladywood, there is the need to straddle a boundary, and the boundary straddled at the other end is, of course, the Victoria --- the Soho and Victoria wards. Now, the boundary there now is one of those boundaries you cannot recognise when you are in the area. It is, like, a barmy boundary in the sense that the way the wards have been done between Birmingham and the other authorities, you cannot see a boundary. It is all one community. It will still be the same by adding Soho and Victoria wards. It will still be one community, so it does make sense because you have got to get the numbers right, but Castle Vale, as I say, it is only part of Tyburn ward, but it is a big part. It has got its own postcode, for a start: B35. I never got a sense, of chairing the partnership board, the partnership board was there because of a massive regeneration programme, 32 tower blocks of flats were taken down, and so the place

now, people queue up to live there rather than queue up to escape. Many of my former constituents were actually moved there in many years past, they did not like it but that is where the offers of accommodation went. It has been dramatically turned around, but the fact of the matter is, I never got the impression that they looked to Erdington. It is quite clear geographically, you know, it is that part of the city, but there are some substantial barriers, and it may be that people say, "Oh, well, they're putting Rover and the Jaguar factory into Ladywood", I mean, you cannot avoid that. The fact is to make the numbers right, and I think if there is a case, and it is very seductive about Stockland Green, because, you know, I am realistic about this, it is seductive, but it would leave the Perry Barr constituency boundary a couple of hundred yards from the centre of what I call Erdington Shopping Centre. Erdington does have a centre; Perry Barr never had a centre. There never was a Perry Barr centre; same as Oscott as well. It is a completely false name. Erdington has got a centre, but to have the other constituency boundary being almost so close into the high street does not make sense, and it is a marginal point, but it is the thing, I think, that shifts the balance, that the numbers have to be made, because the numbers are, I think there are a thousand voters between Stockland Green and Tyburn, so it does not make any difference which way it goes. It is still within the quota, but I think on balance, to stop having a constituency boundary right in the middle of the other constituency, I think that is the reason why I would support keeping the plan for Tyburn to be part of Ladywood. It makes for an interesting shaped constituency, as anybody in the city will know, going from what is in effect North Warwickshire, right, deepest, into almost the Black Country, if I can use that term, because that is what it starts to become, so it straddles, but it would be a wonderful constituency to represent, because it would be incredibly diverse.

So, I am here to support the proposals. In the past, there are two Boundary Commissions where I have attended in the past, both for 1983 and 1997, where I was not fully supportive and I am very taken by the fact that in your document, it is pointed out that, because people have not spoken up at the initial consultation and then the boundaries --- listen to people, the Commission has --- and then has made changes, having listened to people who opposed, they then find out loads of other people said, "We liked what you did in the first place and we don't like what you've done now", but they never spoke up to start with, and I think that plea, I think, for help in doing that, is basically the reason I am here today, because I do support the proposals and I have got other views for the location where I live, but I am going to save that until Monday next week. That completes my points that I wanted to make.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, and we look forward to hearing those other views, and absolutely the importance of hearing the positive as well as the negative, so we do not throw things up in the air that actually the majority may or may not want, but may want. Any questions or points of clarification from the floor? Lord Rooker, thank you very much. Very useful.

LORD ROOKER: I am sorry about this. I neglected to make one other point. I made the point about the wards as they are, but in so doing I am making a point for keeping the wards. I mean, you know, I do not want to get involved in the argument of splitting the south of the city; I am not so familiar with it, but splitting the wards, I mean, if we could split wards in Birmingham, we could come up with a plan to keep probably the city contained. It would be easy to do if you could split wards. If that was the rule of thumb, to split wards, but I think on the basis that what we have got with the wards we have got, they are the building blocks and I think we should use those.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you.

Do we have anybody else who is in the chamber who wishes to speak now? In that case, we are going to go for a fifteen-minute adjournment, so we are back just between quarter and ten to. Oh. Hold on a second. Sorry. Mr Gove-Humphries, would you like to speak now? You are happy to do so? It would be very useful if you could, because you are the one in the chamber who is next down to speak. So, sorry about that. Adjournment off. Thank you. So, a quick reminder that you are being filmed, and we need your name and address. Thank you.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: My name is Steve Gove-Humphries and I live at 9 Southam Road in Hall Green, in Birmingham, obviously: B28 8DG, for the record. I am just trying to balance some of my papers here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Take your time. We have got plenty of time, do not worry. It gives us time to find our maps.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Thank you very much indeed. I will not be as detailed as some people have been, because I do not have the expertise or experience, but to give you some background: I was involved in the campaign, in Hall Green, around the ward boundaries that came out originally for the city council via "We Are B28", a community organisation, and we made various submissions. Part of that submission was around the idea that Hall Green should remain Hall Green. It had a station, it had Sarehole Mill, it had various places of importance, all of which were going to be either renamed or moved out of the Hall Green ward. So, my position is fairly clear. In an ideal world, Hall Green should remain as the constituency, but we are not in an ideal world, and I am here to talk about specifically Hall Green ward and the suggestion that the Hall Green constituency, and it gets confusing if I mix up constituency and ward, my apologies, but the position is quite clear to me. I would have liked to have seen Hall Green constituency remain, but that does not seem to be the position. We are now going to have a position where Hall Green ward is going to be moved into effectively Yardley, and it is going to be joined by three other wards. I would like to read to you a portion of a letter that the Member of Parliament for Hall Green has sent to, I believe, the Secretary of the Boundary Commission, a Mr Sam Hartley, and in respect of that, I would just like to read a small section, which says:

“You sent to me proposed changes to the parliamentary constituency, including my constituency of Birmingham Hall Green. You propose not to make any changes to the two existing constituencies of Birmingham Hall Green and Sutton Coldfield, but you then, and it is in bold, quote, ‘noted that the existing boundary, Hall Green constituency, also has an electorate within five per cent of the electoral quota, but we have had to make changes to that constituency as a result of changes required to neighbouring constituencies’. I fully understand that the criteria which you have to work to and the fact that the rules require that each constituency must contain no fewer than 71,031 electors and no more than 78,507, but what you have done is not to make changes to the Hall Green constituency but to completely dismantle it and relocate the four wards to four adjoining constituencies”.

So, under your proposals, Hall Green ward will now be moving elsewhere. I say to you that that is wrong and I make these representations as somebody who has lived in Hall Green and thereabouts for 30-odd years, and I am aware that it is proposed that Birmingham Hall Green be effectively removed, and I do object, and in forming my views, I do so for a number of specific reasons.

I think there is an artificiality of lumping Hall Green ward into Birmingham Yardley, where it will join Acocks Green, South Yardley, and Stechford and Yardley North. This is a wholly artificial construct. They do not take into account paragraph 7 of the Boundary Commission for England rules under the legislation, I would suggest. They ignore local government boundaries, and of course, the new 2018 boundaries for local wards just announced, in terms of the homogeneity of Hall Green ward and its long built up ties with other wards within Birmingham Hall Green.

The direction of travel for Hall Green ward is up from the areas of Sparkhill and Sparkbrook, now Springfield ward, into Hall Green ward, and this is how the new local authority boundary is to be constructed, with Hall Green North expanding further into Springfield, and obviously, there being a Hall Green South ward. It is a move northwards and not to the east, towards Yardley, and in fact, Birmingham Hall Green has always looked west, and these are its historic links, I would suggest, and I suggest that it would assist the Boundary Commission if they were to look at some of the maps that are produced in the ward maps for 1911 to 2000, a set of local election results produced by some academics from the South West, I think the university of Plymouth, Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, and if you see those and look at those, and I would ask you to take those into consideration, I cannot produce them to you at this stage but I am happy to send you a link to them in due course, I think you will see that Hall Green has been Hall Green for a very long time. People in Hall Green like the name Hall Green, they like to live in Hall Green, they were the people in the Hall Green ward who made some of the most vociferous representations to the Boundary Commission about keeping Hall Green and I am pleased to say that after those representations, which involved a number of very large public meetings, something that

is quite rare in Hall Green, you took on board that particular position and redrew various boundaries. I say to you that you could consider that again.

Now, how do you define a community? Gosh, it is extremely difficult, and we will all say these are the communities we live in, and we know what those communities are, and I would respectfully suggest that the Boundary Commission do take on board local opinion and I know that is why it is an open consultation, but Hall Green has been Hall Green for a long time. People identify with it, and people move and look towards the west, I would suggest, not towards the east. They look north and west, and if you were looking for a way of looking at the diversity of Hall Green ward, one might look at some of the key indicators that you can do, and I do not have the up-to-date figures for 2015-2016, but there are a number of key indicators that you can look at. You can look at them in areas of deprivation. You can look at them in terms of education. You can look at them in terms of house ownership, of unemployment, youth unemployment, mortality rates. All of these figures show that Hall Green does not have the same social make-up of the wards that I have mentioned that it is suggested that they join. If you look at Hall Green in terms of education, you see that Hall Green is seventh in the city, with A to Cs at GCSE, 70 per cent. If you look at Acocks Green, it is 22nd on the list. Stechford and Yardley North, 23rd, and down at South Yardley, 38th. Those are the figures that I have got; perhaps they have moved over the last and current years. I do not have those figures, but clearly, you will have those figures, and I would ask the Boundary Commission to take on board that. The same may be in terms of the religions that are identified in particular places. I do not have the total breakdown for Hall Green ward, but certainly, in Hall Green constituency, it is substantially different. On the figures that I have seen, the Muslim community or people who identify as the Muslim community: in Yardley, 20 per cent; Hall Green, 46 per cent. Hindu: in Yardley, 1.4; Hall Green, 3.4. Sikhs: 2 per cent in Yardley; 3.6. Christian: in Yardley, 51 per cent; and in Hall Green, 26 per cent. Now, I am sure you can break down those figures into terms of wards and whatever and you will have greater access to those data, and I apologise for not being able to give you exact figures, but I am sure that you will be able to put your hands on those. What I say is, that starts to give you a narrative about the different types of community that we have, and that is why I say that we face west and north, and not east, because that is where the links have been in the past, with Billesley, with Brandwood, with Moseley. There is a greater fit with those areas than there are with the wards that it is suggested that Hall Green join.

If we look at multiple deprivation, and of course, all the maps show, and they are coloured maps, again I will send you links to what I have seen so you can compare and contrast. You look at national ratings and Hall Green does not even get close to the deprivation that is in Stechford and Yardley North, South Yardley and Acocks Green. Child poverty, again, fuel poverty: they are all figures that are completely different from those three wards, which have a number of really challenging problems, and again, the fit, if you look at the figures, would suggest that we have a greater affinity and a greater community link with Moseley and Brandwood and Billesley, all westward facing.

So, the area of travel, I say, is, to use it bluntly, is up the Stratford Road towards Hall Green from maybe Springfield and Balsall Heath and places like that. So I think we need to take that into consideration. We also need to take into consideration where people were born. A large proportion of people in Hall Green ward born outside this country. A greater churn, a greater difference and diversity, but similar to ones in Moseley and various other places. I cannot give you a map today saying where the roads should be drawn, but what I would invite you to do is, re-look at this in terms of Hall Green ward and say, Hall Green does not say it is particularly special. Hall Green says it wants to be Hall Green. It wants to have the name Hall Green. Much as I am sure that the people of Yardley constituency, an ancient name, going back for many, many centuries, perhaps, would want to reserve and keep the name of Yardley, Hall Green has been Hall Green for a long time. The people of Hall Green identify with other parts of the city. That is what has kept the social cohesiveness, I would respectfully suggest, that is important, and one of the parameters and criteria that Parliament set when it gave you in 2011 the decision that we had to move forward to look at boundary changes.

So, let us not lose Hall Green. Let us re-examine the map. Let us say move westward. I cannot have what I want, which is the status quo; that appears to be something that is outside anything that other politicians are talking about, or other people, but I really do not think that we should be just plonked --- I am trying to think of a non-pejorative word, because I do not have anything against those communities in other parts, but I just do not think it is an easy fit, and I think that you should look carefully at what Hall Green said in the last consultation and bring that up and think, Hall Green is a special place, a place that Tolkien lived in, a place that has a history, Sarehole Mill, it has a long and good tradition, and that tradition should be preserved, as it should be preserved with the people of Yardley. We just do not necessarily think that that fit is good, for all of the reasons I have set out. I am sorry I do not have a map that I could provide to you, which would draw out all those particular places. I hope that this has been useful, and thank you for the opportunity of coming here today to put forward this. I put forward this on a personal basis, not on any political grounds, not on any grounds of saying that I have a representative, a community, all standing behind me saying that that is what going to happen, because that would not be true. I am here as an individual, but I think I am somebody who has lived in that area and can properly reflect to you the subtle nuances that are about here. I know you have a very difficult task, you know, and I wish you well, because, you know, there will be lots of losers, perhaps some winners, but I do hope you will take into consideration some of the points that I have raised, and I will send you those links in due course.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Really interesting. Do not go away yet.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We really appreciate you coming and giving us such a wide picture. Do we have any questions from the floor, first of all? Points of clarification?

MR PRATT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. A point of clarification. I fully understand what you are saying --- Roger Pratt, sorry, from the Conservative Party. I fully understand what you are saying. You would like a constituency called Hall Green, including Hall Green and possibly Billesley, Moseley, Brandwood and Springfield, or parts of those, but obviously, that does have a problem in terms of Yardley, and you mentioned Yardley. Clearly, you think the other three wards would go with Yardley, but do you have an idea of another ward that would be more suitable in Yardley rather than in Hall Green? I wondered, as clarification, whether you had had any thoughts about that?

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Gosh. That is quite a difficult question, because I had not really applied my brain to the wider picture. Perhaps people would criticise me for that very fact, that I have not looked at a wide city map.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is fine.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: It is, in a way, I have come here with a very self-centred view about Hall Green, but I can understand that argument, and I do think that Yardley is represented by an MP who is vociferous, and I am sure would make all of the representations that will be necessary for the people of Yardley in due course.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think that is absolutely fine. We want to hear from people like you. Is there any other question? We have got one at the back. While we are taking the mic over, Sam has just got a point to make.

MR HARTLEY: It was just, Mr Gove-Humphries, I just wanted to remind you that the consultation is open till 5 December, so if you do have any more thoughts about it, this is not your only opportunity. You can write to us, catch one of my staff on the outside and they will give you the email address ---

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: I am grateful. I did not see your name there, Mr Hartley. I apologise for perhaps quoting some correspondence. It was not private and confidential.

MR HARTLEY: No problem.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: I anticipate it was in the public realm. It was sent to me. It did not have any imprimatur that I could not quote from it.

MR HARTLEY: I get quite a few letters.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Of course, all I would say, Mr Hartley, is presumably when all of the disclosure comes about, the letter that you wrote to Roger Godsiff, which I have not seen, will be in the public realm and people can comment on that ---

MR HARTLEY: It is.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: --- because I may have quoted it out of context. I do not know. I would not want to criticise anybody for that. I have only seen one side of that argument, and I obviously understand that you want to see all of the arguments.

MR HARTLEY: Exactly, and my point was simply that if you have further thoughts about what you have told us today ---

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Oh, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity ---

MR HARTLEY: --- please do send them in.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: --- and in fact, what I will do is, from now on, I will publicise it on our website, ask people to make sure that they do submit to you, to 5 December. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is absolutely right, and you are going to send us those links as well.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: I will do.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have another question for you.

MRS GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Thanks very much. You spoke about direction of travel ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you just say who you are, please?

MRS GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Yes. Alison Gove-Humphries. I am married to this man and I come from Hall Green.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Being barracked from the right-hand side, even. I hope it will not be a difficult question.

MRS GOVE-HUMPHRIES: You spoke about direction of travel and we are thinking about wards we might want to link up with. Am I right in saying that many of the families who now live in Hall Green have extended families who live in Sparkhill and Sparkbrook, and have moved up the Stratford Road to Hall Green, and am I also right in

saying that, historically, we were linked with Brandwood and Billesley to the west of Hall Green, and now we are linked with Sparkhill, Sparkbrook?

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Well, you are absolutely right, Ali. That is the position, and of course, people in some ways, have moved up over the generations. If you take communities in the, say, Sparkbrook area, and Springfield, we had a very large Irish community many, many years ago, and then they moved to the outer parts of the suburbs, and the same is still happening with the inner city now, so yes, the direction of travel is all in my way one way, and it is not east. It is west. I think we should be westward facing. Brandwood, Billesley, Moseley, they are a better fit for that particular constituency. Yes, indeed. I will do my homework better next time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think you did very well. Thank you very much indeed, that is great. No further questions, I am assuming. Thank you very much indeed for your time.

MR GOVE-HUMPHRIES: Thank you to you. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our 12.00 speaker is Charles Regan. Is he here? I do not think so. So, we are going to take a five-minute break, because it is nearly five to now, and --- actually, let us call it a ten-minute break, just in case, and give him time to settle down and go from there, so, 12.05. Thank you.

Time Noted: 11.55 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 12.05 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we are ready to resume. Just a reminder to those who have joined us that we are being filmed and that anyone who takes the podium, please could you make sure that you give us your name and your address? Our next speaker is Mr Charles Regan, please. If you speak down here, give us your name and your address, we will put a map up of where you are going to speak about, and there is a pointer sticker there, if you want to --- Northfield. There is a pointer thing, like this, if you wanted to point any bits out. We will get it up there, anyway. Fire away.

MR REGAN: Right. Thank you. Charles Regan, Birmingham Northfield, 69 Wychall Lane, B38 8TB. I would like to speak in opposition to the boundary review, for a number of reasons. The first reason being that, while the population of the city and of the country has been growing, it makes little sense to cut the number of parliamentary representatives who are elected to represent our constituents. The workload and the caseload of politicians, MPs, has grown and grown over the years as society becomes

more complex and people's needs become more complex. It makes little sense to reduce the number of MPs at a time when the public need greater representation and our politicians need to be more accountable than ever before.

Secondly, I do not need to use the pointer; the map, I think, is self-explanatory. The shape of the new proposed constituency is curious, to say the least. Whereas Birmingham Northfield, at the moment, is roughly even in shape, this seems to be some sort of hotchpotch, some sort of mish-mash, of a number of regions, which seem to be cobbled together with no enormous thought in mind, in order to actually do this. It simply does not make sense to break up what is a constituency which has been there for many years, which works as an entity, and to turn it into something like this.

Thirdly, I would oppose the boundary review, because there does seem to be some evidence that the boundary changes would favour unfairly one political party over another and would lead to the Conservative Party, at the next general election, enjoying an unfair advantage in terms of the demographics of each seat. Thank you for listening.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Before you go away, just to point out a couple of things: firstly, we are absolutely here to talk about the boundaries, to let every person, whoever they are, have equal weight and equal influence over what we decide on. Me and my colleague here, David Latham, have, although we are from the Boundary Commission, we have not been party to drawing up these plans.

MR REGAN: Of course.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are absolutely here to hear what local communities have to say, but we are restricted by the law, we have absolutely to stick within the law and use the data that we have, therefore things like discussing the number of MPs, we cannot do anything about that whatsoever and we are absolutely not here to listen to party politics played against each other. We are absolutely dealing with the boundaries.

MR REGAN: No, of course. I quite understand that, but I am making those points for the benefit of the review.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, and before you go again, some points of clarification from the floor, it looks like.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much. Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. You said that you thought the proposal for the Birmingham Northfield constituency was a hotchpotch. I wonder if you can indicate which areas might go better with Northfield rather than the ones they have put in.

MR REGAN: Well, I would suggest that the four wards which comprise the current Northfield constituency perfectly adequately and fairly form a representation. That is Weoley, Longbridge, Northfield and Kings Norton.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Anything else from the floor? Thank you very much for your time and for your clarity.

MR REGAN: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could I call Jack Dromey MP, the MP for Birmingham Erdington, please? Thank you.

MR JACK DROMEY: (MP for Birmingham Erdington) Good afternoon, Ms Gilmore, and panel. Can I start by saying that I think ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We just need the --- officially, for --- so sorry.

MR JACK DROMEY: My apologies. I am Jack Dromey, proud to be the Member of Parliament for Birmingham Erdington. If I can just say some preliminary points, I think the proposal to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600 whilst substantially increasing the numbers in the House of Lords is wrong and anti-democratic. I do not think it is in the public interest, and I will say something briefly about that, but having said that, given that the Commission is constrained by its terms of reference, I think that the approach that has been adopted by the Commission has been characterised by an integrity of approach producing proposals of integrity, for example, respecting ward boundaries.

On, then, therefore, the terms of reference laid down by government, if I can just say briefly, before I turn to some specific local issues, reducing the number of MPs is anti-democratic. It reduces the voice of Parliament by eight per cent. Less MPs means greater demand on Members of Parliament, in the case of Erdington, by 8000 electors, and I would simply make this point about the constituency I am proud to represent, that it is rich in talent but it is one of the poorest in the country, with huge demands. I think it is wrong that the first electoral register since IVR from December 2015 is wrong, as it has artificially devalued the number of electors, particularly in student and majority ethnic minority areas, who are disproportionately affected by IVR. I think it would have been better to use the electoral register for the EU referendum, as there were 1.75 million more people on the electoral register and engaged in the political process. This was not the only regressive decision, however. The fact that a leniency of only five per cent was decided on, rather than the standard ten per cent, has meant that it has been incredibly difficult to take proper account of community ties when mapping constituencies, but forgive me if I say this, Madam Chairman. In the circumstances, I

think the Commission has done really quite well in terms of what it is proposing for Birmingham.

If I can turn, then, to some specific local issues, and tell a story of the Stockland Green dad from three years ago, with a ten-year-old daughter and a three-year-old daughter. The ten-year-old daughter, about to go to Stockland Green High School, in Stockland Green. The three-year-old going to Featherstone Children's Centre in Stockland Green. Their medical practice, the Stockland Green Medical Centre in Reservoir Road, in Stockland Green. They use, however, the walk-in centre at weekends in Erdington High Street. They shop in Erdington High Street. The postcode of Erdington High Street is B23, even though it is predominantly in Stockland Green. They use the swimming pool in Erdington, and the library in Erdington. Typically, therefore, representative of those strong ties between the wards.

Now, believing as I do, Madam Chairman, that it is always very important that you actually ask local people what they think, I do not want to pretend this has been a scientific survey, but in the 24 hours since I have been alerted to a counter-proposal that has been put, I have had a series of discussions, including with Slade School parents, Yenton taxi drivers, those who use the Highcroft Community Centre, asking them about how they identify, and they all say the same thing: that we are Stockland Green in Erdington. In Erdington. B23, and B24. Now, there is also very strong economic, and community, ties. On the economic front, as I said earlier, Madam Chairman, the constituency may be rich in talent, but is one of the poorest in the country. I have therefore a fierce focus on strengthening the local economy and the creation of jobs. If I can give but one example, there is an excellent organisation called Erdington Works. Brings together a whole range of statutory and voluntary organisations, on ladders of opportunity, particularly for young people, but with an overwhelming focus, not exclusively, but an overwhelming focus on Stockland Green and Kingstanding. The East Birmingham plan that, right now, we are talking to the city council about, and the local economic partnership, East Birmingham as a whole, but with a fierce focus on Stockland Green and Kingstanding. If one looks at community organisations, if I can just take but one. Home-Start is now called Erdington and Stockland Green Home-Start. It started life based in Slade School, in Stockland Green. It is now based in the Baptist Church in Erdington. It operates across, however, the boundaries between those wards. If I can take another community example, Witton Lakes. What you see typically is people from Stockland Green and Kingstanding, particularly the Perry Common area, who come together to improve the environment in which they live, the Chair lives in Kingstanding, many of the people concerned live in Stockland Green. They collaborate together in a highly innovative and inspirational way. I never thought in my former being that I would ever go on duckling watch, but that is precisely what they did. A group across the two wards coming together to patrol the area at particular times of year to ensure that ducklings are able to flourish. On the cultural front, Madam Chairman, if I can just take but one example. This Friday coming, we will be having the Stockland Green community Awards. 200 people from the

statutory and voluntary organisations, the rich tapestry of the local communities, predominantly Stockland Green, but many of the organisations. Stockland Green, Kingstanding, Erdington. They cross those boundaries. Strong historic relationships, and just a recent example is that I am now working with the Birmingham Rep, with a view to Erdington being one of those areas in Birmingham where there is a pilot project taken in terms of arts for the people. Now, there is already a rich tapestry of arts but we want to build on that, and the focus will be not exclusively but predominantly on Stockland Green and Kingstanding.

If I can just say two things in conclusion: I am truly proud to represent the constituency. I have been associated with Birmingham for 35 years. I am truly proud to represent the constituency, and I spend my life going up, around and over Spaghetti Junction, and every time I then get on to Gravelly Hill, what do I see? Welcome to Erdington, in Stockland Green. We then do down Gravelly Hill towards Six Ways, you get to Six Ways: Pride in Erdington, which is an excellent logo. Pride in Erdington, but you then look at the actual junctions, and it is three in Stockland Green, one split between Stockland Green and Erdington, and two in Erdington.

So, Madam Chairman, I may not like the overall process, and to be frank, I do not, but having said that, I fully accept the constraints within which the Commission has got to operate. My very strong view is that the proposals in relation to Birmingham are proposals of integrity, and crucially, this test. In terms of varying from those proposals, are there exceptional circumstances which might lead the Commission to reconsider? I would strongly argue that no, there are no exceptional circumstances. I hope that therefore is helpful.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very helpful indeed, Mr Dromey. Any questions from the floor? One of the issues that has come up is Tyburn, at the bottom (indicating). Do you have any comment on that, which is now going into, is it, Ladywood, if I am right? Yes, Ladywood.

MR JACK DROMEY: The --- well, if I can just say two things, very briefly. I mean, one is the obvious point, is that --- about the overall situation. We are where we are. I mean, the law is what it is. The Commission has got to do its job. On Tyburn, what is quite interesting about Tyburn is that the stories I told earlier on about how people identify themselves, because I just happen to think that is really important, how they identify themselves, in economic terms, in cultural terms, in personal terms, where they live, how they describe their community, is that in Tyburn, people tend to talk in terms of, "Oh, I live in Castle Vale", or "I live in Pype Hayes". There is not the same Tyburn identity as there is a Kingstanding identity, for example, and of course, the proximity of the two with good transport links, I understand why the proposal has been made, but forgive me if I say that I am reluctant to endorse every aspect of this process. The key thing is, given the constraints that the Commission has had to operate within, has it

taken a look at the city as a whole and come up with proposals for the city as a whole that make sense? Yes, I believe you have.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any further points of clarification? Thank you.

MR JACK DROMEY: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you for this opportunity.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You are welcome. The next speaker on our list is Nicholas Stephens. Thank you. A reminder that you are being filmed, and that we need your name and address, please.

MR STEPHENS: My name is Nick Stephens. I am from Seven Star Road in Solihull. Chair of the Solihull and Meriden Labour Party, which covers those two constituencies, and a former councillor for many years in the Chelmsley Wood part of Solihull, and can I first of all say, we are all very aware of the difficult job the Commission have had to do, and the tight constraints that the Government have imposed on them, and congratulate the Commission for the job they have done, which is certainly better for the Solihull area than the one that was proposed five years ago, although I know that the proposals have caused a lot of anguish in other parts, like Warwick and Leamington, where I think all the counter-proposals submitted so far are trying to put Warwick and Leamington back together, but I do want to say in a few minutes why I would support the Labour Party counter-proposal that was submitted yesterday by Mr Cook, and I was not able to be here when he put the proposal before you yesterday morning, and I apologise, therefore, if I am repeating a lot of what --- some of what he might have said, but it is for emphasis, and I would say first of all that I accept local authority boundaries are very much one criteria that need to be considered, and in the Borough of Solihull, we could fit two new constituencies in the borough, like we have now, but we are mindful that that could not be the case elsewhere, like in Coventry, where they have to go down from their present three constituencies, but I do want to stress that other considerations need to be taken into account, such as local community ties, and the present Meriden constituency, I would submit, with the long neck that goes up in the north of that constituency, covering areas like Chelmsley Wood and Castle Bromwich, has very little in common and never has had as much in common with the areas in the south of that constituency, like Hockley Heath, Cheswick Green, Knowle and Dorridge, and I do speak as a former parliamentary candidate for that constituency, going back to 1992.

So, the Labour Party counter-proposal, which widens that northern part of Meriden constituency, or as the Boundary Commission's proposals now recall or rename the constituency of Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North, by adding Coleshill and Water Orton as well as the Sheldon ward of Birmingham, to that constituency, because we feel both have more in common with areas like Chelmsley Wood than the existing areas, like Knowle and Dorridge, in the southern part of Meriden constituency.

Our proposal does also keep the existing Solihull constituency intact, so that there is absolutely no change to that constituency, minimal change, which is another thing that lends itself to the Commission, and the other big thing that we feel our counter-proposal has going for it, is it keeps Knowle and Dorridge together, which are very much a community, almost a mini-version of Warwick and Leamington. They run into one, and the Commission's proposals plan to cut that community in two, putting Knowle over with a constituency based largely around Coventry, whereas our proposals do say that we should keep the three Solihull wards of Blythe, Knowle, and Dorridge and Hockley Heath in with a Stratford-on-Avon constituency, and this is, we feel, far better than the Commission's proposals of a single orphan ward, Tanworth in Arden, coming upwards from Stratford, going the other way, so the three Solihull wards that we are proposing, Knowle, Dorridge and Hockley Heath and Blythe, going into a Stratford constituency, would be almost half of that constituency and would keep that community much more together in terms of cohesion, and in fact, they are putting some of that area back into Stratford that was there before the review in the early 1980s, the area around Hockley Heath, Cheswick Green, that part of Blythe ward. That always used to be in Stratford-on-Avon constituency, and it would be putting it back in.

So, in conclusion, in the few words, the few minutes, I have got, I would ask the Commission to look again at the proposals, take a stronger consideration within the restraints they have got of local community ties, keeping those together that are a natural community, and not trying to push areas into another area that they have got little in common with, like Knowle going into Coventry, just to balance the numbers up, so I would ask you to look again and take seriously the proposals that Mr Cook submitted yesterday. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We are certainly going to look at everything that we hear today, and take into account the community issues. Let me just ask if there are any questions. Do we have any questions or points of clarification?

MR PRATT: Thank you very much indeed. Through you, Madam Chairman, I would just like clarification on --- sorry, Roger Pratt, from the Conservative Party. I beg your pardon. The clarification on something you said right at the beginning of your contribution. You said they were a lot better than the proposals in terms of Meriden last time, which I think you meant the aborted review, I wondered why they are a lot better than that, and how does that link in with the proposed constituency of Meriden that you were proposing?

MR STEPHENS: Well, I think, last time, and going back over old ground, I have not got all the details here, but Castle Bromwich in the north was going to be hived off into Birmingham Erdington as an orphan ward, and then the bottom bit of Dorridge and Knowle, and part of Meriden, was going right off into Kenilworth constituency, going south-east of Coventry, where, again, it had little in common with parts of Shirley in the

Solihull constituency, so the whole thing was going to be broken up into four constituencies, none of which were going to be wholly contained in the local authority borough of Solihull, whereas our proposals are that at least the Solihull constituency would stay absolutely intact, and would be in that one borough, but because of the knock-on effects elsewhere, we would have to, you know, look at Meriden being divided up, but at least keeping communities together, which the proposals from the Commission do not do, and we feel, with Knowle going off into Coventry, with Meriden ward.

MR PRATT: Perhaps you could just confirm how many local authorities your Meriden constituency that you are proposing would consist of?

MR STEPHENS: It would consist of three local authorities at the moment, yes.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much.

MR STEPHENS: Thanks.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any further questions? Thank you very much for your time and your input. Is there a Mr Verne in the room at the moment? In that case, our next speaker is not due for another ten minutes, so we will now adjourn until 12.40. Thank you.

Time Noted: 12.30 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 12.40 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, we are ready to resume, and our next speaker is Andrew Hardie, if that is okay. Could I remind you that you will be filmed, and we will need your name and your address, please. Thank you.

CLLR DR HARDIE: I am Dr Andrew Hardie. I am a retired GP. I am also a city councillor in Birmingham, and I live in Bournville Lane in Birmingham, in the current Selly Oak constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

CLLR DR HARDIE: My evidence really relates to the Northfield constituency, because my last practice, where I was for over 25 years, was actually in Northfield, so we had patients from the whole area, Northfield, Longbridge, Kings Norton. I have carried out surgeries in different parts of the area over my career, as well, Brandwood, for instance, and my concern, really, for all the areas where I have been, both as a GP and politically,

is that we need to have a relative degree of cohesion in the populations, because although diversity is a popular word, I think it is vital that we are able to concentrate on certain particular types of problems, and become --- gain more expertise in those matters. It is important from --- it relates, really, to the difference between a clinic and a general practice surgery, where the surgery are dealing with all sorts of problems coming in, and you are trying to assimilate different things, but if you are in a clinic, you are dealing with the same thought processes, and it is a far more effective way of dealing with problems, like diabetes, whatever, and it relates into the political field as well, because if you have an MP who is dealing with a lot of the similar issues, and also similar people across a population, it is a lot easier to grasp those issues and to relate to the population that you are representing.

I think the difficulties arise if you try and mix up problems, to a large extent. It is far better, for instance, I mean, I was involved in a case in relation to --- a sad case of a Muslim death and the problem was of getting the burial done within 24 hours, and this involved me speaking to the General Medical Council, but it was a very specialised issue, and it would be far better if somebody who was dealing with a lot of those problems was dealing with that issue. In the medical field, as well, because this relates to populations, MPs are going to be dealing with medical problems, and if they get a feel of how that population and their diseases relate, it is much easier to deal with problems when you come to Parliament, for instance. If you are trying to deal with widely varying types of problem, then I think you will end up not getting useful representation. I think it is far better that you have somebody who is an expert in particular types of problems, and the thing that I have noticed for many years, working in this area, is the populations, Northfield, Longbridge, Bournville, are relatively homogeneous, and that relates also to Brandwood, as well, and I would have concerns as far as representation, adding in Moseley and King's Heath, because my understanding is that this area would be better linked into other areas, because of the difference in the populations which one has there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. I totally understand what you are saying. Does anybody have any point of clarification that they would like to put? One question, which absolutely, if you cannot answer it, do not worry, but --- sorry, we will take the question first and then I will come back, if not. If you could do it through me, and it must be a point of clarification?

MR REGAN: Right. Okay, Chairman. Would you prefer it if the constituency boundaries for Northfield remained as they are now?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you just remind us of your name, please, Sir?

MR REGAN: Charles Regan.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

CLLR DR HARDIE: I think if --- we are likely to get changed, so I think the situation would be that the proposed boundary changes would fit in with what I would regard as a natural constituency. We have had many changes over the period of time I have been living in the south of Birmingham, and I would look at the proposals of having Longbridge, Northfield, Bournville and parts of Brandwood, as a homogeneous area, so I think that would fit in with the pattern of homogeneity, which would reflect what I have been saying, and I would presume the numbers would fall into place as well.

MR REGAN: Okay. Can I ask for some clarification on that? You mentioned homogeneity quite a few times during your presentation. Do you not think that the Northfield constituency, as it is presently constituted, based as it has been historically upon the growth of what was the Austin car works, which has become the Rover car works, is not homogeneous enough at present?

CLLR DR HARDIE: I think there is a degree of sense with that. I would not look at the proposals here and say that this does not fit with what I have been saying, so I would go with a degree of homogeneity and the proposals for the new Northfield with, including, bits of Brandwood, would fit well with what I have been saying.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And I am getting that there is another question, but, just before we come to that, the thing that worries you most is the very top, there, of the Moseley and King's Heath ward, that you feel does not sit comfortably? (Indicating)

CLLR DR HARDIE: Yes, that is right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is ---

CLLR DR HARDIE: Yes.

MR PRATT: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. You mentioned Longbridge Northfield, Bournville, and part of Brandwood. Is there not a ward between Brandwood and Northfield, which I do not know whether you should have mentioned or wanted to mention?

CLLR DR HARDIE: Yes, Kings Norton. Sorry, yes, I am not really with it, with my cold, but yes, Kings Norton is part of where the, as I have mentioned in my initial discussion, we had the --- I had patients in Kings Norton, Northfield, Longbridge, so yes indeed, that would be --- adding that in would be a sensible proposal.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, I think you did mention it, actually. I have got it in my notes here. Any further question there? Thank you very much indeed. Oh, there is another one here.

MR MURRAY: David Murray from the Liberal Democrats. Could I ask what your view is with regard to Weoley, which is part of the current Northfield constituency, because you had not mentioned that at all?

CLLR DR HARDIE: I think parts of Weoley could fit in, potentially, into a homogeneous area. I would agree with that, but I think the proposals put forward because of the numbers game would be a sensible proposal to run with.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Anyone else? Thank you very much indeed. That was a really useful input, and appreciated, and we will take it into account.

Our final speaker has not come yet, so I think we are probably going to break for lunch, unless anybody in the room, I know there are some people who are speaking this afternoon, if they want to speak now, they may, raise your hands. No? You still have your slots this afternoon. Not a problem. So in that case, I think, because the last speaker has not turned up, we will adjourn for lunch now and reconvene at 2.00 pm. Thank you very much indeed.

Time Noted: 12.50 pm

After the luncheon adjournment

Time Noted: 2.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and it is a slightly diminished group of people, but we are delighted to see you, and just a reminder that my name is Margaret Gilmore. I am Assistant Commissioner here. David Latham is the other Assistant Commissioner, and everything that is said in this room, we will take into account. Neither of us have been involved in the drawing up of the initial plans. Everyone who comes to the podium should be aware that we have a camera that is filming, and we require that everybody gives their name and their address. Anything on the administrative side, we have got the Secretary, Sam Hartley, who runs the Boundary Commission for England, and so he will deal with anything on that side of things. So, let us call our first speaker, who is the Reverend Dave Tubby.

REV TUBBY: Good afternoon. I realise that I have the first one after lunch, so that is always one of the complicated ones, is it not? So, my name is Reverend David Tubby. I am the Minister of Northfield Baptist Church, which is at 789 Bristol Road South, Northfield, B31 2NQ, and I am grateful for the opportunity to help input into the Boundary Commission's provisional recommendation for the West Midlands, and

specifically, Birmingham. The original proposals have been of great interest to me, because I have seen it as an opportunity to be constructive and helpful into a process which I am sure has been a complicated one to organise, and against a political backdrop which is clearly complex.

Putting both of those things to one side, I was encouraged to read of the desire within the original documents to consider how communities would be affected, and in its own words: "What we do not yet have is evidence and intelligence of how our proposals reject or break local community ties. One of the most important purposes of the consultation is to seek evidence that will enable us to help review our initial proposals", and as Minister of Northfield Baptist Church, I hope to be able to offer some initial observations in that regard to our area, which I trust you will find helpful. As well as being the Minister, I have the privilege of being actively involved in community life within Northfield, and I am Chairman of a local community leaders' forum, the Northfield Stakeholders' Group, which covers all four wards of the current Northfield constituency. In the time that I have been in Northfield, I have seen a community growing with confidence and assurance in tackling some of the practical issues that it faces on a daily basis. Over 51 per cent of our population falls within the most 20 per cent deprived areas in England, and it also has the rather sobering statistic of having the highest percentage of people paid below the living wage as agreed by the Living Wage Foundation than anywhere else in the country, and 11 years on, it is still feeling the effects of the Rover collapse. In my time here, I have seen a community which is growing in its desire to develop and to move forward. It has a real sense of togetherness in that, and Northfield Stakeholders' Group is a strong reflection of that. It is made up of dozens of businesses, charities, government agencies, churches, schools, community groups, the police and many other organisations besides, and there has been a growing sense of identity and desire to work together for the good of that area.

It is a community which is proud of what it has achieved, and proud of what it seeks to achieve. It is held together by a desire to grow together and a vision for a bright and positive future, where new local business initiatives like Smart Works go arm in arm with our annual beach and our carnival, which attract thousands and thousands of visitors each year. It is a place where welfare projects make a massive difference to lives locally. Northfield Community Partnership, one such organisation, has provided practical support for over 12,500 people across the constituency this year so far. It is a place which has become very defined, and whilst I recognise that the new framework is based around the need to have capacity for between 71 and 78,500 registered voters, the current proposal, I believe, runs the risk of tearing that identified community apart. One section of the border for the new Northfield constituency splits the focal point for Northfield itself, the high street, in two, where one half remains within Northfield. We find ourselves in the strange situation where the other half potentially is faced with sitting in a constituency stretching all the way out to Halesowen. My own church, Northfield Baptist Church, which sits on one side of the High Street, would, as things

stand, fall into that Birmingham Selly Oak and Halesowen constituency. If you see on the map there --- so, there we go (indicating). That is the area, in particular, there. That is the High Street in Northfield, and this is the dual carriageway, the Bristol Road, and the by-pass, going round. The proposal is --- that bit there is Northfield High Street, so one half would fit into the new Selly Oak and Halesowen constituency, and the other half would fit into the Northfield one, if that makes sense.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

REV TUBBY: Thank you, and I accept that there is a need to draw the boundary line somewhere, and I also recognise that the current boundary follows the existing ward boundaries, that of Weoley and of Northfield, and on the left-hand side, on the western side, is Weoley, and on the eastern side is Northfield. Living in separate wards is one thing, but I think living in different constituencies and the High Street being right down the middle is something very different indeed. There is a real sense of community cohesion and identity that is known within Northfield, which would suddenly come down to which side of the High Street do you live on? Which side of the High Street is your business or organisation involved in? Straightforward matters suddenly become far more complicated, particularly with activities which cover the whole of central Northfield. Regular community events like the beach, and festive activities like those at Christmas and Easter, would be hugely affected, I believe, and organisations who have worked closely together to support the local economy and community would suddenly be forced to align themselves with a community which lies largely over five miles away and outside of the Birmingham ring road, or try and overcome the complications of having two MPs covering one high street, which in itself is a complicated thing, I am sure.

I welcome the Boundary Commission's keenness to consider the impact on the local communities and to listen to what these communities feel about them, and I have had the opportunity, the privilege, in my role, to talk to many people about the Boundary Commission proposals, and most local people have said to me they are concerned and a bit surprised that the centre of Northfield would be split in such a way, and I have been asked to relay these concerns in this time today, and I hope I have adequately done their concerns justice.

So, then, taking all of that into consideration, what is the best way forward? I do not believe it is helpful to be able to say, "Here is a problem", and not offer any alternative as a suggestion. I guess one of the options may be to re --- move things, so that Weoley fell into the revised constituency, but I recognise too that that may impact on the number of required voters that that would accommodate. Another alternative may be to work in a different basis, so that the ward boundaries were not as rigid, in that respect, for that particular area, whether that could accommodate the High Street, both sides of the High Street, and incorporate the Ring Road rather than the High Street as the boundary, I do not know. I heard what Richard Burgon, our MP, said, when he spoke to you yesterday, and I agree with him about the potential merits of a spoke-based system

going into the centre of Birmingham, and the sense of identity that could be fostered through those important bus routes in and out of the city. I think that has the potential to help bring Inner and Outer Birmingham closer together, ideologically, and also has the potential to deal with the thorny topic of splitting communities like Northfield in half, out of a need to keep within a strict number of voters. That could be done to incorporate very defined communities constructively, where there is already a sense of collective identity and affinity, such as I see daily in Northfield, and in Longbridge, and the surrounding area. I believe that could be a creative solution to what is clearly a very complex task, but in summary, I would specifically urge you to reconsider that particular aspect of the constituency boundary line, because I think it could have a detrimental impact on the centre of Northfield, and the people I represent in Northfield believe that to be the case, too, and I would again encourage you to look at creative ways to help develop a real, lasting sense of community cohesion across all of Birmingham in a way which I hope, and I am sure we all hope, could bring long-lasting and positive change throughout this wonderful city. That is all I have to say, so thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. That was really useful. Thank you very much.

REV TUBBY: You are welcome.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Let me just see if anyone has anything to ask, any point of clarification? Otherwise, no. Thank you very much, and it was very clear to me. I hear what you are saying, and we will take it away and have a look at it. Thank you.

REV TUBBY: Thanks.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could we now have Douglas Osborn, please?

CLLR OSBORN: Thank you, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner.

MR HARTLEY: Is there any particular constituency you want up there?

CLLR OSBORN: Well, I have a bit of a difficulty there. I represent this particular area here, which is called Weoley, but I am, in effect, due to the --- oh, I should not be able to do that, should I (indicating)? Naturally, blame myself.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Lovely, and we obviously need you to tell us who you are and your address, please.

CLLR OSBORN: Right, well, I was elected for Weoley in 2000, just after the problems that we had at Longbridge. In fact, at that stage, the Northfield constituency, of which

we were a member, was one of the highest-paid areas of Birmingham, but subsequent to the demise of that, and you can blame who you will for that, it has now become one of the least. Now, that puts us fairly and squarely in ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Name and address? Just for the record. I do apologise.

CLLR OSBORN: Oh, I am sorry. It is when you introduced me, I thought you knew who I was. Peter Douglas Osborn, 1 Spring Hill Passage, which is Birmingham, B18 7AH.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Please go on.

CLLR OSBORN: Right. So, what you have is a peculiar thing. Although we are talking about Northfield, Weoley was in Northfield, and is not projected to be so, the point I would make here is the same problem that we have with the Northfield constituency, and that is, it is segmentalising. I know it does not look quite like that, but the principle is that you are taking away from it the character of a suburb and you are putting in, in the Selly Oak case and with the Moseley and King's Heath case, an area as a, sort of, without being rude to it, a more bohemian area rather than, shall we say, a leafy suburb of mainly blue-collar operatives in this area here. So, I agree very much with the Reverend Tubby on his dissertation earlier on. Very erudite and explains, I think, where we are coming from in terms of what has been mathematically arranged, and we were trying to put some clothes on the idea of it being characterful.

Could I then go back to Northfield, please, sir? Thank you. You will see it is an extended constituency, and, as such, it has more than one character, and more than one character too many, and it would be far simpler, I think, personally, to put in this area here, which is Kings Norton, and it then becomes a more cohesive area. It is a suburb for the centre of the city, and it means that this particular area, and going back to the previous constituency, this particular area, Selly Oak, are capable of being incorporated in the Selly Oak constituency, which would be made up of those areas to the east of this particular area. So, what I am saying is, the character of Northfield, Longbridge, and Bournville, now we have got rid of the factory here, is mainly residential, although there is a considerable retail area here, it is part of the character, and this area here is a considerable mix of both municipal and private housing, a very happy mix, and I would very shortly say that that would be the cohesive area, where the character would be maintained, as opposed to a split area, and obviously, with a split, if you are representing that in Parliament, you have conflicting reasons, I think, for both support or against any particular policy, and that is what we want. We would prefer to have the majority represented, and that is what I am suggesting here. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I think that is very clear, and thank you also for offering an alternative idea, which we will look at very

closely. Any points of clarification? Otherwise, we will take our next speaker. Thank you. Could we have Mark Parker, please?

MR PARKER: Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Mark Parker and I live at 160 Stroud Road, Shirley, B90 2JX. I am here to talk about the constituency of Solihull. The easiest and most logical solution would be to have two constituencies within Solihull metropolitan area, which are broadly based on the existing Solihull and Meriden constituencies. Solihull and Shirley, this is made up of the existing Solihull constituency, with the SMBC, by which I mean Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, ward at Elmdon removed and the SMBC ward of Blythe added. This would give the constituency with an electorate of 75,626. With Meriden, this is made up of the existing Meriden constituency with the ward of Blythe removed, and the ward of Elmdon added. This would give the Meriden constituency with the electorate of 78,247. Residents in Blythe look naturally to Solihull for their services, shopping and employment. In terms of shopping and major services being surrounded on two sides of the M42, the natural outlook of the ward is northwards, towards Shirley, and then on to Solihull town centre, and the provision of major supermarkets is also in this direction. The northernmost portion of the Blythe ward has a postal line address of Shirley in the address, and so combining the ward of Blythe with Solihull and Shirley makes sense for the residents. The boundary with the M42 provides a natural break between constituencies, much in the same way that rivers traditionally used to shape constituencies. At present, Blythe is the only ward in the Meriden constituency which is south of Solihull and west of the M42. This creates a defined geographical boundary to a constituency.

Since previous boundary revisions came into effect, there has been large scale development of the Monks Path Estate within the Blythe ward, within the existing Meriden constituency. These properties are of a housing estate style, both with detached and semi-detached style, in a built-up area, which shares more characteristics of the wards within Solihull constituency, and which remains a borough constituency, than they do with the more leafy and rural areas, which currently make up of the county constituency of Meriden.

Solihull has a unique status on the edge of the West Midlands and Birmingham, whilst not being part of a city, because people choose to live here, and they wish to live within a town environment. As such, crossing boundaries is not welcomed by local residents within Solihull. The Commission itself stated, in paragraph 49 of the initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the West Midlands document, that it would be possible to create two constituencies within the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council area, yet it decides not to. I believe the Commission should look again to keep the area of Solihull Council between the two constituencies. Previous Commission drafts on the last Parliament had the Solihull constituency extend the boundary to the north of the constituency into Sheldon, Birmingham. A repeat of such a proposal would not be something which the Commission should consider, because it would cross the local authority boundaries. Sheldon, Birmingham, forming part of a Solihull constituency

or wards, would disregard the fact that Sheldon identifies with Birmingham. Sheldon has a good provision of a range of schools for all ages, and the majority of students remain there for the entirety of their education. Solihull does not have a hospital which has an emergency unit, or which handles complex procedures. All the residents in Sheldon, much like Solihull residents, use Heartlands Hospital, which is located in the current Birmingham Hodge Hill constituency. Sheldon ought to remain in a Birmingham Yardley seat, combining four of the current wards with three from the Birmingham Hall Green seat. To solve the question of the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council wards, which were to make up the Commission's proposals of a Coventry West and Meriden, which under this proposal, would remain part of the Meriden constituency, there should be Coventry East, Coventry North West, and Coventry South and Kenilworth constituencies, as those areas have a more natural focus into Coventry for their larger amenities, where the areas of the existing Meriden constituency have a Solihull focus rather than Coventry. Thank you for that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That is interesting, and an interesting perspective on possible alternatives. Any questions from the floor? No. Really useful, thank you, and clear to me.

MR PARKER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could we now call Ron Storer? Councillor Ron Storer, and a reminder, you are being filmed, and please could you give us your name and address?

CLLR STORER: Thank you. My name is Cllr Ron Storer, and it is 113 Plumstead Road, Kingstanding. I am a councillor in Kingstanding, and I have come to talk about the Erdington proposal. I generally support the proposals, but with a couple of small changes. If we start off, I do oppose Tyburn going into the Ladywood area. Tyburn has always been part of Erdington. It is connected by a local travel, community services, high street. I also support that Oscott, Pheasey Farm, should be in Erdington, because it does reflect better, like, communities. Local travel, like the number 28 bus, it goes from Oscott, Pheasey, Kingstanding, Erdington, Tyburn, and Castle Vale, but it does not go through Stockland Green. So I actually do think that Stockland Green should be put back into Perry Barr. My notes are all over the place here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is fine. It is making sense to me, and there is a map up there if you want, as well.

CLLR STORER: Also, the --- I actually grew up in Newtown, and growing up in Newtown, Newtown has always been part of Aston. I do actually think that it should return to the Ladywood ward, as you have got the Ladywood ward, Aston, all connecting the city centre, so I do actually propose that being moved. The recent local government boundary review, the border between Stockland Green and Erdington was

retained, as it is a natural border between the communities, whereas the boundary between Oscott, Kingstanding, Erdington, and Erdington and Tyburn, changed, because those communities were spread across the boundaries, highlighting that all the areas are connected in one way. You can tell I am not used to doing things like this.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is fine.

CLLR STORER: Right. Other ways the areas in, like, the proposals, what we have put for Erdington, is the actual road structure. You have got Collingwood Road, what goes into Pheasey. This turns into Kings Road and then it turns into Chelmsley Road, actually linking all the communities together. I do not know if I have missed anything. No, I think that is about it, to be honest.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. That is really interesting, and certainly, we have heard quite a lot about Erdington and there are a lot of different opinions, but you are talking Tyburn should be back in, rather than going into Ladywood.

CLLR STORER: No, Tyburn has always been part of Erdington ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, I ---

CLLR STORER: It is a very close-knit community.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: According to the plans here, you would rather see it as well. We have one question on the floor, which we are going to put to you. Thank you, and obviously, points of clarification, sort of thing, if ---

MR KHALID MAHMOOD MP: (Birmingham Perry Barr) Yes, just purely that including Stockland Green just because of the number six --- Khalid Mahmood, Member of Parliament for Perry Barr. You are excluding Stockland Green from Erdington just purely because the number 16 bus does not go through it ---

CLLR STORER: There is a lot more. Stockland Green, I mean, it is --- if you connect Stockland Green with Witton, with Perry Barr, and all that, it is just --- I do not know. I mean, you are the MP for that area, so ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I suppose the question is, though, the feeling of community, what makes you feel that it should be where you want it.

CLLR STORER: Well, you can only have so many wards in each area, and I actually think that the Pheasey Farm, the Oscott, the Tyburn, the Castle Vale, the Erdington, the Kingstanding, it is all in the one close-knit community, and you can only have so many, so in an ideal world, if we could add more, I would be more than welcome to have

Stockland Green. My ward goes on the border with Stockland Green, so, as I said, if you allow us to have more wards, I would be more than happy to include Stockland Green, but you can only have so many, so ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any further questions? In which case, thank you very much for your time.

CLLR STORER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for coming here today. Now, if we could call you, Mr Mahmood, that would be great. The MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, and again, if you just repeat for us who you are.

MR KHALID MAHMOOD MP: Hi. Thank you. Khalid Mahmood, Member of Parliament for Perry Barr. The address is 33 Anderton Park Road, B13 9BJ.

Obviously, I am here, in principle, supporting the Boundary Commission's initial proposal for Birmingham, but if I was here on a basis of the fact that the conditions that have been set to the Boundary Commission, I would not be supporting any of these changes at all. I think we have got very good constituency boundaries already that have been set up, and we support but by reducing, the Government's proposal to reducing these from 650 to 600, I think has a huge deficit in terms of our democratic representation, and what it does do is, in a growing city like Birmingham, where the population growth has been growing, and missing out over, almost, two million across the country, and particularly in areas when we have got very extensively growing populations, there is going to be much greater workload on Members of Parliament, and it is going to be very difficult to carry on representing and dealing with all the case work that we do, it is going to make it very, very difficult for us. Birmingham is a city which has had ten constituencies and I think if we look at the proper records, if you look at the amount of people that live across all of our constituencies, you will see that we could do with another MP at least, not a reduction of an MP under the boundaries, and I find that it is going to put a huge amount of pressure on us already. The Boundary Commission's sticking ruthlessly to the five per cent margin of error is a huge amount of lack of flexibility, and I think a lot of people made representation in terms of where the boundaries will end up, and also, there is the changes to the local ward boundaries, which will exist, coming in 2018, and I think that will further have an effect on where the constituency boundaries lie, and how that moves forward.

However, given the needs that the reduction of MPs across the West Midlands --- I realise that there has been seats that unite two metropolitan boroughs. We already work very closely with Sandwell, because it comes on to, attaching to, my border. We work on a lot of the local amenities that are there, particularly in terms of the West Birmingham CCG, which we have a lot of cross-border issues in terms of health, and because we have a similar demographic across those areas, we are quite happy to do

that and to work quite closely. We have also got the huge hospital and we have got a new one coming up, being built, again, in terms of Sandwell Hospital, which currently exists, but also there will be a new hospital coming across, which will be the West Birmingham Sandwell City Hospital coming together. We share a huge amount of constituents in terms of crossing those borders, and we want to look and see how we can strengthen that. We have further education colleges, who are a huge resource to our communities, because they provide the ability for those people who have not had the chances of coming through and particularly in terms of training people, and bringing forward skills for people that are there, both the Sandwell College and the Metropolitan College, work very closely together. Only a few weeks ago, I had a visit to the Sandwell College, looking at how we can do a lot more work closer to the top end of my constituency, and see how we can, sort of, get more work done. In order to support that, I work very closely with the other two colleges, South and City College, which is in my constituency as well, as well as the Metropolitan College, so we want to try and put that synergy far better together.

The other ward that is coming in is Newtown. If you look at the overall boundaries of West Bromwich West, which is at the top there, if you look at the overall --- that bit of geographic area, it is cut off from the rest of West Bromwich West, and it has been a block that has been sticking out (indicating). There is a huge synergy, particularly up the old Walsall Road, where there is a lot of shopping. We have got Hamstead train station just by it as well, which actually, people come to. The number 16 bus route actually has been mentioned before, goes through that, and a lot of people actually feel affiliated to this part of Perry Barr, because they have always lived together and crossed boundaries together, and they feel very much isolated, so I very much agree with the changes that are being made there in order to allow that community to come together.

Overall, I think, if you look at the boundary changes that have been made, it is regrettable that I have lost Oscott. Oscott has been a very good part of my constituency, where I have made a lot of friends. A lot of communities have been coming together, and we have done some, sort of, very, very good work in relation to that, but Aston coming in and the previous discussion that was made about how it fits in with Ladywood, up to 2005, I had, initially, half of Aston into my constituency and we worked together. One of the big area issues that we have in Aston and Lozells and East Handsworth, is to deal with issues around gang violence and gun crime, and that provides that bit of nexus. It is an issue that I have to work along with my colleague Shabana Mahmood across the border to try and deal with this. Putting that into one constituency actually makes real sense because there are a lot of serious issues in relation to how we deal with some of that, and putting that under one constituency, putting that under one Member of Parliament, allows us far greater control to be able to work with the police, to work with the community, and we have gone huge amounts of strides. In 2001, we had a very tragic incident where two young girls were shot, and we have worked ever since then, we reduced the level of crime, and unfortunately, we have got a slight peak coming up now, because that is due to another government policy,

because of the cuts in policing that they have made. It is making it difficult to do that. We want to try and get back to that. We are going to work with all the community. I do a lot of work with the church communities, particularly, across the two boundaries, in order to try and get that, sort of, synergy working with the two areas of the constituency, to be able to do that, and I find that is the best way to put that real issue, because if we do not deal with issues like that, we will end up in bigger problems as a community, and what I want to do is to having that other half of Aston, which I have not had before, together with the top half of Aston, Broadway area, predominantly, that makes very good sense, and I think one of the good things that the boundary changes, the Commission has done, is to recognise that issue of the community and put that together. So I agree with that.

Again, you know, I really want to stress the issues that people --- issues that have been raised here. In terms of giving Perry Barr Stockland Green, just because the number 16 bus does not go through it makes absolutely no sense. If you speak to anybody in Stockland Green, they feel very much a part of Erdington, and they have done. It is a good community, but you look at the geographic boundaries of the way that the motorway bridge runs, and the way the roads are designed in that area, it is an integral part of Erdington. For people here, councillors, elected members, to say that is not the case, I think the people of Stockland Green would be quite hurt by those, sort of, comments, and I find it outstanding that an elected member here, standing here for the local area, making those, sort of, things, I think in terms of Tyburn, yes, it has, but I think, in order to resolve that situation that we have had, that we have all been put under, by the current government strategy and direction towards the Boundary Commission, we have had to deal with the best that we can, and I think we have accepted that on that basis, because the Member of Parliament for there, I believe that she is quite in support of having a cross-community to be able to work with. One of the key things that have come out of this, and this also applies to Newtown area in my constituency, is that there has been a huge talk about isolating communities. What this is going to enable us to do is to actually draw together with communities, actually start to reintegrate communities together and work together on that, and from that point of view, I think all the work that has been done by the Boundary Commission has actually been positive, in order to recognise that, to be able to move forward with that. So I think that is a fantastic way of getting communities back together again, and not deciding, based on the ethnicity of that area, so you cannot cross that border. That has been a complete nonsense and I think we want to reverse that. Birmingham is a cosmopolitan city and we want to ensure that that remains. That is very important to us. Looking at where some of the other proposals - I think, the Conservative proposals - I lived in Moseley Springfield and Brandwood is where I have lived for a long time and to divide those areas, I think the communities will be devastated by that, sort of, division. There are no exceptional circumstances to divide those areas. Absolutely no exceptional circumstances, and those people, I think, would be hugely affected by those, sort of, artificial divisions that have been put forward in that. I think, overall, just to sum up my position, if I wanted to be here, I would not be here, where we are, but that is not

through our making, the Government has decided that. I am not happy with the way they have done it, I am not happy with the fact that they have not included two million of people who were able to vote for Brexit are not able to be included in this, to be able to do that, so I regret all of that, but I think the work that the Boundary Commission has done for Birmingham is positive, and I would therefore look to support it. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Mahmood. Obviously, we have no jurisdiction over the rules of engagement, as it were, for this process, so we cannot do anything about that, but we have heard what you are saying. It is very clear. We will take some questions, now, from the floor. Again, points of clarification, not cross-examination or anything like that.

CLLR ALDEN: Thank you. Hello, Khalid, I hope you are okay. You mentioned that you are speaking on the grounds of not splitting up --- Sorry, Cllr Robert Alden, leader of the Conservative Group, councillor in Erdington. You mentioned you are speaking on the grounds of not splitting up communities, and you mentioned that you supported Tyburn going into Ladywood on the grounds of community links. Can you name a community link between Smethwick and Tyburn?

MR KHALID MAHMOOD MP: Well you are actually making the wrong comparison. Smethwick is at one end, which actually fits quite well with Ladywood and Soho. Where we are trying to move forward from Nechells and onwards, into Tyburn, is effective. A lot of people working at JLR, for starters, have that, sort of, sharing both boundaries, and it is important that those people feel that, rather than just living on one side, they can actually move across that and they feel part of that. A huge amount of people working from across the city, particularly areas of Ladywood, that have actually worked in Tyburn, actually working in Tyburn, not just in JLR, there is a huge supermarket there that works there, so there is quite a lot of synergy, and a lot of people already have moved during the early period of regeneration, in Tyburn, from Ladywood, across to that border, so I do not think there is an issue of that sort of facilities. It is the people who have already moved in there have that synergy and that is why I would support it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any further questions? Thank you very much for your time.

MR KHALID MAHMOOD MP: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Could we now call Dr Kieran Mullen, please?

DR MULLEN: Hi. I am Dr Kieran Mullen, and I live at 220A Fulham Palace Road, Hammersmith, W6 9ND. I want to talk about the Northfield constituency. So, I grew up in Northfield. I lived there until I was 18. I went to the Infant School in Bournville along with my sister and my brother, and my sister went to Kings Norton Girls' School and my

brother went to Bournville Secondary School, and I was also a parliamentary candidate for the Conservative Party in Birmingham last year.

I think processes like this are really important, and the reason why I wanted to contribute is that, I think, as you know from the decision to run these processes, it is really hard for people who do not live in an area or are not from an area to understand the, kind of, intangible sense of identity that people feel to different parts of a city, particularly a big and diverse city like Birmingham, and so I felt this is a, you know --- that I have lived in that area of the city longer than I have lived anywhere else in my life, and if I could contribute that, I thought I would like to.

So, I looked at the proposals for Northfield and on looking at them, immediately the thing that stands out to me is really jarring with my sense of identity for that part of Birmingham, is the proposal to attach Moseley to Bournville, Northfield and Longbridge. I think if you stopped anyone on the street who lived in Longbridge, or Northfield and Bournville, and put that to them as an idea, I think they would think that just does not fit with their sense of where they belong in Birmingham and the other parts of Birmingham that sit with them, and I did not stop people in the street, but I did mention to my mum that I was coming here today and explained the proposals, and her immediate reaction to the suggestion that you would attach Moseley to the Northfield constituency was, "That's ridiculous". It just does not fit with how we view the area, and as it seems that talking about bus routes is popular this afternoon, if you think about bus routes, to get from the end of Longbridge to Moseley is three buses, and more than an hour, and I think that just demonstrates from a practical point of view and even from a transport planning --- even the transport planners do not see that there is a need to create direct links between those parts of Birmingham, because they are not natural routes of travel, whilst if you are in Northfield, you can get to Longbridge and Bournville in one bus route, and as is at the moment, we have Kings Norton in the constituency, the same thing, you can very quickly get to Kings Norton from Northfield.

So, I would prefer the proposals to look at how we might stick to that part of South Birmingham and include, for example, Kings Norton, which is already a part of the current seat, and if --- you might need to tweak things in that part of the city to make it work. I know you have got to make changes. I think that would be much more preferable to the suggestion of adding Moseley to that part of Birmingham. I do not think that fits with people's intangible, difficult to define, but important sense of identity in that part of Birmingham.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Anyone got any questions on that? Again, I think you have made it very clear, and we can tell from the map what you have been talking about.

DR MULLEN: Great.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for your time.

DR MULLEN: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could we now have Cllr Tristan Chatfield, please?

CLLR CHATFIELD: Cllr Tristan Chatfield, address: 52 Edwards Road, B24 9EW. I am here to talk about the Erdington constituency, specifically Oscott ward, which is the ward I represent.

I will be brief. Just, really, to say that I support the proposals that have been brought forward. Oscott has a great many shared links with both Pheasey Park Farm and Kingstanding, not least the aforementioned bus routes that we have talked a lot about today. The 28, the 33, et cetera. It has a shared shopping centre at the Kingstanding Circle, if I can get this to work, which is just round about there (indicating). The Circle Shopping Centre. There are a number of shared amenities. It is well integrated with Kingstanding, while historically it has always been part of Perry Barr, the Bandywood Estate at the top of the ward, especially, here, and further down, have always considered themselves to be part of Kingstanding, and have always written Kingstanding on their postal addresses, et cetera, so it has always had that commonality of sense across the two, and certainly, Pheasey itself is isolated from Walsall but very well connected with Birmingham through Oscott, with a shared centre around Queslett, ASDA shopping centre, and various other things along that main Queslett Road. So, as I said, all in all, I do support the proposals. Speaking in a different area, I would mention I was a resident of Stockland Green before I moved to where I do live at the moment in Erdington, and Stockland Green is well integrated into Erdington, and I think any suggestion it should be put into Perry Barr, quite frankly, is a bit farcical. I do sympathise with the people of Tyburn. I would say that it is fairly well integrated with Erdington as well, but Stockland Green has an equally, if not better, claim, to be part of Erdington than Tyburn does, certainly. So, I think that is all. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Again, very clear. Thank you very much indeed, and any questions on that idea? And interesting to hear your views on all the other suggestions that have been made as well. Thank you for your time.

Could we take Ken Wood, please?

CLLR WOOD: Cllr Ken Wood. Address is 110 Redditch Road, B38 8RD. I would like to make comment on three areas. One is obviously as a councillor in Sutton Coldfield, the Sutton Coldfield boundaries, we are quite happy with. More than happy. At the moment, though, I reside in Kings Norton, so sorry to make you go up and down.

I think, on looking at the proposals, as a resident of Kings Norton, I would like to think I would speak for quite a few residents in Kings Norton. Kings Norton has probably found itself on the tail end of all the boundary changes. It has been in Selly Oak, it has been in Bournville, it has been in Northfield, and now it looks like it is going to be changed again, but not in a particularly logical way. I realise that in rearranging the boundaries, things have got to happen, but I would have thought it would have been a lot more logical to do it in a, if you like, a less damaging way, and by keeping Kings Norton, if you like, as part of the --- you have got the Northfield boundary. Effectively, leave Kings Norton --- add Kings Norton into that one, and take the Moseley bit out (indicating). It makes the constituency more compact, and it is a lot easier from a transport route as well, and as I say, speaking from a Kings Norton point of view, it has got far more in common with Bournville and Northfield than certainly Moseley and King's Heath, so from a Kings Norton point of view, I would suggest that it would make sense to make the proposals a lot more compact, rather than spread out. So, that is the comment on Kings Norton.

The other one that I would like to make comment on is the Ladywood proposals, which seem to me to be completely and utterly out of kilter with what I would have thought the Boundary Commission was trying to achieve, and that is, again, it is not compact. It is not connected. It is just a big, peculiar shape, and I would have thought that again, to make it more compact, is to look at leaving Tyburn into Erdington, which makes far more sense from a geographical point of view, if you like. Stockland Green, move that from Erdington to Perry Barr, and I suppose the Aston bit, and pull that across into Ladywood. Again, I do not quite understand the fascination with these bizarre ways of drawing the lines. I realise that change has got to happen, because we have got to --- you know, the Government has decided to reduce the number of MPs, but it still surely makes sense, even from an MP point of view, to have as compact an area as possible and one that keeps most of, that keeps a lot of, the demographics and the commonality across it. You know, the commonality between, you know, Soho and Tyburn, I am sorry, it just is not even imaginable. So, that is what I would like to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Can I just ask you one thing? On the things you were saying about Kings Norton, you talked about adding Kings Norton and taking out Moseley, and I just wondered, it does not matter if you have not, but have you given any thought to the knock-on effect that those two moves might make? And again, if you have not, that is fine.

CLLR WOOD: No, not particularly. I mean, as far as numbers are concerned, and again, I realise that numbers have got to be taken into consideration, but not at the expense of, you know, demographics and stuff like that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Again, thank you very much indeed.

CLLR WOOD: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will now, unless there are questions --- could we hear from Mrs Janet King, please?

MRS KING: (Liberal Democrats) Good afternoon. I am Janet King. I live at 110 Linthurst Newtown, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, B60 1BS, and I am Chairman of Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats, and I am speaking on behalf of the local party on local issues, but I will add one or two comments that I think could be applied nationally.

The first one is that, really, we are not in favour of a boundary change --- well, of a reduction in MPs. We believe that they are actually overworked, under-resourced as it is, and a reduction in their numbers is not particularly helpful. That is our local view and it may not be the view of our Party. However, we are where we are, and so we are going to address the effects of your proposals and I would like to thank you for allowing us to speak today, and actually for keeping us well in touch during the Commission's work. It has been very helpful.

So, currently, Bromsgrove satisfies the requirement, actually, to have an electorate within five per cent of the electoral quota, but we do realise that in order to allow other constituencies to have that number, we do need to accept some boundary changes. So, Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch District Council work very closely together, and shared services such as planning have now been embedded into their work. They are housed largely in Redditch, so before your proposals were published, we were expecting a merger of constituencies to be Bromsgrove and Redditch. Horizontal, just based around Birmingham. So, we were a little bit surprised when the proposals were Bromsgrove and Droitwich, which is thinking, now, vertically, taking us down between the two large neighbours, between Birmingham and Worcester. In fact, Bromsgrove is washed over by green belt to prevent urban sprawl from Birmingham, although the current sprawl, if you like, is from Redditch, which as a New Town in the 1960s was not allocated really sufficient land and so at the moment, 3400 in our new district plan, 3400 new homes, are to be built in Bromsgrove but against Redditch housing, and the two are therefore working very closely together.

The proposal to merge Bromsgrove and Droitwich, we actually do accept. There is some sense in the communications are very good between Bromsgrove and Redditch. We are linked by what was formerly a Roman road, so what was good enough for the Romans is probably good enough for us. We have the M5, which is excellent communication. We have a good rail service, a less good bus service, but the Bromsgrove bus does go to Droitwich now. It formerly went to Redditch, largely, so my village, up in the north of Bromsgrove, is connected quite easily to Droitwich, not as frequently as we would want, but that is for another forum.

So, the character of the two towns and the numerous villages and small settlements are similar. They are both market towns proud of their heritage, but are forward looking,

and I would hope that Bromsgrove, with its recent excellent record on start-up companies, success with those, will be seen as a real gain by the good people of Droitwich. Much of the constituency is rural, so in principle, we agree with your proposals, but there are just a number of minor changes, which we would like to see. We propose that in the south, Lovett and North Claines should remain with Worcester, and that in the east, at least part of Tardebigge should remain with Bromsgrove. You may decide on the whole of Tardebigge, but the new Bromsgrove District Plan is proposing the large cross-boundary housing development, in this case, of 2800 homes in Tardebigge. That is to meet Redditch's housing needs, so our suggested boundary would allow this development to become part of the Redditch constituency, with possibly the western part of Tardebigge to remain with Bromsgrove, but that does mean splitting a county division, so we would accept if you wanted to take the whole of Tardebigge. It would leave me living personally right on the eastern boundary by that famous railway line. The large settlements of Alvechurch and Wythall are better connected to Redditch than to Bromsgrove town centre, and we support their inclusion in the new Redditch constituency. Politically, that would increase the Conservative vote in Redditch, but situations change. We do not agree with the practice of splitting communities, as some of the Birmingham councillors have said – communities, in our case, which have developed on both sides of a rail line – so these are villages with --- you know, you live on either the right or the wrong side of the track, and in some cases, like Barnt Green, both are the right side of the track, and we are concerned to ensure that large settlements like Barnt Green, which is a close-knit and active community, are not divided by the rail line, and left with two MPs, because we are still to be convinced that two MPs are not necessarily better than one. Just a word of caution on the use of rail and road infrastructure as political boundaries: whilst they are often excellent planning boundaries, we do urge you to use them with care as political boundaries, which would split communities rather than uniting them. Thanks very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, and very useful to know that information about the housing, which I think was quite important to us. Do we have anything from the floor on those plans and ideas? Otherwise, thank you for your support, and a reminder that obviously, we have no say about the rules within which we are carrying out this job.

MRS KING: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. Can I now call Michael Hodges, please?

MR HODGES: Good afternoon. My name is Michael Hodges. I am from 27 Bridge Street, Pershore, in Worcestershire. I am the Chairman of the West Worcestershire Conservative Association and I am attending today to make representations in relation to the proposals for the Malvern and Ledbury constituency.

The proposals are broadly similar to those of 2012. The main difference is the removal of two Bromyard wards, which were included in the 2012 proposals. Geographically, these proposals create an artificial division. Bromyard, Tenbury and Ledbury are culturally linked. Shopping and school catchments do not sit comfortably with these proposals, so I speak for many who see more logic in the 2012 proposals than the current proposals. We would recommend, therefore, the inclusion of Bromyard Bringsty and Bromyard West with a combined electorate of 4770 into the new proposed constituency of Malvern and Ledbury. To compensate, Malvern and Ledbury would potentially lose Ombersley, in the north-east. Ombersley was not originally proposed for consolidation into the Malvern and Ledbury constituency in 2012. Ombersley is a Wychavon District Council ward, not a Malvern Hills District Council ward. Ombersley has 1946 as the electorate, so the loss of Ombersley and the addition of the two Bromyard wards would imply an electorate of 78,172 plus 4770 minus 1946. I hope you are still following me. So, that would give a constituency electorate of 80,996. Too big. Geographically, therefore, the Severn separates two Malvern Hills District Council wards on the east from the balance on the west. This is the Severn here, and Kempsey and Ripple sit on the eastern shore of the Severn (indicating). There is therefore some logic in separating Kempsey and Ripple, with a total electorate of 4487, from Malvern and Ledbury. Were this to happen, the electorate for Malvern and Ledbury, with Bromyard Bringsty and Bromyard West, excluding Ombersley, Kempsey and Ripple, would be 76,509, and that comfortably sits within the Boundary Commission's parameters of 71,031 to 78,507. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That is really interesting. We have not actually had anything, I do not think, on this area, so it is quite interesting to see. Just a couple of things. Are there any areas which are developing particularly fast in --- you know, we had mention, for example, before about big housing estates and what have you, which could affect that figure of 76,000, that you are aware of? And then the other thing is, the effect of the motorway, the M5, just going through on those two wards, Ripple ward and Kempsey ward, that you were saying could perhaps go elsewhere.

MR HODGES: Yes. Kempsey and Ripple sit on the eastern side of the Severn, and the Severn is basically parallel with the M5. The M5 --- the --- Kempsey and Ripple are here, this is the M5, and this is the Severn. So, Kempsey and Ripple sit between the Severn and the M5. The difference is that there is one bridge in Upton. There are bridges in Worcester and down in Tewkesbury, but effectively, the main connection between Kempsey and Ripple and the rest of the constituency is the bridge in Upton-upon-Severn, so there is just effectively one link, whereas underneath and over the M5, there are many more links between Kempsey and Ripple and the balance of the neighbouring district council, which is Wychavon. This is obviously the area which we originally saw in 2012 as being logically linked, which is the Bromyard area here, and that obviously has the social connections, and shopping and school connections. Sorry, you had another question? Oh, it was in relation to housing? We do have a South

Worcestershire development plan, which foresees, by 2030, a significant amount of additional development across the board, effectively, focused in Evesham, Pershore, which is in Wychavon, and around the north of --- around Worcester, towards Malvern, less so in the Hereford area, but there, it will be significant additional development in due course.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We will have a look at that. Are there any questions or points of clarification? Yes, we have one over here.

MR MURRAY: David Murray, Liberal Democrats. With regard to Kempsey and Ripple, where do you intend those to be accommodated? Are you intending them to go with Worcester, and the same with Ombersley at the north end? Is that intended to be part of the Wychavon constituency or the Kempsey and Ripple part of a Wychavon constituency?

MR HODGES: In terms of links --- thank you, that is a very good question.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And that is obviously if you have a view on it.

MR HODGES: Thank you. That is a very good question, and we obviously looked at that. The logical links, because you have got, obviously, parallel with the Severn and the M5, you have links up and down in this direction more so than in this direction, so there is a logic to considering an extension of Worcester through down to Kempsey and Ripple. Equally, Ombersley sits comfortably with the north part of Worcester. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Any further questions? Thank you very much. Very interesting. Could we now call, please, Luke Davies, and, as ever, name and address? Thank you.

MR DAVIES: Hello. So, my name is Luke John Davies and my address is 259 Cartland Road, Stirchley, B30 2RD, part of the Bournville ward of Birmingham, and it is Birmingham Northfield I will be speaking on. So, the --- I would like to make a couple of comments from other people about the boundary review, as total, being, sort of, arbitrary, unnecessary and politically motivated, but I think, having been, sort of, forced into this position, which I understand is not your choice at all, I think the current proposals are the best proposals that are available for this part of Birmingham, so I therefore want to speak in favour of them.

I was actually born in Stechford, although my mum was born and raised in Moseley, and it was always planned that the family would move back to the south-west suburbs of the city, to be near my grandparents, who lived in Bournville, so we actually moved back when I was six and lived in Cotteridge, which is the bottom part of Bournville, next to

Northfield, and that is where I grew up. I grew up there until my university days. My parents divorced in my early teens and my dad moved to Longbridge, and then I split my time between Longbridge and Cotteridge, and now I live, as I say, in Stirchley, which links Bournville to Moseley and King's Heath, and I would also like to think that, sort of, my background sees that I understand the character of these areas, and I would also take a little bit of issue with the comments of the gentleman from the Conservative Party earlier, saying that he takes three buses to get from Longbridge to King's Heath. Well, as I said, my dad lived in Longbridge, I lived with him for a while, and I worked in a pub in King's Heath at the time, and if you walk ten minutes up the Bristol Road to the Black Horse, you can get the number 27 direct to King's Heath Park, so possibly, that level of local knowledge is why he was an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, I would suggest. Anyway, moving on, so, the --- sorry, I am just going through my notes.

I was trying to work out, because to me, it seemed very obvious, and when I was discussing this with my mum yesterday, it seemed very obvious that they are linked, and that there is a certain cultural affinity between the areas, and I was trying to work out why, basically. There are practical reasons, so, for example, just down the road from me, Bournville Village Trust has a huge amount of housing and that actually currently straddles the border between Bournville and Northfield as does the Masefield estate, slightly further down the road, so at the moment, there are constituent blocks, if you like, of people who straddle the current border, who would be reunited under the current proposal for the new constituency. Bournville College is located in Longbridge, and moved there a few years ago, and again, you know, a huge number of people commute between, sort of, Bournville, mostly, King's Heath, and Stirchley, down to Bournville College, either to teach or to study. There are also transport links. As I said, the number 27 bus goes straight through the middle, as well as the Cross-City line, which there are four stations stretching through the current proposal on the Cross-City line, and, you know, I live in Stirchley, I commute either way, either down to Bournville or Northfield shops, town centres, or to Moseley or King's Heath in the other direction. They are about equidistant and I do not see them as particularly different when I move through there, and there is also a lot of links in terms of green spaces. You can actually walk from Northfield all the way up through green spaces to Bournville. You can then move on to the River Rea and walk all the way up to King's Heath and Moseley without really going through town spaces. There is a whole deliberately planned, sort of, green cycle route that links all those areas.

When I started to, sort of, think it through, and why I feel that these areas are linked in terms of their character, it was actually around the Cadbury factory that started me thinking again, which links into the green places, because obviously, the whole ethos of Cadbury's was to have the factory in the garden, so you have the Cadbury factory, which dominated the culture around that area of the proposed new constituency, and the Austin works that then became MG Rover, where I did my school work experience, down in Longbridge and Northfield, but the culture is not actually manufacturing, particularly. It is more craftsmanship, and if you go back to the origins of both of those

factories, they are craftsman's factories. They were not the assembly line kind of things that we see today, and although the, sort of, robot age has driven that out, that culture and that character has remained, and that is the key link, to me, between Moseley and King's Heath, which those who know the area will know, has very strong history of craftsmanship, of independent, small businesses. They will not allow any chains, for example, to open in Moseley Village, and that spirit of having a craftsmanship, a certain pride in your work and a pride in what you do, and a pride in your community, is what links, to me, these four wards. So, that reason, you know, for me, is why the culture is the same, but I think it is also worth --- I have been, sort of, sitting at the back and seeing alternative proposals from other people, and it is worth saying why I do not think it would be a good idea to add in Kings Norton or Weoley or Brandwood or Billesley, and that is, the current proposed constituency has a very broad range of socioeconomic groups, whereas the --- you know, you, kind of, get, like, people in drinking a pint of beer in Northfield in the Black Horse, and people drinking a glass of wine in Moseley at the Fighting Cocks. Although they are quite different, socioeconomically, that culture is quite similar, but I think if you removed Moseley and King's Heath, you run the risk of destroying the richness of the diversity in our communities, so this current proposal would have around about 20 per cent ethnic minorities within it, which is not as high as Birmingham is in general, but is a fairly good cross-section of the south-west suburbs, whereas if you removed Moseley and King's Heath and you added Weoley or Kings Norton or Brandwood, you would have a very white community. You would lose that richness, that diversity, and lose that connection between this area of Birmingham and other areas of Birmingham around it, so that would be at least one of the reasons why I would say that this proposal is better than to add Weoley and Brandwood and remove Moseley and King's Heath. So, those are the reasons why I support the current boundary, and I would urge the Commission to maintain the current proposal going through the process.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that and for giving us an insight into the local community. Much appreciated. Are there any questions from the floor on what we have just been hearing? Yes? I have got one at the back there.

CLLR ALDEN: Cllr Robert Alden. Just so I can be clear in the logic you have applied to coming to what you are thinking about. So, you are saying that the logic behind sticking with this constituency is based upon ethnic make-up of the wards more than anything else?

MR DAVIES: Well, I think it is based on the cultural affinity of the wards, rather than that, but I think if you remove Moseley and King's Heath, and add in Weoley or Brandwood or Billesley, or Kings Norton, you would lose the ethnic diversity and the richness that is part of that culture.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any further questions? Thank you very much for your time. We have quite a full session after our break. Is there anyone who wants to speak now? Why not. If you are happy to? Debbie Clancy, yes? That would be great, if we could take you now, because we do have quite a full session, so that would be lovely. And again, just a reminder to say who you are and where you live, your address.

CLLR CLANCY: Thank you. My name is Cllr Debbie Clancy and I am a councillor of the Northfield ward at present. As many of you know, there will be --- well, there have been ward changes, boundary changes, so the ward that I represent now, which is Northfield, will change to the Longbridge and West Heath ward. A couple of interesting points made today. Just to clarify, make myself clear, I object to the proposals as they stand at present. I do not agree that the Moseley and King's Heath, and Springfield, and Billesley wards should be incorporated within the Northfield constituency. Based on my experience and observations in the past 12 months as a councillor, and the residents and the constituents I deal with, this does not best reflect the ward at present or the ward to be. So, I would just like to make that very clear. One of the reasons I feel that, and think that for myself on behalf of the constituents at present, and it has been previously mentioned about the Bournville College, let us not underestimate the value and the importance of the college as it stands at present, and the majority of the students that are travelling into the college are from the local schools, Turves Green Boys, Turves Green Girls, and also, St Thomas Aquinas, which is in the Kings Norton ward, so the links are, for educational reasons, exceptionally strong. Now, I know that students do migrate in further afield, but politically and from residents' point of view, I cannot see that a constituency that includes a ward further afield, such as Moseley and King's Heath, will benefit the constituency in any shape or form as far as education for Bournville College is concerned. The students are, as I say, further afield, but the majority are from those close wards nearby. Along with Bournville College, that of course, the students that come in are usually local, therefore they contribute to the local economy, so we have the Bournville College, which now is associated with the new Longbridge regeneration, and the economy is now helped with those students that travel in, and the local economy and the families that travel in as well to do with those students.

Let us not forget the entertainment side and the new retail park that is in the Longbridge ward. This best serves the families and constituents that travel in from Kings Norton. You know, we --- other than the city centre, there are very few places now that the families can go to for entertainment, albeit a cinema or the shops, the new large shops, the new large M&S, that is something that is absolutely vital. We have Kings Norton residents who are coming in. I know this because we have literature that goes out. We talk to our residents, and we know that that is better served by the more condensed proposal that we would like to see. That would be Kings Norton, Bournville, Longbridge and Northfield, which makes up the Birmingham Northfield constituency. Moseley, King's Heath, Springfield, and Billesley are not connected. The Bournville College and

the economy that is now progressing at a fast rate in Longbridge because of the new regeneration, those are served by the train links. We --- and if you look at the train links, we have got Longbridge, Northfield, Kings Norton, Bournville. Nowhere on the train line is there a Moseley and King's Heath station, or a Springfield station, or a Billesley station. The bus services that serve the college and the economy in Longbridge are also the main Bristol Street, the main Bristol Road, so we have got that link that goes down to Bournville. Nowhere is there an easy link to Moseley, King's Heath or Springfield, so again, please bear that in mind, because it does not best serve us at the moment.

The pool, the Northfield Pool --- also linked to education, our surrounding schools in Kings Norton and Bournville use the pool that is now under regeneration. As far as I know, Moseley and King's Heath and Springfield schools do not use or will not use the new Northfield Pool when it is completed next year, so again, another point, I just do not see the sense in the proposals that the Boundary Commission have made.

Just another point on the train and bus services. We have large deprivation areas. The constituency as it stands is either affluent or not. I have to base my observations on the parts that are not affluent, and these links that we have with those residents, they tend to have travel habits that do not extend beyond Bournville. I know that because I have enquiries about it. I know that because I sit on connectivity boards. I know that because of general enquiries that come through, so really, although the gentleman earlier mentioned about cultural differences, there is a lot of cultural activity in the ward as it is, and the new proposals certainly do not warrant that to be put in place on a cultural basis. I mean, that is just a weak argument in itself, because we have a lot of cultural diversity as it is. We do not need to use that as a reason to extend the constituency up and beyond Bournville. That is all I would like to say. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Do not go away. Please come back. Before I open it up to the floor, just a question. You are talking, you are arguing to bring back Kings Norton ward and I wondered if you could tell us a bit about the community there but also whether there is any effect or relevance about the road that goes through, which I think is the A441?

CLLR CLANCY: Well, the Kings Norton ward, the proposals, our counter-proposal would be that it is actually Kings Norton ward and some of the Brandwood polling districts. Sorry, your question on Kings Norton ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just to give me a sense of the community there. You were saying it really feels better going back with Longbridge and Northfield. I understand what you are saying about that, so what is it about that particular community that would make it, do you think, needs to make it go that way rather than that way, and also, whether the road has any effect on it?

CLLR CLANCY: Well, as far as the first point, I mean, if I think of my role, as present, we deal a lot with housing liaison boards. Now, the housing liaison boards are interlinked. That is Kings Norton, Northfield and Longbridge. I do not deal with Moseley and King's Heath and Brandwood, as in liaison boards, and so when you talk and think of those extent of the links with sheltered accommodations, and residents that are under --- You know, they fall under the bracket and umbrella of the council, for whatever reason, that is very condensed and it works very well. We need to keep that and we need to bear that in mind of the housing liaison boards, and the social tenants that are in place and that are looked after by the council already, so it actually makes very good sense to keep that together. Sorry, I do not understand your point on the road?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Maybe it is not relevant at all. I am looking at a map here and I see a road going straight through the ward and I wonder if that had any effect, but if it does not, that is fine.

CLLR CLANCY: I am not sure which road, so I would rather not comment.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Kings Norton ward has a road that goes right through it. Let me point it out here (indicating).

CLLR CLANCY: Yes, sorry. The Redditch Road. Yes, the Redditch Road. Yes, thanks. Yes, which is actually on the verge of the Longbridge and West Heath Road, and some apart --- just on the cusp of the road will be the new part, I think I have got that right, the new part of the Longbridge and West Heath ward, so again, it is all very -- - I think we have got that right. It is all very interlinked. I mean, the Redditch Road, it ties up with Longbridge and West Heath.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is fine.

CLLR CLANCY: Okay, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any questions? Any other points of clarification?

MR MURRAY: Yes, David Murray from the Liberal Democrats. Just for clarification, can you tell me what area the Stirchley Baths conversion is intended to serve in South West Birmingham? Does it include Kings Norton and that area?

CLLR CLANCY: The Stirchley hub on the Bournville Lane? Would you like --- sorry, could you see it on the map? Could you enhance the map? The gentleman is referring to the Stirchley hub on the Bournville Lane. I am sorry. I do not know how you actually superimpose it. (After a short pause) I think we need to enlarge the map to be fair to me. Well, again, I mean, the train links is a very good one. You have got Bournville station literally on the corner of the Stirchley hub and I was there the other week; spoke

to residents there who are dealing with issues there, and obviously, you know, the hubs are closely linked, for various reasons, to Northfield, and further afield from the factory, Bournville Cadbury's factory, and further up towards Northfield, so I think it is very relevant.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I did not quite understand your question. Can you repeat it again? Sorry. Just to make sure we are not missing something.

MR MURRAY: It was in terms of community links. There is several million pounds, I think six million pounds, being spent on converting the old Stirchley Baths into a community hub ---

CLLR CLANCY: It has already been done.

MR MURRAY: --- for South West Birmingham, which has now opened, and I just wondered what --- in South West Birmingham, did that cover the Kings Norton area as well as the Stirchley and Bournville area in terms of its connections to the local communities?

CLLR CLANCY: Conversations I have had in my own dealings, the Bournville --- the Stirchley Hub, the old pool, is very well linked. I mean, we have got schools, obviously, as you know, in Northfield, we have got the pool closed down in Northfield, there was Tiverton Baths that they have had to redo the children's activities, swimming activities, and the Stirchley hub has had far more contact now than it ever has done before, so actually, it is very relevant.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: One further question, I think, we have got, over here?

MR JEVON: Simon Jevon, the Conservative Party. Cllr Clancy, you represent Northfield at the moment, West Heath, potentially, in the future. Could you confirm, is the West Heath area split between two parliamentary constituencies under the Commission's proposal?

CLLR CLANCY: Yes, it is. We have got it split, so we have got the Northfield under the proposal as it stands and then the Kings Norton ward is in the new proposal for Birmingham Brandwood. I have said earlier the links already as far as Northfield and Kings Norton are concerned, hence we believe that some of the polling districts from Brandwood should come into the proposals in our counter-proposal. I mean, as a whole, if you were to pick most people out of the street or off the walk and say, "Where do you consider Kings Norton to be in the constituency?" they would say, of course, Northfield. I mean, as far as general conversations go, it is just a no-brainer that Kings Norton should absolutely be in the Northfield constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Anything further? Thank you very much for that. That is great. Very interesting. We are now going to take a break until 15.50, so back here at ten to four. Thank you very much indeed.

Time Noted: 3.23 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 3.50 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, ready to resume again, for this, our last session. Just to say, we have had, by the end of this, we will have had nearly 70 people actually give evidence. That is fantastic. It is up with, I think we have had a similar number at one of the hearings in London, but way above most of the others, so it is great that Birmingham is so --- or the West Midlands, I should say, is so engaged in the process, and we have had over 100 people come into this chamber over the last two days. Just a reminder to everybody that we will be taking whatever we hear away. David Latham, the Assistant Commissioner here, and myself, and also, Sam Hartley, who is the Secretary who runs the Boundary Commission for England, who will deal with anything on the admin side and process. Everyone who comes to the podium must be aware that they are being filmed, and we do need your name and addresses. So, our first speaker is Ms Valerie Vaz, the MP for Walsall South.

MS VALERIE VAZ MP: (Walsall South) Thank you, Ms Gilmore, and can I start by saying that we have met before. I hosted an event when you were at the Food Standards Agency, but as you say, my name is Valerie Vaz, I am a Member of Parliament for Walsall South, and I suppose the address is the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. I have been a Member since 2010, and I am here as a member of the Labour Party, and Shadow Leader of the House, and I am here to support the Boundary Commission's current proposals for the new constituency of Walsall Central. Can I start by thanking the Boundary Commission for their very hard work? It is an extremely difficult task within the framework of the legislation. There were extra electors added just before the referendum in June, which actually have not been taken into account under the previous legislation, but this legislation basically said that the parliamentary seats have to be reduced from 650 to 600, which of course, I absolutely do not agree with. Having said that, I will turn to the proposals now.

I support the proposals, especially as the Boundary Commission has used whole wards as building blocks, and I would like to see that preserved throughout the West Midlands, because obviously, if you break up wards in one area, that has a knock-on effect in other areas, and I will give you the reasons why I support the Boundary Commission's proposals. Bentley and Darlaston North is one of the wards that I live in --- there we go. That is that (indicating). That is where I live, and by its very name is linked to, as you can see, Darlaston South. The last time, the last round of Boundary Commission

proposals, Darlaston was actually split. The town was split into two, and local people were very upset about this, and there was a lot of concern, but this time, it remains part of Walsall South and the successor seat of Walsall Central, which is very welcomed. As a member of the BME Asian community, I can confirm that it is a very close-knit, very supportive community. We are very supportive of each other, and it is concentrated around the town centre: Pleck, St Matthew's, Paddock and Palfrey all round there, and it is right that the Walsall Central proposals continues to respect this community, all these community ties, and keeps the community together in one seat. Now, as to the new wards that have been added, that is Birchills Leamore and Blakenall. The traditional Birchills area was split between Pleck, here, as you can see, Pleck, in Walsall South, and Birchills Leamore in Walsall North, so bringing them together into the Walsall South successor seat actually unites the community of Birchills in one seat. Now, currently, the whole town centre is in Walsall South, apart from a small pocket in Blakenall, there, which was out of the area, and this is the area around Walsall College, and the former police station, but this anomaly will be corrected by the creation of Walsall Central.

Now, Pheasey, which is up there, which I was very happy to represent, but it does fit in with Birmingham and the overall proposals for Birmingham and Sandwell does take it in fairly well. Walsall South is the town centre seat that people think of as Walsall, and to expand it into Walsall Central keeps this idea and definition, and I accept and support the current proposals for Walsall South into the new Walsall Central, and would ask the Acting Commissioner to leave their proposals unchanged, for Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley, Sandwell, and Birmingham.

Can I thank you all again for your hard work, and for listening to my evidence.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mrs Vaz. That is great. We have not heard from your area, or not very much, but we have heard quite a bit about some of the things that are happening on the edge, on the eastern, south-eastern edge, we have heard quite a bit about, so it is interesting to hear your view on that. Are there any questions from the floor on what we have just heard about the plans for Walsall? In that case, we will take that away. Thank you very much for your kind comments, and we will move on to our next speaker. Thank you for your time today. It is Mr Ram Mehmi, please.

MR MEHMI: Good afternoon to everybody. My name is Mr R K Mehmi and I am the Chairperson for Bentley Darlaston North Labour Party branch. I am here to support the Boundary Commission proposal for the Walsall Central seat. The reason for that is --- I am a chairperson. I am also a community leader, and we do hold many congregations in Darlaston North, Darlaston South and also in Walsall, because my community lives -- - Walsall --- my community lives in Darlaston, and also in Darlaston South and also in Walsall, and they feel most comfortable with this boundary, the actual Boundary Commission proposal, and we do hold a multi-faith festival as well, and also, like --- the festival where all the community get together and we are trying to form --- our proposal

is to form unity, peace and harmony, so we are quite happy with the Darlaston South, Bentley and Darlaston North, and also I have got a strong connection in Pleck and other areas, and that is the reason I strongly recommend the Committee to leave this, Boundary Commission, as it is. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions to add to that? Sorry. So, what you are saying is, your main reasoning is community cohesion; the fact that you feel very much a community up in that area with that combination ---

MR MEHMI: That is right, yes. Just to give more comfort and also the feasibility and also the approach, you know, for that boundary, within that boundary wall, and we do actually get in touch with the community officer in Walsall Council, where we do hold many meetings together, to promote, as I said before, repeating myself, unity, peace and harmony within the community.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you for your time.

MR MEHMI: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Please may I call Cllr Eileen Russell now?

CLLR RUSSELL: Thank you for letting me express my support for our MP and for these changes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mrs Russell, just before you begin, could you just tell us ---

CLLR RUSSELL: Oh, my name and address.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Name and address. Thank you.

CLLR RUSSELL: Eileen Russell, and I live at 83 Prince's Avenue, Walsall. I actually live in St Matthew's --- in Paddock ward, and I am a councillor for St Matthew's ward, and I was actually born in Pleck, and lived in Palfrey, and attended school in Walsall, and apart from a brief time when I lived in London, I have lived in Walsall and taught in schools, mainly in Walsall South, and I very much think that it is a good idea to bring the constituency back into a central cohesive whole. I think it would be better for the community that lives there, because it is a very diverse community, but people do think of the town centre bit as being the heart of the town, so I do think that it will be for the good, really, and I think the Boundary Commission's proposals in general, for the Black Country, will be helpful, and I think that these are the most sensible proposals we have had for a long time, and I think it has been good for us having stability of the seat, and I

think if we have this new central constituency, that will carry on. There are strong connections with Blakenall ward and Birchills and Leamore, to the town centre, and I think the hiving off of the Pheasey area to another constituency is a good idea, because people from that area are always seen as being a bit foreign, really, if you know what I mean.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: With a small "F", I think is what you probably mean.

CLLR RUSSELL: It is, yes. Alien, I could have said, and it has been good for us having a female MP who represents all sections of the community happily, and I think that is really all that needs to be said.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are you able to give us a tiny flavour of what the community is like? What things matter? What brings you together, in your particular part of it?

CLLR RUSSELL: I think Walsall, it gets a bad press, really. Part of the accent, I expect, does not help. You know, people, they do look at people, hear people, and think --- but the people in Walsall are some of the most friendly people I have ever met, and they are very kind-hearted, and I think we need to hold on to that in these, kind of, troubled times, really.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. If you hold on while I just check. Are there any questions? No. We are fine. Thank you very much for your time. Thank you for coming in and sharing that with us.

And we have got somebody else now, somebody else from Walsall. It is Mr Mohammed Younis. Mind the step there, and again, if you could give us your name and address, please.

MR YOUNIS: My name is Mohammed Younis. I live at 21 Bescot Road, Walsall. I am a member of the Labour Party from Pleck ward. I have come to support the Boundary Commission proposal for the Walsall Central seat. Walsall South has always been the town, a central seat that people think of as Walsall, and the proposal for it to be expanded as Walsall Central keeps this definition. Birchills Leamore and Blakenall are the areas directly to the north of the town centre, so it makes it even more logical and coherent than Walsall South. Unlike the 2012 proposals, and this time, no one is saying this change is ridiculous, and that change does not actually make sense. My particular interest is the BME community in Walsall, and especially the Asian community. I have lived in Walsall for 40-odd years, firstly in St Matthew's ward, and now in Pleck ward. My children have all been to school locally, and now my grandchildren are growing up here in Walsall South. We have had stability in our parliamentary seat and we are pleased, and that proposal will allow the stability to carry on, and we really value having

one MP dealing with our issues, and we really value that our MP is an Asian woman, Valerie Vaz, has been an excellent MP for our communities and for Walsall South generally, and the Asian community is very close-knit and supportive of each other, and is also concentrated around Walsall town centre, in Pleck, St Matthew's, Palfrey, Paddock, Darlaston wards of Walsall South, it is right that the Walsall Central proposal continues to respect these communities, the community ties, and keeps the community together in one seat.

The 2012 proposals suggested Pleck should be in a different constituency, which was ridiculous. We live, work, worship, and shop in all these areas as in one place. So, for example, I live in Pleck but the mosque I attend is in Palfrey ward. My children went to school in St Matthew's, Palfrey, and now my grandchildren attend a school in Pleck. It is all one to us, and our community. The Walsall Central proposal reinforces these ties and communities' cohesion, and cohesion, as it brings into the same parliamentary seat areas with a concentration of Asian families that lie on the periphery of the town centre and to the north. The current boundary between Walsall South and Walsall North splits the local Asian community living in the Birchills, Pleck area and the proposal that Birchills Leamore and Blakenall wards are included in the new Walsall Central seat strengthens the community ties within one seat. This also makes it easier for the local community there as they are only dealing with one MP, when they wish to involve their Member of Parliament in local and community issues. From our community's perspective, on the loss of Pheasey Park, I have found from Walsall South to Birmingham Erdington, makes a lot of sense and will have very little impact on the Asian community in Walsall.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MR YOUNIS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: There is just that very last sentence, you say, it will have little impact and it makes sense. Can you expand on that a tiny bit for us, using Pheasey Park?

MR YOUNIS: That is right. It is a very little community actually lives in Pheasey Park area, and that has a boundary with Birmingham, so they do not have ties with Walsall area. Not much at all.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any questions or points of clarification needed from the floor? In which case, we are really grateful to you for coming. Thank you. Oh, excuse me? Okay. Fine.

CLLR ELCOCK: Hello. I am from Stourbridge constituency. Has anything been discussed about Stourbridge today?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: There have been some things. Do you want to speak? Would you like to put your name down, because it is ---

CLLR ELCOCK: I actually made a submission to the boundary change. I am Cllr Elcock from Norton. I actually wrote in a submission ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right.

CLLR ELCOCK: --- and it was accepted.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Absolutely, we have written submissions, but if you want to, we can squeeze you in. If you would like to just give your details outside, in the door outside.

CLLR ELCOCK: I have given my details. I am not bothered about speaking today, because I can see you have moved on, but ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you know what? No, I think you should. Why do you not come down, and we can give you five minutes right now, rather than interrupt, and you can just give us your view, because we want to hear as much as possible and we can definitely pop you in. Why not.

CLLR ELCOCK: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, what we need is your name and your address, please.

CLLR ELCOCK: Yes. My name is Cllr Colin Elcock.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And the address is?

CLLR ELCOCK: My address is 98 Vicarage Road, Wollaston, Stourbridge.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

CLLR ELCOCK: Do you want the postcode?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

CLLR ELCOCK: DY8 4QY. It is Margot James' constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right.

CLLR ELCOCK: I attended the Boundary Commission changes at Burton, and our constituency, as you can see on the screen now --- these are the proposals, but we have actually written in to hopefully change this to keep the constituency very much as it is at the moment but with the addition of half of the Brierley Hill ward, which would bring us up to a constituency count of around about 75,000, which is midway between the score. We feel that the Hayley Green and Cradley South, if that was brought into our ward for Stourbridge, it would be quite a concern for the voters in Halesowen and it would be out of character for our seat in Stourbridge to have Birmingham postcodes in addition to our Stourbridge Dudley postcodes.

Also, we feel --- obviously, I am a Conservative and we feel that the addition of the Hayley Green and Cradley South ward there would be detrimental to our other MP, James Morris, who covers the Halesowen and Rowley wards, and he covers that constituency. So, we are very much in Stourbridge. We are very much thinking that Margot and our ward councillors want to keep the ward as it is, but with the addition of half of the Brierley Hill ward. That is really all I want to say on it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, you are happy with the top, with Brierley Hill coming in?

CLLR ELCOCK: Yes, we are happy with half of Brierley Hill coming in.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. Okay.

CLLR ELCOCK: I think Mike Wood --- has Mike Wood been in today? Or yesterday? He was in yesterday. Well, Mike was at the Boundary Commission changes with us in Burton, and we did discuss the thing with him, and we feel his idea of bringing in half of Brierley Hill to our ward --- to our constituency is a sound idea.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And why not the other half?

CLLR ELCOCK: The other half would probably push us over the constituency figure. We are trying to get somewhere midway, around about 74,500 – 75,500.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. So it is a numbers thing, it is not a community thing, it is not a ---?

CLLR ELCOCK: So it is a numbers thing, really. It is a numbers thing, really, and we are --- you know, we are quite keen to keep the ward basically as it is but with the addition of the half of Brierley Hill, which would really make us a very viable 75,000-strong constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed.

CLLR ELCOCK: Anybody got any questions on that?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Has anyone got any questions? Yes. Hang on a sec. Just take the mic and again, just remind us who you are.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley. Cllr Elcock, the Boundary Commission do have, in their rules, provision that wards can be split ---

CLLR ELCOCK: Yes.

MR RILEY: --- with bits in different constituencies, but it is described as being only possible in exceptional or compelling situations. What exceptional or compelling reasons do you give for splitting Brierley Hill ward in half?

CLLR ELCOCK: To make it as an exceptional case or a compelling case, we have discussed it with the MP for --- who has that ward in his constituency at the moment. There is a natural boundary line through the middle of the ward. It is a railway line, in actual fact, and it is very convenient to the sitting MP, Mike Wood, and to our MP, Margot James at the moment, and for numbers, it is --- it seems to make sense. The councillors in the ward --- there are some councillors, some Labour councillors, in the north of the ward. There is a Conservative councillor in the south of the ward, which we are proposing to take, and it seems to make sense. We have discussed it with all the relevant parties and it seems to make sense to do that. I have not got --- you know, there is no --- I said to you before, to try and make an exception or a compelling case is difficult ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is entirely up to you what you ---

CLLR ELCOCK: --- but it is --- it has been discussed with the MPs and they are in agreement with it. Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine. You can answer that as you please. Any other questions? We have got another question here.

MR JEVON: Thank you very much. Simon Jevon, the Conservative Party. Cllr Elcock, would you say as a Stourbridge resident that the residents of Hayley Green and Cradley South look more towards Halesowen as a natural home or Stourbridge?

CLLR ELCOCK: They do. They do. I had a business in Halesowen for quite a few years, and I remember when the constituency was Stourbridge and Halesowen, under John Stokes, and another guy that came to us from over in --- cannot think what his name was, the MP who followed John Stokes. Can you remember? Warren Hawksley. When it was Warren Hawksley. It was a constituency then, Stourbridge and Halesowen, but since it has been split, and since we have had James looking after the

Halesowen and now the Rowley, and Margot has got the Stourbridge, it seems to work a lot better, and our councillors in Halesowen and surrounding areas feel it works really well as Stourbridge and Halesowen, and really, to try and incorporate Hayley Green and Cradley into Stourbridge would not be a good idea. We do not think so, as an association or as a constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any further questions? Thank you very much for your time.

CLLR ELCOCK: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That was interesting, and nice to talk about Stourbridge.

CLLR ELCOCK: Thank you for finding time for me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You are welcome. Our next speaker is not due for 15 minutes. Everybody has been very precise and succinct this afternoon, and has spoken well within their allocated times. Is there anyone in the room who would like to speak at this point? If not, what we are going to do is adjourn for just under 15 minutes until 4.30, when our next speaker is due. Thank you.

Time Noted: 4.17 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 4.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, still no sign of our final speaker, unfortunately. If he comes in in the next 30 seconds, we will grab him, but otherwise, really, really sorry, and we are now going to close the meeting and advise him he can come to the other hearings. Thank you so much for staying from the beginning to the end, and for all your contributions. It has been really good here in Birmingham. Thank you.

Time Noted: 4.31 pm

End of hearing

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