

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

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ON

MONDAY 31 OCTOBER 2016

DAY ONE

Before:

Ms Sarah Hamilton, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the public hearing of the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the Eastern Region. My name is Sarah Hamilton and I am an Assistant Commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England. I was appointed by the Commission to assist them in their task of making recommendations for new constituencies in the Eastern Region. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow, and I am also responsible, with my fellow Assistant Commissioner, Laura Smallwood, who is sitting in the audience, for analysing all the representations received about the initial proposals for this region and then presenting recommendations to the Commission as to whether or not those initial proposals should be revised.

I am assisted here today by members of the Commission's staff, led by Sam Hartley, who is sitting beside me. Sam will shortly be providing an explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for new constituencies in this region. He will tell how you can make written representations and he will deal with one or two administrative matters.

The hearing today is scheduled to run from 10.00 am until 8.00 pm and tomorrow we will be scheduled to run from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. I can vary that timetable and I will take into account the attendance and the demand for opportunities to speak. I should point out that under the legislation that governs the Commission's review each public hearing must be held over two days and cannot be extended into a third.

The purpose of this public hearing is to allow people to make oral representations about the initial proposals for the Eastern Region. A number of people have already registered to speak and have been given a time slot, and I will invite them to speak at the appropriate time. If there is any time free during the day or at the end of the day then I will invite anyone who has not registered but who would like to speak to do so. I would like to stress that the purpose of this public hearing is for people to make oral representations about the initial proposals. The purpose is not to engage in a debate with the Commission about those proposals, nor is this hearing an opportunity for people to cross-examine other speakers during their representation. People may seek to put questions for clarification to the other speakers, but they should do that through me as the Chair. I will now hand over to Sam, who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the Eastern Region.

MR HARTLEY: Thank you, Sarah. Good morning, everyone. Sarah mentioned that my name is Sam Hartley and I am Secretary to the Boundary Commission for England. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their role to recommend new parliamentary boundaries, and at this hearing I lead the team of staff who are responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly. As Sarah has already stated,

she will chair the hearing and it is her responsibility to run the hearing at her discretion and take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here today to support Sarah in carrying out her role. Please ask one of us outside of the hearing if you need any assistance.

I would like to talk now about the Commission's initial proposals for new constituency boundaries. We use the European electoral regions as a template for the allocation of the 499 constituencies to which England is entitled, not including the two constituencies to be allocated to the Isle of Wight. This approach is permitted by the legislation and has been supported by previous public consultation. The approach does not prevent anyone from putting forward counter-proposals that include one or more constituencies being split between the regions, but it is likely that compelling reasons would need to be given to persuade us to depart from the regional based approach we adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

The Eastern Region has been allocated 57 constituencies, a reduction of one from the current number. Our proposals leave six of the existing 58 constituencies unchanged. As it has not always been possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties in the region, we have grouped some county and local authority areas into sub-regions. The number of constituencies allocated to each sub-region is determined by the electorate of the combined local authorities. Consequently, it has been necessary to propose some constituencies across county or unitary authority boundaries.

In Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk it has been necessary to propose two constituencies that cross county boundaries. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Cambridgeshire and Norfolk which combines the village of Littleport and the town of Downham Market. We have also proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire which combines three wards from the district of South Cambridgeshire in a constituency with the towns of Letchworth and Royston.

In Bedfordshire, Essex and Suffolk it has been possible to propose a pattern of constituencies that is within the boundaries of each county.

The statutory rules allow us to take into account local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015. These include both the external boundaries of local councils and their internal boundaries, known as wards or electoral divisions. We seek to avoid dividing wards between constituencies wherever possible. Wards are well defined and well understood units which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. We consider that any division of these units between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for electoral registration and returning officers, who are responsible for running elections. It is our view that only in exceptional and compelling

circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified and our initial proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes to split wards strong evidence and justification will need to be provided and the extent of such ward splitting should be kept to a minimum.

The scale of change in this review is significant and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation period. We are consulting on our proposals until Monday, 5 December, so there is still time after this hearing for people to contribute in writing. There are also reference copies of the proposals present at this hearing, and they are available on our website and in a number of places of deposit around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at bce2018.org.uk. I urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December.

I would like to remind all participants that this hearing is part of a public consultation and you will be asked to provide us with your name and address if you wish to make an oral representation. The Commission is legally obliged to take a record of the public hearings, and, as you can see from the back, we are taking a video recording from which we will create a verbatim transcript. The Commission is required to publish the record of the public hearing, along with all written representations, for a four-week period during which members of the public have an opportunity to comment on those representations. We expect this period to occur in the spring of next year. The publication of the hearing records and written representations includes certain personal data of those who have made representations. I therefore invite all those contributing to read the Commission's data protection and privacy policy, a copy of which we have with us and is also available on our website.

Finally, I have a few matters of housekeeping. There is no fire alarm scheduled today, so if it goes off it is real and the entrance is back through the main door and down the stairs that you came up. The toilets are by the stairs as you enter the building. Please switch off your mobile phones or put them to silent. One final point: I am very sorry that this screen behind me is not working, we discovered this morning, so presenters I am afraid will have somehow to look at the screen but also make sure that you are using the microphone so that the record can pick it up. At this stage I will hand back to Sarah to begin the hearing.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Sam. This morning we will be hearing from the political parties. We have invited the five main political parties to come and give a representation. Each party will have a 30-minute slot. I will give a nudge after 25 minutes or so if it looks like you are still going and you need a reminder. May I ask that when you come up to speak you give your name and which party you are representing. Could I please ask Roger Pratt to begin? Thank you.

MR PRATT: (Conservative Party) Thank you very much indeed. I would like to thank the Commission for their proposals in Eastern Region and all the work they have done. My name is Roger Pratt. I am the Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party and this is a representation on behalf of the Conservative Party and the Eastern Region Conservatives. I will, during my presentation, be referring to the document on the initial proposals, the document of the revised proposals in the aborted review from the Assistant Commissioner's report there, and also the Guide to the 2018 Parliamentary Constituencies.

In the Eastern Region we support the allocation of 57 seats to the region. We also support the Commission's groupings and the proposed allocation to the sub-regions as follows. We agree with the allocation of six to Bedfordshire, 27 to Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk. We did note that the Commission could have reviewed Hertfordshire alone, but the advantage of reviewing Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk together is that you have a very small number of wards linked between Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire and only two wards linked between Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, so we feel that has that advantage. We support the allocations to Essex and Suffolk.

The guidelines that we have used to guide us in our alternative proposals are the rules for redistribution of seats that the Commission may take account of, so special geographical considerations, local government boundaries, and when we talk about local government boundaries there are two particular aspects of that. It is how many constituencies are within a local authority and how many local authorities are within a constituency, the boundaries of existing constituencies and, therefore, the degree of change, and any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.

It says there and in our written handout that we do not support any of the Commission's proposals for the six seats in Bedfordshire. That is, I am afraid, incorrect. We support the North East Bedfordshire constituency as proposed. You will see on both sets that it has the same electorate and it is the Commission's proposals, so I apologise for that slight error.

We are proposing the following seats. Bedford I think would be happy if the seat was called Bedford and Kempston. We have one ward swap in Bedford. We have changes in Luton North and Luton South to ensure that one Luton constituency is entirely within the Luton local authority. We have a Mid Bedfordshire which has consequential minor change, and South West Bedfordshire, which again has changed to ensure that that happens. These (indicating) are the wards that we change within Bedfordshire. In Bedford we have Kempston Rural rather than Elstow and Stewartby, and various changes that you can see in the other parts of Bedfordshire.

This is our map. We believe the shape of the Bedfordshire constituency and the shape of the Mid Bedfordshire constituency are much better under this proposal, so you have a continuous area in Bedford going from Kempston Rural rather than having a long thin part of the constituency eating into Mid Bedfordshire. We believe those seats are better. We reflect ties between the Kempston area of Bedford and the Kempston Rural ward, the Great Denham area of which is already in the Bedford constituency and which shares close ties with Bedford. We therefore have all of Kempston, so it is sensible. There are four Kempston wards within Bedford. It is sensible that Kempston Rural is also there so that you respect the ties in Kempston. We do not think the ward the Commission have chosen is the right one, the Elstow ward. Only 61 electors of the Elstow ward are currently within the Bedford constituency as opposed to 317 electors from the Kempston Rural constituency.

We restore ties between Barton-Le-Clay and the rest of Mid Bedfordshire, which are divided by the Commission proposals. The Commission could just make those two alterations and the numbers would be right, so it would work entirely with just those two changes. However, we believe there are other things that we should do, so we restore the ties between the villages of Kensworth and Whipsnade and the rest of South Bedfordshire, together with the villages of Hollywell and Southam. They are divided by the Commission proposals. We restore ties between Barnfield and Icknield wards which are divided by the Commission's proposals.

Central Bedfordshire is contained within four constituencies as opposed to five under the Commission proposals, which represents a substantial improvement, and the Luton local authority has one additional constituency entirely contained within its boundaries rather than having one orphan ward from Central Bedfordshire. We believe our Bedford solution gives a substantial improvement in terms of local authority links.

In Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk we support the following constituencies. We support North West Cambridgeshire, which is all from North West Cambridgeshire with the exception of six electors. I beg your pardon; Broxbourne is the existing constituency plus one ward. Cambridge is the existing constituency plus two wards. Hertford and Stortford is all from the existing constituency. Hertsmere is the existing constituency plus one ward. Hitchin and Harpenden, no change to that constituency, which we strongly support. In Huntingdon all the electors are from the existing constituency with the exception of 11 electors. North East Cambridgeshire is all from the existing constituency, and North East Hertfordshire we recognise is a constituency crossing the border with Cambridgeshire, including three Cambridgeshire wards, but we

acknowledge, as the Commission do, that those three wards have strong ties to Royston, so we support that as one of the constituencies within there.

North West Cambridgeshire is all from North West Cambridgeshire apart from six electors. North West Norfolk is just plus one ward. Peterborough we think is right, just adding one ward to the constituency, and I would refer you to item 32 in the initial proposals document on page 13, which said:

“We considered whether a better pattern of constituencies could be formulated by not including the City of Peterborough wards of Newborough, and Eye and Thorney in the Peterborough constituency and instead including the ward of Stanground Central (City of Peterborough), which lies in the south of the city, in order to create a more compact borough constituency.”

We came to the conclusion that opting for this pattern would have resulted in unnecessary changes to existing constituency boundaries and would have split the settlement of Stanground between constituencies. We totally agree with the Commission as far as that matter is concerned. We support minor change to the South Cambridgeshire and South East Cambridgeshire constituency and support the South West Norfolk constituency with just the addition of two Cambridgeshire wards of Littleport. We support the Stevenage constituency as the existing constituency plus the Walkern and Watton-at-Stone wards, and the Welwyn and Hatfield constituency, the existing plus Hertford Rural. That is the map of Cambridgeshire, which we are not proposing to change.

We do not support the proposals in Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk for 11 of the seats, the 11 that are on the screen there, so we take the areas in turn. We propose the following seats. The Hemel Hempstead seat we believe should be the existing seat plus, and we believe there are very strong reasons why Ashridge ward should be within the Hemel Hempstead constituency.

We note at the aborted review that this was an area which was debated very considerably, and I would refer to the Assistant Commissioner’s report in two cases, on page 36, item 150, that the inclusion of Ashridge Dacorum ward in a South West Hertfordshire constituency rather than a Hemel Hempstead constituency, as it is at present, was opposed by the overwhelming majority of those making submissions on this issue. This one proposal, relating to a ward of 2,138 electors, resulted in more than 100 submissions, all but one or two opposing the change. It is further referred to on page 45 in 210, 211 and 212. In 210 we consider that we should deal with Ashridge Dacorum ward in some detail, given that, although it contains only 2,138 electors, it had

generated more than 100 submissions in the initial stage of consultation, all bar one suggesting it be retained within Hemel Hempstead. That solution is supported by the MPs for South West Hertfordshire and Hemel Hempstead, by Three Rivers District Council, several parish councils, local councils and members of the public. The submissions draw attention to a number of different issues – transport, employment, shopping, links to Hemel Hempstead and links to doctors and dentists, etc. Others drew attention to the rural nature of the ward and its historic links to Hemel Hempstead. Item 212 goes on to talk about Mike Penning, the Member of Parliament’s submission, which gives all the ties with Hemel Hempstead.

There are consequential changes to South West Hertfordshire going back to more like its existing constituency and to St Albans and Watford. We get both less change and better local authority links by doing this. These are the wards that change, so Ashridge goes back to its existing constituency. We split the Bovingdon, Flaunden and Chipperfield ward, and I will come back to that in a minute. Gade Valley goes back to the constituency where the majority of electors are. Leavesden goes back to the constituency where all its electors are, and South Oxhey goes back to the constituency where all its electors are.

I appreciate that the Commission has talked about exceptional and compelling circumstances in terms of dividing wards, and therefore I thought I should do this at this point as this is the only ward in Eastern Region that we are suggesting dividing, and they have regard to specific factors in Rule 5. They have in particular cited, in item 31 from the original guide to the review, that whole ward solutions significantly cut across local ties. We would argue that in Ashridge, Leavesden and South Oxhey they do cut across local ties, and, just by dividing that one ward, and we believe it is a very logical, sensible division of that ward between constituencies, we improve factors under three of the relevant rules, Rule 5(b) in terms of local government links, Rule 5(c) in terms of existing constituencies, and Rule 5(d) in terms of local ties.

That is the existing Hertfordshire as proposed by the Commission and this is our alternative. This is the Bovingdon ward, and obviously, it is Flaunden and Chipperfield as well. There are three polling districts that we retain within South West Hertfordshire, and there are these two polling districts which we put into Hemel Hempstead, which takes Hemel Hempstead up to the right number and can ensure that Ashridge ward is included within the Hemel Hempstead constituency. Of those five polling districts, three are parished, those three, two are not parished and have very close ties to Hemel Hempstead. There has been debate in the past about this particular ward because these areas have very close ties to Hemel Hempstead, and so we would put those two within the Hemel Hempstead constituency. The advantages are that we restore local

ties between Ashridge and Hemel Hempstead, divided by the Commission proposals, and between Gade Valley ward and Watford, divided by the Commission proposals. The majority of electors in the Gade Valley ward are currently in the Watford constituency. We restore local ties between Leavesden ward and Watford, divided by the Commission proposals. We restore ties between South Oxhey and Moor Park, divided by the Commission proposals. The Three Rivers local authority is contained within four constituencies as opposed to five under the Commission's proposals. That is a substantial improvement for a relatively small local authority. It is much better that it should be contained within four rather than five. Dacorum local authority has one additional constituency entirely contained within its boundaries, 13,367 electors. By just splitting that one ward, and I stress it is a very logical split, 13,367 fewer electors move from their existing constituency, so we would argue that that is a very considerable improvement.

In Norfolk we are proposing the following seats. Broadland is three authorities as the Commission proposes, but, rather than having one orphan Breckland ward, we have more wards from Breckland. With regard to Great Yarmouth, we believe one of the poorest aspects of the Commission proposals is the Great Yarmouth ward that is attached to it, the Thurleton ward, and we link it, therefore, to one North Norfolk ward rather than to one which it has better links with than one South Norfolk ward. In Mid Norfolk there are some consequential changes with areas leaving the constituency and going back into South Norfolk.

North Norfolk is all within the North Norfolk local authority. Again, we feel it is odd that the Aylsham ward from Broadland is included in North Norfolk when it is not necessary, and North Norfolk would be entirely within the North Norfolk local authority. Norwich North we add to the Drayton and Taverham wards, and I would refer you to item 117 in the Assistant Commissioner's report last time on page 31, when Drayton and Taverham was suggested to be included. It was proposed that the Norwich North constituency should be extended by including the two Drayton wards and the two Taverham wards from the district of Broadland. In general these proposals were welcomed. We think we should go back to that, and that ensures that Norwich South is the existing constituency plus, rather than taking a ward out, and South Norfolk is all from the existing constituency.

That is the proposed Norfolk and that is our alternative Norfolk, and I again highlight the ward that the Commission propose is taken into Great Yarmouth. If we go back, the ward that is taken in, which we think is very poor because of very poor boundaries, and is that ward (indicating), if you look at it, that is a boundary with Broadland, that is a boundary with Suffolk, so it has got this boundary, but if you look on the ground at what

that boundary is, it is a wide area of broads and river. It is a very poor boundary for this ward to be included with Great Yarmouth, and therefore we think that it is much better that you include this ward) which has ties across here, into Great Yarmouth. We restore ties between Wensum ward and Bowthorpe and University wards, divided by the Commission's proposals, and thereby the current Norwich South constituency is retained intact with the addition of only one ward. We reflect local ties between the towns of Drayton and Taverham and the City of Norwich, which are divided by the Commission proposals. Drayton and Taverham were part of the Norwich North constituency until 2010. We restore ties between Thurlton ward and Gillingham and Lurdon wards, which are divided by the Commission proposals. We note that Thurlton ward is divided from Great Yarmouth by the River Waveney with only one road across the Waveney linking the two. We restore local ties between the town of Wymondham, the towns of Attleborough and Dereham, which are divided by the Commission proposals, thereby our proposed South Norfolk constituency comprises wards entirely within the current South Norfolk constituency. We restore local ties between Aylsham ward and the Hevingham ward, which are divided by the Commission proposals. Broadland and South Norfolk local authorities each have one fewer constituency within their boundaries. North Norfolk local authority has one additional constituency entirely contained within its boundaries, so North Norfolk constituency is entirely within North Norfolk, and 2,146 fewer electors move from their existing constituency.

In Essex we support the constituencies of Braintree, which is totally within the Braintree local authority, Brentwood and Ongar, which sensibly has the four Chelmsford wards that are currently within the Saffron Walden constituency because of changes elsewhere. We have Chelmsford with no change, and again I would refer you to item 43 in the Assistant Commissioner's report. The Commission on that occasion did not have Chelmsford unchanged. The counter-proposal to maintain the existing Chelmsford constituency unchanged has met with almost universal approval. That was AC43 on page 16. Colchester, which is plus one ward, Epping Forest, which is no change; Harlow, which is sensibly extended for further wards with the Epping Forest district; Harwich and Clacton totally within Tendring; North East Essex surrounding Colchester, with Colchester and Tendring authorities. Saffron Walden: sensibly the Uttlesford district on this occasion is not divided, so you have the Uttlesford district plus some Braintree wards, previously in Saffron Walden, and no change to the Thurrock constituency.

As far as the other constituencies in Essex are concerned, what I would term South Essex, Basildon and Billericay, Castle Point, Rayleigh, Rochford, South Basildon, Southend West and Witham and Maldon, we are at the moment reserving our position. We may well at a later stage put forward a position when we have heard other options.

We are concerned about the split of the Castle Point local authority. We are concerned that one ward of Maldon district is left out of that constituency, and we are concerned about the number of seats that the Chelmsford authority takes in, but at the moment we cannot see a solution to that, largely because of the size of the Basildon wards, which are an awkward size, in order to get a reasonable counter-proposal, so we are currently reserving our position on that area. That is Essex, which we are not seeking any changes on, although we reserve our position on South Essex.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Roger, you have five minutes left.

MR PRATT: Okay. In Suffolk, in the sub-region we entirely support Suffolk Coastal, which only changes for split wards, and Waveney and West Suffolk, which are no change. We fully support that. We do not support the those four constituencies and we are proposing a Bury St Edmunds. Rather than three wards, as the Commission suggests, coming out of Bury St Edmunds (they have to lose some wards), we take two wards out. Central Suffolk and North Ipswich takes those two Bury St Edmunds wards. Ipswich has an Ipswich ward rather than a South Suffolk ward, and South Suffolk consequently can become no change, so those are the wards we are moving.

Castle Hill is the Ipswich ward that we would move into Ipswich from Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, Needham Market and Ringshall, then the consequential changes, and South Suffolk, as we say, becomes no change, so that is the Commission proposal and that is our alternative proposal. The advantages of this are that we reflect the local ties between the Castle Hill ward and the rest of Ipswich, which are divided by the Commission proposals. Thereby we avoid the Ipswich constituency containing the orphan ward of Babergh local authority, we restore local ties between Onehouse and Rattlesden wards and the town of Stowmarket, divided by the Commission proposals. We retain the South Suffolk constituency as an unchanged constituency. Babergh and Mid Suffolk local authorities each have one fewer constituency within their boundaries, Ipswich local authority has one additional constituency entirely contained within its boundaries, one additional constituency is wholly contained within one local authority, and one fewer constituency is contained within three local authorities. We believe our Suffolk proposals again are very much better under the local government rules.

As a reminder of the rules that have guided our alternative proposals, and particularly local government boundaries, in summary we propose considerably better local authority links with four additional constituencies contained within one local authority, thus being more compliant with Rule 5(b). We have one additional constituency, South Suffolk, unchanged, and two constituencies, Hemel Hempstead and Norwich South, retained intact, thus being more compliant with Rule 5(c), and we break fewer local ties,

historic ties in Bedford, Barton-Le-Clay, Hemel Hempstead, Watford, Norwich, Mid Norfolk, Ipswich and Stowmarket. Thus we are being more compliant with Rule 5(d).

In conclusion, we support the allocation of 57 constituencies in the Eastern Region but believe there is a much better scheme available, which we have put forward. We will submit to the Commission before 5 December a comprehensive document outlining our rationale whether we support the Commission or propose alternatives. We will take into account representations made at the public hearing, and may, in the light of these, amend our submission from that which we have outlined today, particularly in relation to South Essex. I am very grateful, thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Roger. Does anyone from the audience have any questions of clarification? No. Thanks very much, and thank you for keeping to time, Roger. I would now like to invite Greg Cook to come up, and, Greg, perhaps you would state for the record your name and which party you represent.

MR COOK: (Labour Party) Thank you very much indeed. My name is Greg Cook and I am an official of the National Labour Party based at our head office at 105 Victoria Street, SW1.

May I start by thanking you for delaying the start of the hearing and apologising for my late appearance. It took me about an hour and a quarter to get from Stratford to Chelmsford by train this morning. I will start by saying that the submissions being made on behalf of the Labour Party and the Eastern Region of the Labour Party are presented as an overall response to the initial proposals of the Boundary Commission and following a detailed consultation process within the Labour Party, involving all Members of Parliament, constituency Labour Parties and others within the region.

We welcome the initial proposals of the Commission and the clear and comprehensive way in which they have set their proposals out. While the Labour Party disagrees with some of them, and in presentations to all the regional hearings we are setting out alternatives which we believe better fit the statutory criteria, we accept that in all cases they have fully considered the different options and explained the decisions they have made. We also welcome the Commission's efforts to stimulate and encourage public participation in the process and to consult with the political parties on their policies and procedures, and we are grateful in particular for the opportunity at this hearing to set out the views of the party on the Commission's initial proposals.

I will say a few words first about the statutory criteria which the Commission operate under. We note under the terms of the Act that the Commission may, in choosing

between different schemes, take into account the four criteria of special geographical circumstances, local government boundaries, the boundaries of existing constituencies, and any local ties that would be broken by changes to constituencies. It is self-evident that the Commission may not be able to respect all of these criteria, or, indeed, in some cases any of them, in every part of the region while keeping the electorates of the constituencies within the permissible range. We therefore accept that in some areas the disruption to existing constituencies is likely to be substantial, that it may be difficult to respect local authority boundaries, and that local ties may be broken. Where the Labour Party puts forward alternative proposals to those of the Commission we do so on the basis that we believe them to be, on balance, more consistent with those statutory criteria. We accept the electoral quota for the review is 74,769, and that all seats in the Eastern Region must therefore have electorates between 71,031 and 78,507.

I want to say something about the policies of the Commission as set out in their guidance booklet. We welcome the Commission's decision to use the European electoral regions as the sub-national review areas for the purposes of their initial proposals. Were they not to do so we believe that the review of constituencies in England would be much more complex, with almost limitless options, and the result would be that meaningful consultation and public participation would be much harder to achieve. We note the electorate of the Eastern Region at 4,242,266 gives an entitlement under the Sainte-Laguë calculation to 57 seats with an average electorate of 74,426, which is 243 below the electoral quota.

We note the Commission's policy of using district and unitary wards as the smallest unit within which to build constituencies, and also their remarks on this issue set out in their guide, which state that they recognise that there may be exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it appropriate to divide a ward, but that no such proposal has been made in the Eastern Region, or, indeed, anywhere else. The Labour Party fully supports the policy and the Commission in this area. We believe that any such proposal should be treated on its merits, but within an assumption that whole wards and divisions should remain intact in the absence of compelling and exceptional circumstances such as are described. We make no such proposal in this region and we have not identified any areas where we think that there are such compelling and exceptional circumstances.

We also note the concept of the orphan ward, where one ward of a local authority is added to a constituency wholly or partly within another local authority, and that this is regarded often by definition as undesirable. We accept that such arrangements are sometimes anomalous and they are clearly at odds with the respect for local authority

boundaries. However, we believe that a dogmatic policy, in which we consider that such arrangements are always undesirable, is not appropriate, and that the addition of other wards just for the sake of not having a single ward in such a scenario is not by itself necessarily to be preferred if it means that ties are broken and electors moved in that ward. This is an issue which is particularly pertinent in this region because there are probably more orphan proposals here than anywhere else, and most of those we support, indeed, all except one we support, the one which we do not support we believe being unnecessary. We believe that most of these proposals have been made in order to minimise change, and we believe that is appropriate in all the circumstances.

On the issue of sub-regional review areas, we note there is no requirement on the Commission to avoid the crossing of county boundaries as there was historically under the previous legislation when the review was divided down to county level, but in this region the Commission have allocated whole numbers of seats to Bedfordshire and Luton, to Essex and Suffolk, and that the other three counties comprise one large review area. We believe that the use of counties as units in this way is a sensible approach, and it is obviously consistent with respect for local authority boundaries.

Finally, on the names of constituencies, we note and support the Commission's policy on the names of constituencies. We are aware that there is a tendency for names of constituencies to become more complex and unwieldy and would, as a matter of principle and practicality, resist that. Also, where a constituency is largely unchanged, we would normally support the retention of the existing name, but we will consider all proposals on their merits, taking account of local opinion.

To turn to the initial proposals of the Commission, we set out here our views on those initial proposals and we have one minor counter-proposal. While we refer to the proposals in terms of the statutory criteria, we do not include detail of community ties and other relevant matters, which will be amplified in the statements of individuals in the areas affected. We support the vast majority of the initial proposals in the Eastern Region, and while in many areas they are imperfect and may break ties and cause some disruption we believe that, with the one exception, there is no better alternative available that we have yet identified.

We note the Commission propose that the counties of Bedfordshire and Luton, Essex and Suffolk should be allocated six, 17 and seven constituencies respectively, and that Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk should be jointly allocated 27 constituencies. We agree with the Commission that there is no benefit in any constituency being partly in Essex or Suffolk and partly in another county. However, the county of Cambridgeshire has mathematically got to be grouped with at least one other county as

the average electorate of seven seats is more than five per cent above the electoral quota. Similarly, the county of Norfolk could almost certainly not support a whole number of constituencies without the division of wards, and therefore there must be at least one constituency which contains part of Cambridgeshire and part of Norfolk. It would, we believe, be possible for Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to be allocated six and 11 seats respectively. In Hertfordshire, however, we believe the very low average electorate would mean that ties would be broken and towns divided, and we therefore agree with the Commission that there should be one constituency containing part of Cambridgeshire and part of Hertfordshire, and that Bedfordshire and Luton together should be allocated six seats, which is the allocation they have at the moment. We therefore accept the review areas as set out by the Commission but we will consider all alternatives that may be proposed.

We note that in this region in total net, just one seat is abolished and that under the initial proposals six of the 58 current seats are unchanged and another 14 are retained intact and enlarged, and in total 30 seats retain more than 95 per cent of their electors, and only five seats retain less than 75 per cent, all of them in Essex. In total some 3,844,742 electors out of the 4,242,266 in the region, which is 90.6 per cent, remain in the main successor constituency, which is the highest proportion of any region. In other words, the level of disruption under the initial proposals is less in this region than anywhere else. We therefore believe there are no strong arguments in favour of major changes to the initial proposals, and we look instead at local alternatives as being the main options that are available.

To start with, Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock, we note the electorate of the county is 1,274,597, which gives a theoretical entitlement to 17.05 constituencies, and it therefore should have an allocation of 17 whole seats. We support the initial proposals in Essex in full, although we believe aspects of them remain unsatisfactory. In particular, we regret the continued division of the town of Basildon with the Fryerns and St Martin's wards in the Basildon and Billericay seats, Pitsea and Castle Point, and the remainder in South Basildon and East Thurrock, and we, therefore, like the Conservatives, would carefully consider any counter-proposal which kept the whole of Basildon in one seat, or even a larger part of it, and also any alternative name for the Basildon and Billericay constituency, given that only a minority part of the town is in that seat.

We also note the Brentwood borough and Castle Point borough are divided between constituencies under these proposals for the first time, and that the City of Chelmsford is divided between five different constituencies. While we would consider counter-proposals which addressed these issues, we believe that the initial proposals may be

the best available arrangements. We support the changes to the Harlow constituency to bring its electorate within five per cent of the electoral quota. Also, the inclusion of the town of Harwich in the Harwich and Clacton constituency, which largely restores the constituency which was in place until 2010, should stay, although we accept that some ties may be broken by the inclusion of the Golf Green ward in North East Essex.

In Suffolk we note the county of Suffolk, with an electorate of 526,217, has a theoretical entitlement of 7.04 constituencies and has been allocated seven whole seats. We support the unchanged Waveney and West Suffolk constituencies and the Central Suffolk and North Ipswich and Suffolk coastal seats, which are amended only to reflect new ward boundaries. We support the inclusion of the Mid Suffolk wards of Onehouse, Rattlesden and Ringleshall in South Suffolk constituency, and also the Babergh ward of Pinewood in the Ipswich constituency ward, which lies entirely to the north of the A12, has strong ties to Sprites and Stoke Park wards. If we look at the detailed map of the constituency you can see that Pinewood fits perfectly into and has continuous development with both of those wards.

In Bedfordshire and Luton we support the inclusion of the Elstow and Stewartby division of Bedford in the Bedford constituency, most of whose electors live in Elstow and Kempston north of the A421. We also support the changes to the Luton North and Luton South constituencies. We believe the inclusion of Houghton Regis in the Luton North and Houghton constituency is the obvious way of making up the numbers to sustain two whole seats. We also agree with the transfer of the Barnfield ward and the inclusion of the whole of the Caddington division in the Luton South constituency, which keeps most of its electors in the same seat. We note and support the changes to Mid Bedfordshire, North East Bedfordshire and South West Bedfordshire, which are partly to reflect new ward boundaries.

In Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk we note that the only part of Cambridgeshire to be included in a seat with part of Norfolk is the town of Littleport, which is added to the South West Norfolk constituency, and that the result of this is that the average electorate of the nine seats wholly or partly in Norfolk is just 72,424. We support this, however, as we believe it has allowed the Commission to retain the broad pattern of constituencies in Norfolk, to minimise change and to keep all the small towns undivided. We support the inclusion of the South Norfolk ward of Thurlton in Great Yarmouth as there are road links into the town along the A143, and we also support the inclusion of the Broadland ward of Aylsham in North Norfolk constituency, of the North Norfolk ward of Briston and the Breckland ward of Hermitage in the Broadland constituency. All of these are orphan ward proposals which we believe minimise the level of disruption, and we also support the more significant changes to Norwich North,

which would include the Wensum ward and Norwich South, which once again includes Cringleford, which was part of the constituency before 2010, and Old Costessey, and we believe this provides two well-shaped and balanced constituencies within the city. We also support the inclusion of the town of Wymondham in the South Norfolk constituency, which once again restores the pre-2010 position, which was a matter of some controversy in the review ten years ago, because Wymondham is the largest town in South Norfolk and there was much opposition to its removal at that time, and also the consequential changes to the Mid Norfolk and South West Norfolk constituency and the inclusion of the Walton ward in North West Norfolk.

Within Cambridgeshire we note that, while changes are made to all constituencies, their pattern is maintained, and we support the inclusion of the Fletton and Woodston ward in Peterborough constituency, of Earith in South East Cambridgeshire, and Gransden and The Offords in South Cambridgeshire, the latter two of which are orphan wards, but again we believe minimise change.

We also support the inclusion of three South Cambridgeshire district wards in the North East Hertfordshire constituency, all of which have ties to Royston and have local stations on the Hitchin to Cambridge railway line. Where we believe the Commission have made a mistake is with the inclusion of the South Cambridgeshire district ward of Milton in the Cambridge constituency, which we believe is unnecessary. The addition of the Cambridge City ward of Queen Edith's is sufficient to bring the electorate of the current constituency up to 72,757, and that would also make the constituency coterminous with the city, which would clearly fit with the local authority boundary criterion. We assume, therefore, that the inclusion of the Milton ward is regarded as necessary in order to balance the electorates of other seats in Cambridgeshire.

We would propose that Milton ward should remain in the South East Cambridgeshire constituency and, as consequential changes to that, that the Teversham ward should be included in South Cambridgeshire constituency, which would respect its ties to Fulbourn, which has been transferred to that seat, and that the ward of Meldreth should be included in the North East Hertfordshire constituency. Meldreth has strong ties to Melbourn, which also lies on the A10, and while the Meldreth station serves both villages; indeed, it was many years ago called Meldreth and Melbourn, we would suggest that the name of North East Hertfordshire may be changed, given that there is a significant part of Cambridgeshire in it, perhaps to Letchworth and Royston.

In Hertfordshire, again, we welcome the Commission's intention of retaining the existing pattern of constituencies. Thus, many of the changes are simply the addition of one ward, and among these we support the inclusion of the ward of Great Amwell in

Broxbourne, of Carpenders Park in Hertsmere, of Gade Valley in Hemel Hempstead, and of the whole of the Abbots Langley and Bedmond and Leavesden wards in St Albans, and also the addition of two East Hertfordshire wards to Welwyn Hatfield and of Walkern and Watton-at-Stone to Stevenage. We also support the inclusion of the whole of the Oxhey Hall and Hayling ward and South Oxhey in the Watford constituency, which means that South Oxhey is kept together. The Hayling part of Oxhey Hall and Hayling is part of the South Oxhey community, and were they to be in different constituencies that would be divided, and that constituency, Watford, would be compact and wholly urban. We note that the Three Rivers district has just 66,161 electors, and also East Hertfordshire, which has 101,155, both divided between five different constituencies, but again we believe this is justified by the ability to retain the current constituency pattern.

In summary, madam, the details of all the constituencies where the Labour Party makes an alternative proposal, the four of them, are set out in the appendix. We will be making a detailed written submission before 5 December, which covers the whole of the country, including the Eastern Region, and sets out our arguments in full with maps and full statistics, and we will reserve our position and comment on all other proposals that may be made by others during the secondary consultation period next year. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Greg. Do we have any questions from the audience?

MR PRATT: It is just a very minor matter of clarification so that you can get it on the record. In the Appendix A counter-proposal, I assume you mean Cambridge rather than Lincoln.

MR COOK: Yes. It is a cut and paste error. Thank you.

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any other questions? (None) We will now have a break and I propose coming back at 11.45, so a half-hour break. Thank you.

Time noted:11.01 am

After a short break

Time noted:11.45 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back to Chelmsford, everybody. This morning we will be continuing with the representations from the political parties and could I please ask Stephen Robinson to come forward? Thank you.

CLLR ROBINSON: (Liberal Democrat Party) Thank you. I probably will not take all of my half an hour, but, if it is okay with you, one of my colleagues, Cllr Kendall, because he has to go to work, would like to address you at the end on one of the key aspects of our change proposals affecting Essex. I probably will not take up all of my half hour, so I would like to bring Cllr Kendall in at the end if that is all right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine with me. Thank you.

CLLR ROBINSON: Broadly speaking, we welcome the approach that the Commission has taken and, obviously, a lot of work has gone into this. One of the key criteria is minimum change and we think that the Commission has achieved this in many respects and that the Commission's draft recommendations across the region, therefore, provide a good balance of all the factors in Rule 5, so in general we endorse most of the draft recommendations. We are proposing some relatively minor amendments to further improve the draft recommendations in a number of places and some slightly more significant changes in Essex.

Starting with Bedfordshire, we endorse the draft recommendations, subject to the following minor amendments set out there. We feel that Barton-le-Clay has greater ties to Mid Bedfordshire and should be retained in Mid Bedfordshire, and that Eastcotts should be in the North East Bedfordshire constituency. There is no need for either ward to be moved to achieve the statutory electorate range and therefore they could be left alone and maintain their existing community ties, and all those constituencies would remain within the correct range with those numbers.

Moving on to Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk, that sub-region, again, as the two earlier speakers have acknowledged, it is necessary to put these three counties together and we feel that the Commission has done a good job across this sub-region. Each constituency has a clear successor, each proposed constituency comprises more than 85 per cent of the electors from its predecessor, and over 93 per cent across the three counties will remain in their existing constituency, so there is a lot of consistency and continuity. The number of Cambridge electors moved across constituencies is a minimum and everything is retained within the statutory electorate range. There are not significant divisions between communities and local ties remain intact. However, on a couple of specifics we will set this out in detail in our written submission, but we would

like to draw out these particular points, particularly as Cambridge has already been addressed by the Labour Party.

On Cambridge and this issue about the ward of Milton, when you look at the map you can see that, if you were adding anything to Cambridge, Milton is the most obvious one to add because it is coterminous with the city, and, indeed, a chunk of the Milton ward is to the south of the A14 and effectively Milton is now Cambridge City overspill. They have got the science park, which sits across some of the district boundaries, so we feel that if you are adding anything to Cambridge Milton is by far the obvious ward, and it makes a lot of sense.

On St Albans, starting with the existing constituency, if you are looking to add something, the community of Abbots Langley seems a reasonable fit, given the road links locally. As far as North Norfolk is concerned, the Commission is proposing minimal change, which we support, and we feel that the inclusion of Aylsham, as the Commission proposes, is a reasonable fit. If you look at the road network, both north-south through Aylsham, and east-west, those roads are within the North Norfolk district and constituency, and so we think that Aylsham has strong links to the North Norfolk constituency and, therefore, is a good fit.

On Norwich North, what the Commission is doing is adding what is Norwich North overspill, the extension of the built-up part of the City of Norwich. Although technically it is in the district of Broadland, the Commission is proposing the entirety of what you call the Norwich hinterland in the Norwich North constituency, which makes a lot of sense. There is a consequential change within the centre with Norwich South, but the change to Norwich South which the Commission is proposing enhances the constituency because, instead of having one ward from South Norfolk, you now have three, and that makes the A47, which is to the south of Norwich, the constituency boundary for Norwich South, and so we feel the Commission's proposals for Norwich North and Norwich South make a lot of sense in community connections and community ties. Clearly, there will be local people at your Norwich and Luton hearings who will address these points in more detail.

On South East Cambridgeshire we think the minimum change proposed by the Commission is appropriate and that there are these continuing strong links between Ely and South and East Cambridgeshire.

On names, we would like to address this and ask you to pay this some attention. Whilst we support the draft boundaries of these cross-county constituencies, we would ask that you consider the name. We are talking about North East Hertfordshire and South West

Norfolk. In both cases they will no longer be entirely in Hertfordshire and Norfolk respectively, and therefore we would urge you to consider a change. You can either, in a rather ungainly fashion, add on the bits that you have added, so the Commission propose to add Melbourn to North East Hertfordshire and Littleport to South West Norfolk. The Commission likes names that sound right, and that probably does not sound quite right, so you could go for town-based names, which is another approach the Commission uses. You could use Letchworth and Royston instead of North East Hertfordshire, and Thetford and Downham Market, those being, in each constituency's case, the two most significant. I note in the Commission's proposals that you have gone for a geographic compromise with Luton North and Houghton. You have recognised the addition of Houghton Regis there, and have added it to the name.

We feel that in order for the public to identify with their constituency you should consider changing the name, because the people who are from the counties which are being added will not feel part of Hertfordshire and Norfolk respectively. Perhaps as an aside I can add from my own personal experience. Last time, in 2003, when the Saffron Walden constituency added in the Broomfield and Writtle county division, most people in Writtle, which is just up the road, said, "I don't live in Saffron Walden. It is 25 miles away". We had a long debate about whether it was 24, 25 or 26 miles away, but this constituency has now been in place since the 2010 election and people still say, "I don't live in Saffron Walden". At that inquiry in 2003 the Inspector agreed with my suggestion of calling the constituency Saffron Walden and Writtle, as did the Labour Party. It went into the Inspector's final report, but unfortunately the Commission said, "No, we do not want to change it". I do think names are important because I think we want residents to identify with their parliamentary constituency, so I would urge you, madam, to address that in your final report.

We have a minor amendment in the South East Cambridgeshire constituency in that we feel you should retain Fulbourn and Linton in South East Cambridgeshire, and instead transfer Histon and Impington to South Cambridgeshire. This is more consistent with the current situation on the ground and, in geographic terms, there is no road link between Histon and Impington and the rest of South East Cambridgeshire, so it would be detached and there is an obvious alternative. The continuous development between Fulbourn and Teversham on the edge of Cambridge would then be retained in the one constituency, and it makes very little difference to the numbers, but we feel better reflects the community ties of the existing wards and constituency boundaries, so we would urge you to consider that, and under that proposal the numbers would be very little changed and well within the required range.

Moving on to Essex, as we know, this is the one part of the region where there is substantial change because we are losing one seat, so this is obviously going to lead to greater disruption. We are proposing a number of amendments to the draft recommendations which we feel better comply with the factors set out in Rule 5, namely, minimum change. We feel it is possible to reduce the amount of electors that would be moved and better respect existing community ties on the ground, so to this extent we have had a go, which the Conservative and Labour Parties felt unable to do. First of all, a couple of small changes. This one, I would argue, is not very controversial and should be considered seriously on a community ties ground. The ward of Golf Green must be in the Harwich and Clacton constituency. It is the unparished part of the Clacton constituency. It is an integral part of the Clacton built-up area. It is almost impossible to get to anywhere without going back into Clacton. The ward's name is Golf Green. It is known locally as the Jaywick area, and it really does belong in the Clacton constituency rather than in North Essex. It is a separate parish.

What would we move instead? We feel that the Weeley and Little Clacton ward could be in North Essex, and, whilst it has got the word "Clacton" in it, the Weeley bit is the more substantial bit and is the rural bit. In fact, Little Clacton is separate from Great Clacton, or Clacton Town, and therefore we feel that you should swap those two wards and that would much better reflect the community ties on the ground and would lead to a minimal net difference in the number of electors because the two wards are of very similar size and we urge you to swap them, to put Golf Green back into Clacton and take out Little Clacton and Weeley and then the numbers would be almost exactly the same at 77,000 in each.

Moving on to the more controversial area, Basildon, Brentwood and surrounding areas, there are two very important points. The ward from Brentwood that the Commission propose to put with Basildon make absolutely no sense at all, and Cllr Kendall will address that in a moment. If you accept that that makes no sense because Warley is an essential part of the centre of Brentwood, you have to make a number of consequential changes, so we propose moving a number of wards round in a circular motion so that the numbers still add up but better reflect community ties. One useful consequence of this is that the majority of the town centre of Basildon would end up in one constituency. At the moment the Commission propose to divide the centre among three constituencies, whereas under our proposals it would only be divided between two. All of the Brentwood district, which is a fairly small district, would remain in one constituency and an even smaller district, Maldon, would also be in one constituency. I know the workload on the district council is not a central consideration of yours, but, certainly as far as Maldon is concerned, it would make the administration of elections

much easier for Maldon district, who have come in for some criticism in the past for the way they run elections, to have only one constituency to look after.

Under our proposals 20,000 fewer electors are moved from their current constituency compared to the Commission's proposals and therefore our proposals are a more stable set of arrangements consistent than the Commission's. A further additional benefit of our proposals in terms of maintaining the existing situation is that we would keep Rayleigh and Wickford constituency with only a slight amendment instead of splitting Wickford away from Rayleigh, which is what the Commission propose.

Finally, although I have not mentioned it there, under our proposals Chelmsford district would only split among four constituencies instead of five. That is the map which supports our proposals. I think Mr Pratt referred earlier to what you might call the Broomfield and Writtle area, which is this bit here. Under the Commission's proposals these four wards, that one, Boreham and The Leighs, that one, Broomfield, that one, Rural, and that one, Writtle, all go in with Brentwood. At the moment they are in the Saffron Walden constituency. However, this bit, Boreham, is the larger part of this ward, Boreham and The Leighs, and sits very uncomfortably in the Saffron Walden constituency. You can see this bit, which is the parish boundary between two parishes, and this was a bodge at the 2003 borough ward review to make the numbers add up in borough council terms, because this ward was single member and too big, and this one was too small, so they were put together and they do not really sit well together. Boreham, here, is on the A12. You can just about make out the A12 going through the middle, and so we feel that the Boreham and The Leighs ward, of which the majority of the population is round here in Boreham, sits comfortably with the Maldon district. As you can see, that is the Maldon district boundary going down there, so you can see that we have put all of the Maldon district into one constituency, and then you have got Witham, and Maldon and Witham used to be in the same constituency in the middle of the 20th century. Essentially, we feel we have a more compact constituency and a more sensible Maldon constituency, which works geographically on the ground.

Broomfield and the Rural West ward, which the Commission are proposing to put in with Brentwood, we leave there as the Commission proposes, but by taking these two the Commission want these two wards there. This is Basildon New Town. The Commission want to put these two in with Basildon New Town and we think that is silly. That is the Brentwood borough area and, if you look here, the railway is here, and in relation to Warley, when you come out of the Brentwood station and turn left you will be in the Basildon constituency, which is why we think it is silly. If we put those back into the Brentwood constituency that means that we can then move the Basildon constituency out eastwards a bit and take in this part of the Basildon town centre, and

then this becomes much more of a Basildon proper constituency. Inevitably, this comes out of the Billericay constituency, so we have to go up here, so we put Writtle in. There is a road, it is Margaretting Road, from Writtle down here, through Margaretting and down to Billericay, and so we think that is a reasonable fit.

The other consequence of our proposals is that Wickford (which is part of Basildon Council) and Rayleigh are the constituency at the moment, and under our proposals would be the same, or very similar to the current Rayleigh and Wickford constituency. Very few voters would be moved if you stick with that as your Rayleigh and Wickford constituency. Then you have Rayleigh and Wickford largely as it is, and then you have South Basildon, and you could call it Basildon, because it would now be most of Basildon, Basildon and East Thurrock, and a much more sensible Brentwood arrangement. As I said, the final icing on the cake is that Chelmsford district, which is there, is only split among four constituencies, not five.

Those are our Essex proposals. Obviously, they are done ward by ward in our detailed submission, and, having revised those seats, the numbers, as you can see, are all within the range.

Moving on to Suffolk, as I think everyone seems to have said, there is no need for much change at all in Suffolk. Ninety-eight per cent of the electors will remain in their existing constituency. No community is divided between constituencies and no local ties are broken. I would just like to mention the Pinewood ward, which was mentioned earlier. The Pinewood from Babergh is Ipswich overspill, so the Commission are proposing to put Pinewood in with Ipswich. We think that makes sense on the ground, and I think if you look at Google Earth it is pretty obvious that Pinewood is an extension of Ipswich rather than an integral part of Babergh district, and the A14 then is the southern boundary of the constituency.

Just to sum up, the draft recommendations are a good balance between all the factors set out in Rule 5. We support most of the proposals in the draft recommendations and we cover this in further detail in our written submission. The draft recommendations take good account of local communities and avoid breaking local ties, and in the amendments that we are proposing, as already mentioned, we have a few ward swaps which we think make a lot more sense on the ground, and a more substantive set of proposals in Essex which we think significantly improve the Commission's proposals. They move a lot fewer Essex voters than the Commission proposes, and as a result our Essex proposals better meet the statutory criteria than the Commission's proposals do. That is our presentation.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Stephen. Does anyone have any questions of clarification?

MR PRATT: I wonder if I could clarify, under your proposals and under the Commission's proposals, how many constituencies are contained within the Basildon local authority in each proposal.

CLLR ROBINSON: As Mr Pratt himself acknowledge, one of the problems we have in Basildon is that the wards are so very large that if you move one ward the numbers go haywire, because they are seven or eight thousand. The Commission are already proposing to come into Basildon from the west, so to speak. You have got Wickford and then Castle Point moves. Basildon district is those, so it is four. The thing about Basildon district is that it is at least three separate areas anyway. You have got the area south of the A127, which is Basildon New Town, the town of Billericay, and there is a separate area of Wickford, and they all see themselves as separate areas anyway, although they happen to be under one Basildon district. The residents of Billericay, in the 1995 Local Government Review, were quite keen on detaching themselves from Basildon and joining up with Brentwood, so there is not that sense of unity in the Basildon district as a whole as there is perhaps in Brentwood. The fact that the Basildon district is divided in these ways I do not think is significant.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Does that clarify it for you?

MR PRATT: So it is not three; it is three and four?

CLLR ROBINSON: Yes, it is three and four. However, as I say, the essence of our proposal is that more of the town centre ends up in one constituency. There are always pros and cons of every argument and Basildon district is, by population and electorate, one of the three largest districts in Essex, so it is going to be split up. Our argument is that geographically it is already split up demographically anyway.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

CLLR ROBINSON: Is it all right to call Cllr Kendall?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. Just before we invite Cllr Kendall, as I said, we did invite all five political parties to attend here this morning. Can I check that we do not have any representations from either the Green Party or UKIP?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (The Green Party) (Inaudible)

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, sir. In that case, I will ask Cllr Kendall.

CLLR KENDALL: (Essex County Council) Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is David Kendall and I am an Essex county councillor representing the Brentwood South division, and a Brentwood borough councillor as well.

Part of my county division includes the Brentwood borough ward of Warley, and Warley is situated next to the ward of Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon. Under the Commission's proposals that have gone out to consultation both these Brentwood borough wards would move from the Brentwood and Ongar constituency into the South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

When my colleagues and I heard about the proposals we alerted residents in both wards and were contacted by a number of people who said they were shocked and alarmed that their area might be moved out of the Brentwood and Ongar constituency. We were asked to organise a petition and I have brought the returns we have had to date with me to give you an indication of the numbers against this change. The petition calling for the wards to stay in the Brentwood and Ongar constituency has been signed by 521 residents in Walley and 143 residents in Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon, and we have more signatures coming in on a daily basis. I would like to give you the petition at the end of my presentation if that is okay.

The reasons why both wards want to stay in the Brentwood and Ongar constituency is that they have strong links with Brentwood built up over hundreds of years. There is a real sense of community and identity with Brentwood and they are concerned that it will be lost if they are transferred into another constituency. Part of Brentwood station is in the Warley ward and residents cannot understand the logic of the station coming under the South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Whilst many people are against these changes, they and I, as a local councillor, do appreciate the fact that the Boundary Commission have been given the task of reducing the number of constituencies from 650 down to 600 by the Government, so you obviously have to do something. It is for that reason that I am more than happy to support the proposals put forward by my colleague, Cllr Stephen Robinson, because they not only keep the two wards I have mentioned in the Brentwood and Ongar constituency but also provide real benefits to our Essex residents.

The proposals that Stephen Robinson has put forward would mean that most of Basildon town centre would be in one constituency, which makes sense, particularly from an economic investment and development perspective. Rayleigh and Wickford have always had a close association and keeping them together would ensure the minimum amount of change and disruption, which is one of the criteria you are working to.

I would like to close by saying that for me as a local councillor and the residents I represent local identity and democratic accountability are key issues. We want to keep all of Brentwood borough in one constituency, and to do that would mean keeping it in the Brentwood and Ongar constituency. I hope that you will take my views and the petitions into account before you make any final decisions. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Cllr Kendall. Does anyone have any questions of clarification? (None) Thank you very much.

The next person on my list is Sir Bob Russell. As with all members of the public, could I ask you to provide your name and address, and you will have ten minutes.

SIR BOB RUSSELL: Thank you. My name is Robert, Edward Russell, although I am generally known as Bob. I was knighted in the 2012 New Year's honours for public service in Colchester. I was the Member of Parliament for Colchester for 18 years from 1997 to 2015. I was a member of Colchester Borough Council for 31 years, from 1971 to 2002. I was Mayor in 1986/87 and Leader of the Council for four years from 1987 to 1991. In November last year I was made High Steward of Colchester in recognition of my long record of public service in my home town.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could I ask you to give your address for the record, please?

SIR BOB RUSSELL: Yes. My address is 35 Catchpool Road, Colchester, CO1 1XN. I support the Boundary Commission's proposals in so far as they are related to Colchester, which I am relieved will ensure that its historic, geographic integrity is retained. The reason why I am here today with a written submission and to speak is because I still have bad memories of three Parliamentary Boundary Commission inquiries, which led to the inexcusable division of my home town because of submissions made at the inquiry which overturned the Boundary Commission's original proposals for Colchester.

From 1983 to 1997 the town of Colchester was artificially divided with a boundary that variously meandered along a public footpath at the bottom of gardens and zigzagged through Colchester Garrison, where North and South Colchester constituencies were separated by razor-topped fences patrolled by armed soldiers. It was a ludicrous, incomprehensible arrangement which caused much confusion. Seven of Colchester's then 12 town wards were placed in a constituency called North Colchester, which took in large areas of Tendring district, with the other five in the town's urban wards in a constituency called Colchester South and Maldon, which stretched more than 30 miles to Burnham-on-Crouch. There was no community of interest among the seven Colchester town wards and the rural areas of Tendring, and no community of interest among the five Colchester town wards with vast tracts of rural Maldon district and the Dengie Hundred. The real community of interest is within the town of Colchester, north, south, east, west, the urban wards of Britain's oldest recorded town.

The Boundary Commission circa 1995 recognised that the overwhelming community of interest required the reunification of urban Colchester. Thus, at the 1997 general election Colchester once again was a united town at parliamentary level, as had been the case from the dawn of parliamentary representation. The 14 years from 1983 to 1997 were a regrettable blip which did not serve the town well. I thank the Boundary Commission for once again recognising the importance of its proposals for Essex that Colchester should remain a unified urban constituency.

The 1997 general election, for reasons of number equalisation, the adjoining urban parish of Stanway formed part of the new Colchester constituency. By 2010, with the increased population in Essex leading to the county having an extra constituency, Stanway was removed to be part of the new Witham constituency. During the last parliament, when constituencies were being reviewed, I recall that Colchester was only one of two Essex constituencies that the Commission proposed should remain unchanged.

I recognise, as has been indicated, that the Boundary Commission has to deal with the numbers and with Parliament's proposals that the number of constituencies be decreased. Noting that Colchester's population has increased since that review, which was not implemented, and will have significant growth in the coming decade, I believe more than anywhere else in Essex, I invite the Commission to look again at the numbers to see if the addition of East Donyland, Rowhedge and Cherry Tree would result in an imbalance in size of the Colchester electorate. These two communities would sit well in the Colchester constituency but I am concerned that, with the town's population known growth ahead, we could end up with a constituency with too many electors. I am not proposing today that it be removed because I am conscious of the

knock-on effect elsewhere, and the parish of East Donyland, as I say, would sit well in the Colchester constituency, but, with the massive development – Colchester is one huge building site – I am concerned that by the time of the next general election Colchester may well exceed the number of electors that is required within the small and large sizes permitted.

In summary, should Parliament agree to reduce the number of MPs, the proposal by the Boundary Commission in respect of the Colchester constituency has my support. This is my strong verdict based on my 18 years' experience as MP for Colchester and 60 years' knowledge of community life in Colchester and elsewhere in Essex, including my early years in journalism working on four of the county's newspapers, of which one I was editor. Community of interest and the size of constituencies which the Boundary Commission is looking to create clearly confirm that Colchester conforms to both requirements.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Bob. Does anyone have any questions of clarification? (None) Thank you for taking the time to come to see us today.

I will now ask if we have Richard Huggins.

MR HUGGINS: (Inaudible)

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am afraid I would not know that.

MR HUGGINS: It is all right. I do not have a computer, as you see, so I have written submissions, which may be helpful.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Once again, can you start by giving your full name and address?

MR HUGGINS: I am Richard Huggins, 28 Pine Close, Ingatestone, Essex, as on that submission. Anything else you would like to know first?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, just go ahead. You have got ten minutes.

MR HUGGINS: Thank you for agreeing to see me. I live in Ingatestone and this is the fifth one of these inquiries I have attended. The first one was back in 1979, and I must admit it was rather busier than it is today.

I made my submission primarily because when I saw the Commission's proposals I was concerned primarily with the Brentwood and Ongar constituency and the loss of the two wards of Warley, Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon, and I felt there was potential to improve this. I stress that I do not have any political allegiance; this is done purely for myself, but listening first to Mr Cook this morning when he mentioned the desirability of getting more of Basildon New Town into one constituency, and Cllr Robinson and Cllr Kendall's submission, it is quite similar to my own, but I stress I had no knowledge before I walked in here today as to what they were going to say, and I presume they did not have any knowledge of what I am about to say.

Obviously, like Cllr Robinson said, if you alter one constituency you have to go round in a circle, and that is exactly what I did in the same way that the Liberal Democrats have done. I had to look at South Basildon and East Thurrock first because I felt from the previous Boundary Commission reports that placed St Martin's ward in one constituency and the Southern Basildon area in a different constituency meant that you had a boundary running slap bang through the middle of the town centre. The railway line was the boundary and, as proposed in Brentwood now, between the Brentwood West and Warley wards. I felt that if it was possible to improve the situation in Basildon and improve Brentwood and Ongar, that would be most desirable. I did look at moving both Fryerns and St Martin's ward from South Basildon and East Thurrock, but came to the conclusion that 9,000 electors of Fryerns ward was a bit too difficult within the criteria of the Commission, and I therefore believe that the ward of St Martin's, which is effectively Basildon Town Centre, 5,730 electors, should transfer from Billericay into the Basildon and East Thurrock constituency, which would lose Warley and Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon wards to Brentwood. I suggest, in light of the fact that it would now include all the Basildon New town wards instead of one, that it could usefully be called Basildon and East Thurrock rather than South Basildon and East Thurrock, and that gives an electorate of 75,925, which I note is exactly what Cllr Robinson had and presumably our proposals for that constituency are identical.

Brentwood and Ongar has to lose something when you add in 7,475 electors from those two wards. I came to the conclusion, and this is where I differ slightly but we are trying to get to the same thing, I think, that the wards of Broomfield and The Walthams and Boreham and The Leighs should transfer to the Witham and Maldon constituency. As far as they are concerned that is probably no worse than being placed in the Brentwood and Ongar constituency, and certainly in the case of Boreham and The Leighs, there are quite close connections to Hatfield, Peverel, Witham and that part of the world. When you take those two wards out you end up with an electorate of 73,126 for Brentwood and Ongar.

That, of course, means Witham and Maldon, having gained those two wards, Broomfield and The Walthams, 6,367 electors, Boreham and The Leighs 4,691, has to lose something and therefore I propose Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon, comprising 6,613 electors, would transfer to Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers. This would leave Witham and Maldon constituency with 78,384 electors, which I note is exactly 123 electors within the Commission's criteria, just short of 78,507, so it is a tight fit but I just about made it.

That brings me on to Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers, which, having gained Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon, needs to lose something. I came to the conclusion here that the sensible ward to transfer was Rettendon and Runwell, which is 4,274 electors, leaving Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers with 75,521, and that Rettendon and Runwell would join Billericay constituency, which, following the transfer of St Martin's to Basildon and East Thurrock, I suggest could drop Basildon from its title because it would only include one ward of Basildon New Town, and I think it could revert to its historic title, Billericay, which is a pretty famous name in parliamentary circles, as anyone who was around in the 1950s would recall. I cannot quite remember that far back, but there it was. Rettendon and Runwell, 4,274, going into Billericay leaves an electorate of 72,954 for the revised Billericay constituency.

There was a reason I chose Rettendon and Runwell ward to transfer and that is because Runwell and Wickford, which would also be in the Billericay constituency, are one contiguous settlement. People who live in Runwell probably say they live in Wickford almost. The railway station is Wickford. You pass from one to the other without any real knowledge that you are passing from one to the other, and I felt that was the preferable ward to transfer. However, the only slight downside is that it does mean the principal road connection between the southern and northern parts of Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers constituency would for a short distance be outside that constituency; it would be in Billericay, and I am not proposing that we reinstate a wonderful crossing between Hullbridge and South Woodham.

There is a river crossing there but the ferry has not run since the early sixties. You could probably wade across at low water, but there is a lot of mud, so I accept that for a slight distance the road connection leaves the constituency. That was why, in my written submission which you have there, I suggested that, if that was unacceptable to the Commission, and I am not necessarily certain it should be, but I proposed as an alternative Bicknacre East and West Hanningfield ward transfer instead to the Billericay constituency, and Rettendon and Runwell therefore would stay in Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers. That is not my preferred option, but if that were considered then the

little village of Woodham Ferrers, as opposed to South Woodham Ferrers or South Woodham, as I used to know it as, would be in Billericay constituency, so I have proposed, should you feel that second option is preferable, that the constituency could be named Rayleigh and South Woodham or Rayleigh and South Woodham Ferrers, because I think South Woodham Ferrers is the generally accepted name these days, insert the ward "South", in fact, to replace the one that has come out of Basildon and East Thurrock.

That is the essence of my circular tour round Chelmsford, but I would like to make one further proposal, and quite honestly it is exactly what Cllr Robinson said as regards Golf Green, which is Jaywick Sands, and the Little Clacton and Weeley wards. I remember at the 1993 and 2003 inquiries there was significant representation from the residents of Jaywick Sands, and in the 1993 inquiry there was a large petition produced in support of keeping Jaywick in a Clacton constituency, part of the old urban district of Clacton. I see no reason why the decisions made in 1993 and 2003 should not prevail, and, the electorates being similar, my proposal is that Little Clacton and Weeley would transfer to the North East Essex constituency and Golf Green ward would be within Harwich and Clacton, which, as I say, is exactly what I am pleased to see I have at least support for from the Liberal Democrats.

That is what I wanted to say, thank you. If there are any questions I am happy to take them.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Richard. Does anyone have any questions of clarification?

MR PRATT: I just wanted to check if the Purleigh ward was moved in your proposal from – you are not proposing to move it, but if it was also moved into the Witham and Maldon constituency, which is 2,642, would that still work with your proposal? I think it would but I just wanted to check.

MR HUGGINS: It does not quite work. I did look at an alternative. Purleigh ward, I think, is 2,642 electors, and it was out by a small margin; I cannot remember the exact margin, but if you allow me a couple of minutes I will run through an alternative where I started by looking at the Maldon constituency because, as you rightly say, it is the only ward of Maldon that is not in the Maldon and Witham constituency. There is a way of getting it in Maldon more or less using my proposals but not quite, so if you want me to I will offer that as a third alternative.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Perhaps you can speak to Roger afterwards if you have the time to do that.

MR HUGGINS: All right.

CLLR ROBINSON: There is only one point which I want to raise so that everyone is clearer. You mentioned that in your proposal you would put Rettendon and Runwell with Wickford, and you said that there is a degree of overlap on the ground, but, just to clarify, you would accept that Wickford is part of Basildon borough and unparished?

MR HUGGINS: It is, yes.

CLLR ROBINSON: And Runwell is part of Chelmsford district and parished?

MR HUGGINS: Yes.

CLLR ROBINSON: And they look perhaps in different directions. Also, under my proposals we had South Woodham Ferrers, Woodham Ferrers and Wrettendon and Runwell all in the same proposal, and those three wards do have a degree of commonality, all being part of the rural hinterland of South Woodham Ferrers.

MR HUGGINS: Indeed. It is a case of drawing the boundaries ---

CLLR ROBINSON: You have to draw it somewhere.

MR HUGGINS: --- within the rules, as it were.

CLLR ROBINSON: I just wanted to draw attention to the fact that you can argue these things different ways.

MR HUGGINS: Indeed, as you can with Purleigh, which is another ---

CLLR ROBINSON: Yes. Under our proposals we would unite the entirety of the Maldon district in one constituency.

MR HUGGINS: As I say, I have come up with another proposal which does just that, but it does have ramifications elsewhere.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think this question was for clarification only. We are not supposed to be cross-examining.

MR HUGGINS: I am not objecting.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Richard, thank you for your time. You have obviously spent a lot of time and effort helping us out with that, so we will take away those proposals. Do we have anyone else in the room who is booked for later on today but is happy to speak now? (None) In that case we will adjourn until 1.00 pm when we have our next speaker booked. Thank you.

Time noted:12.36 pm

After a short adjournment

Time noted:1.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back to Chelmsford, everybody. We are continuing with members of the public being invited to come and speak. Do we have Susan Allen here? Ms Allen, would you like to make your way up to the front? We are asking everybody to give their name and address for the record, and just to let you know that all proceedings are being filmed. You will have ten minutes to speak.

MS ALLEN: My name is Susan Allen. I live in Rowhedge, which is a village on the River Colne, 21 West Street. Do you need postcodes for this as well?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

MS ALLEN: CO5 7HW. First, I have been asked by friends, who cannot get to any of these meetings and who live in the West Suffolk and South Suffolk constituencies, to speak on their behalf. In Stoke-by-Clare where they live the community generally looks to Clare to go shopping or to Sudbury. They certainly do not link with a constituency that stretches to the north, which is Mildenhall and Newmarket, which is the one you are looking at for them. Public transport is the 236 bus and that runs east to west. There is no connection at all for this community going further north as you are proposing.

Secondly, where I live in Rowhedge we have just linked up with Old Heath and The Hythe, which is a new ward, and I am very pleased to see that you are putting us into Colchester. I just want to say that I rang up some time ago asking for that, and that pleases me because our links are with Colchester. That is where we go shopping, that is where we go to school, that is where our hospital is.

Living very close to the River Colne, I have always found it odd that the constituency stretches across the river when there is no crossing there. From Rowhedge we see Wivenhoe but we cannot get there without going into Colchester and back out. When you go further south and you have got Mersea and Brightlingsea there is no connection there at all other than the Colne and those who sail on it. Even though I am no longer going to be in that ward, in fact, hopefully I will be in the Colchester ward, I am surprised that that is even in the proposal still because there are options; you could go north, say. North of the Colne is a separate community to south of the Colne; they have different councils, Tendring District Council as opposed to Colchester Borough Council, and going further south to Maldon, so naturally they would want to be a separate constituency, I would have thought. I am just bringing that to your attention because my personal needs are satisfied but I am aware that for other people there is still a bit of a dilemma there.

Generally, what I am hearing from my friends is that there is a great deal of frustration that the Commission has been put in the position of developing constituency boundaries based on rules set by the Conservative Party. As you can guess, I am not a Conservative Party person, but, regardless of that, it is set by them, as all political parties do, to their advantage, but they are using an inaccurate electoral register and there are far more recent and far more accurate ones. I experienced this myself recently when we were looking at a planning application going through, and the stats that Colchester Borough Council planning were using were not accurate, so I do draw your attention to that. I also worry that when you have not got an accurate electoral register and you are using boundaries set by a political party, it does affect the impartiality of the Commission. That is what I have been asked to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any questions for clarification? (None) Thank you very much for giving your time.

MS ALLEN: I have a little drawing here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would you like to pass it up? (Same done) We heard from Richard Huggins earlier and there were a couple of questions of clarification. He has kindly done some work in the interval, and, Richard, may I ask you to come back for part two?

MR HUGGINS: Thank you. I did prepare this earlier before I arrived here, but I felt that it is useful to show an alternative to what I suggested. This, I stress, is not my preferred option, and at the end of the day it possibly comes back to what is more

desirable, to unite the whole of Maldon district in one constituency or to unite the whole of Brentwood borough in one constituency.

I started looking in this instance at Witham and Maldon constituency, and placing Purleigh ward in that constituency and removing it from the Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers constituency. My proposal is that Purleigh and Boreham and The Leighs from the proposed Brentwood and Ongar constituency would transfer into Witham and Maldon, which would be 7,333 electors, and that the constituency, now being oversized, would lose Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon, 6,613 electors, which would leave it with an electorate of 74,659. I think that is quite a logical move because Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon was the sole ward from Chelmsford City Council administration which was proposed to be in Witham and Maldon, and I just switch it with Boreham and The Leighs, but I think Boreham and The Leighs is quite a logical ward to be placed with Witham and Maldon, probably more so than Brentwood and Ongar, and in that respect it is similar to my earlier proposal.

That leaves Rayleigh and Woodham Ferrers receiving the Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon ward and losing Purleigh, a net gain of 3,971 electors, leaving it with 77,153, which is still within the Commission's limits, and I think a logical move if this was seen as uniting Maldon all in one constituency.

Those moves mean I can look at the South Basildon and Brentwood and Ongar constituencies. South Basildon and East Thurrock is a large constituency in terms of electorate, and it can lose the Warley ward, 4,505 electors, to give it an electorate of 73,165, so it stays within the Commission's guidelines. Under this proposal it cannot transfer Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon and I do not transfer St Martin's ward, but it is an option and it means Brentwood and Ongar, having gained the Warley ward, 4,505 electors, which is an integral part of Brentwood and, as we have heard, the railway station is half in Warley, half in Brentwood (well, Brentwood West), even Brentwood Central, or whatever. It would lose Boreham and The Leighs to keep the electorate within the limits, which would make it 76,623. That, in a sense, is going round the other way, which unites Maldon district, transfers one of the two wards from South Brentwood, as it were, from South Basildon constituency, and so goes one way towards obviating the rather unsatisfactory boundary that would arise in the Brentwood area if the Commission's proposals went ahead.

It does not address the Basildon situation, so there I looked at option 2B, which I have sent you a copy of. This is as 2A but in this proposal I transfer St Martin's ward from South Basildon and East Thurrock, and that means it can lose Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon to Brentwood borough, and that unites Brentwood again in one

constituency, giving that an electorate of 75,925, which is exactly what I proposed earlier. That constituency would be exactly the same under this proposal. Of course, it means that Brentwood and Ongar is now too big, so it loses Boreham and The Leighs to Witham and Maldon, as I mentioned earlier. Billericay, of course, having lost St Martin's, is then too small, and the ward I have come up with, which in this instance you would have to transfer, is the one where I live, Ingatestone, Fryerns and Mountnessing, 4,795 electors. You do not unite the whole of Brentwood borough but you do unite the old Brentwood urban district, of which Herongate, Ingrave and West Horndon was a part. It also unites Ingatestone, Fryerns and Mountnessing with an essentially more rural constituency of Billericay, and in a sense that may be more sensible than keeping Herongate out because historically we were part of the Chelmsford RDC in Ingatestone.

We were moved into the Brentwood district in 1973 when the last boundary changes happened. The urban district of Brentwood was not big enough to form a district council in its own right. Several wards of Epping and Ongar RDC and Chelmsford RDC were moved into the Brentwood borough. As I say, that would leave the Billericay constituency, which I suggest drops the Basildon title, with 73,475. I would stress that my preferred option is what I said to you earlier. This is placing the unification of Maldon district over the unification of Brentwood borough, and, as I submit, it is probably a matter for you to decide, in the light of representations, which you feel is the preferable option. It does not quite do what the Liberals have done. I have noticed they moved Writtle ward. I had not considered the movement of Writtle ward. That is a third or fourth option which can no doubt be looked at.

Thank you for listening. If anyone has any further queries I am happy to answer them.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Richard. Any further questions? (None) Once again, many thanks for your time. I do not think we have anyone else in the room now who has not spoken, so we will now adjourn and come back after lunch at half past two.

Time noted: 1.11 pm

After the luncheon adjournment

Time noted: 2.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back to Chelmsford on Day One. We are going to continue this afternoon with hearing from members of the public, and I would like to invite Mr Paul West to come and speak,

if you would like to come up here, Mr West. We are asking everyone to give their full name and address, and you will have about ten minutes to speak.

MR WEST: Thank you very much. My name is Paul West and my home address is 333 Norwich Road in Ipswich, Suffolk. I am here today just to address the Commission's proposals for Suffolk and to put forward some proposals of my own. In the main my comments will cover Ipswich, South Suffolk, Central Suffolk and North Ipswich and the Bury St Edmunds constituencies.

The Commission have addressed the over-representation of Bury St Edmunds and the under-representation of Ipswich by facilitating the changes through the South Suffolk constituency. I would like to recommend that the necessary adjustments to Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich constituencies are facilitated through the constituency of Central Suffolk and North Ipswich as I feel this makes more sense both geographically and also takes into account local government boundaries in a more sensible way, which I will outline.

In relation to the Ipswich constituency, the Commission recommends that the council ward of Pinewood becomes part of the Ipswich constituency. Pinewood is currently a ward in Babergh District Council, and moving Pinewood into the Ipswich constituency alone would create an orphan ward within the Ipswich constituency that I propose ought to be avoided at all costs. I would recommend, therefore, that Pinewood remains in the South Suffolk constituency and Ipswich instead takes in the district council ward of Castle Hill from Central Suffolk and North Ipswich constituency. My reasons are as follows.

Castle Hill ward currently sits within the Ipswich Borough Council area with 13 other wards that currently form part of the Ipswich constituency, whereas Pinewood sits within Babergh, and, as I have said, would therefore become an orphan ward in the Ipswich constituency should the Commission's proposals go through. Also, the most southerly point of Castle Hill ward is just one and a quarter miles from Ipswich town centre, whereas Pinewood is over twice this distance. Castle Hill ward is an urban area built between the mid 1930s and the mid 1960s and is very much part of Ipswich in its outlook, its type of housing and its community. Pinewood, on the contrary, has less affinity to the town of Ipswich, it being a relatively modern development of the last 25 years.

If Castle Hill is brought within the Ipswich constituency, as I propose, it would mean that the county council division of St Margaret's and Westgate would be entirely within the Ipswich constituency. This is to be contrasted with the Boundary Commission

proposals with Pinewood coming in to Ipswich. It would mean the county council division of Belstead Brook that currently includes the district council ward of Pinewood would also be split between South Suffolk and Ipswich constituencies.

To compensate for its loss of Castle Hill ward I would recommend that Central Suffolk and North Ipswich constituency take in Needham Market and Ringshall. These are both wards within the Mid Suffolk District Council area and, indeed, Needham Market is home to Mid Suffolk District Council's administration office and sits more comfortably as part of Central Suffolk and North Ipswich than it does in the Bury St Edmunds constituency. In addition to that, both Needham Market and Ringshall were previously part of the old Central Suffolk seat between 1983 and 1997 before that seat was renamed Central Suffolk and North Ipswich and some changes made at that time.

The wards of Onehouse and Rattlesden I propose be part of the Bury St Edmunds constituency to maintain their close links with Stowmarket, which are disrupted if the Boundary Commission's proposals were to proceed. I am proposing that the constituency of South Suffolk remains unchanged from its current boundaries.

My proposals, which affect just six local government wards, would have the following benefits over the Boundary Commission proposals. It would mean that all of Babergh district would be within South Suffolk instead of creating an orphan ward of Pinewood within the Ipswich constituency. It would mean the constituency of Ipswich would fall within just one district council area, and there would be just two parliamentary seats within the Mid Suffolk District Council area rather than three under the Boundary Commission proposals. For all of these reasons I would like to advance my proposals instead of what the Boundary Commission has laid out. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Would you stay there for one moment? Does anybody have any questions for clarification?

CLLR ROBINSON: Thank you. That was well argued, but, just for clarification, on Pinewood, you said, yes, it is new, but it is more Ipswich spreading outwards, is it not, rather than anything from South Suffolk per se? It is more Ipswich overspill?

MR WEST: You could argue it that way, but I would argue that if Ipswich has to take in a district council ward then it is more sensible to take in Castle Hill, which sits within Ipswich Borough Council and has been part of Ipswich community for far longer, rather than Pinewood, because Pinewood, I feel, being a modern community built almost entirely over the last 25 years, is a more stand-alone community, that, yes, could fit

within the constituency of Ipswich but could equally be comfortable where it currently sits within the parliamentary constituency of South Suffolk.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Mr West. Thank you very much. We were due to have another speaker but they have not yet arrived. They were due at 2.40, so I propose to adjourn until three o'clock.

Time noted: 2.38 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 3.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back to Chelmsford where we are continuing with members of the public speaking this afternoon. May I invite Andrew Sheldon to come up? Mr Sheldon, if you would come and have a place at the front, we are asking people to give their full name and address and you will have ten minutes to speak to us. Thank you.

MR SHELDON: Thank you very much for hearing me this afternoon. My name is Andrew Sheldon. I live at 4 Thundersley Church Road, Benfleet, SS7 3ES. Commissioner, I come before you as a former mayor of Castle Point. I know I do not look like a former mayor of Castle Point but I do promise you I am. This is not some sick joke; I am actually a former mayor of Castle Point.

Unity is very important to the people of Castle Point and our local ties are very strong. If we have a look at the map in a second you will see that the proposal in essence is to take away Hadleigh from Castle Point as a parliamentary constituency and place it in Southend. Castle Point, up until now, has been relatively unique in that the constituency parliamentary boundary and the local authority boundary are coterminous, and it has been that way, I believe, since 1983. The crucial thing to note is that beyond living memory the whole of Castle Point has always been in one parliamentary constituency. Before then, under Sir Bernard Braine, it was under, I think, South East Essex. In terms of the political boundaries, as far as I know, they have never been merged, any of the political boundaries, between Southend and Castlepoint. Southend, as I am sure you know, or, if not, I am about to tell you, is a unitary authority, so beyond that line, where the Castle Point local authority boundary ends, there are almost no shared services. Castle Point has always looked to the rest of Essex, and, indeed, to Basildon, and for any sort of MP who is looking to provide a high quality of service to constituents, and, indeed, to look to tackle the different issues from one unitary borough

and district to go to a two-tier system it is going to be a challenge. They are going to be completely different with another set of stakeholders and a whole other set of challenges.

In terms of local ties, the two wards of Hadleigh, St James's and Victoria, have always looked to Benfleet. In fact, previous to Castle Point coming into existence as a local district authority, Hadleigh was always part of the Benfleet urban district council. Castle Point was formed by the castle, Hadleigh Castle in Hadleigh, which is currently proposed to be taken away from the parliamentary boundary, and Canvey Island, and those two merging, back in the seventies, I think. Hadleigh certainly has always been part of Benfleet, and in terms of shared services they are entirely shared. When it comes to that boundary there, all of a sudden, if you want your child to go to a local school, literally just into Southend, you have to apply to a different local authority. You cannot even use the tip from Hadleigh to go into Southend without paying a fee, whereas you can do if you go to either Canvey or, indeed, the one in Basildon.

I am hoping we could possibly look a little bit deeper at the urban extent here, St James's and Victoria. If you look at the current boundary here, it does not appear so much like it on the map, but this is all green fields; this is all the Hadleigh Downs, and this is all areas of woodland and a golf course, which means that in terms of the urban ... and that is also a trading estate there; forgive me, so, in terms of the shared urban boundary currently, you only have this amount here, because here is green fields and here is a trading estate. There is very little cross interaction, beyond possibly popping down the road for a curry. For the rest of your services you look over here to Benfleet and to Thundersley on this side here. Indeed, when it comes to everything from local schools to other services, such as doctors, very few people look to Leigh, to Westleigh or to Belfairs. Everybody looks to Benfleet.

When we are talking about ties, if we look at the extent of the urban conurbation that is about to be shared between the two constituencies, currently, as I said, it is only that much, which means that the rest of the borough looks the other way. However, if we follow the line here, because of the way both Victoria and St James's wards are made, so there is almost no natural boundary beyond literally going through people's back gardens, the closest thing you have to it is the Rayleigh Road, which is here. Unfortunately, because of the way Victoria ward is structured, it blends into Thundersley, and you will have cases where parts of back gardens are split between two parliamentary constituencies, whereas beforehand they simply were not to this extent.

If we are talking about urban boundaries, as I said before, previously it was just that little amount there. Forgive me if I am being remiss, having not come here with the square meterage, but if you look at it in terms of the ties here, the shared urban conurbation and people going back garden to back garden, as it were, it goes from this extent up here, a short gap there, but then all the way down here, and, indeed, all the way down into the country park there. For the people of Hadleigh, and I say this as a former Hadleigh resident, now a Thundersley resident, they have always been looking towards Benfleet, not just for their political services but also for other cultural services.

I will also mention the nature of Castle Point. Castle Point has a unique identity, although you would not believe it. It has a unique identity in that as a political entity it was almost formed over the past 30 years because we have had the two, if you like, behemoth authorities that we are squeezed in between. You have Southend to the east and you have Basildon to the west. Politically we have always fought, and, indeed, in terms of community we have always fought to stop ourselves merging into either one, despite the various pressures over the years. In terms of a community, a number of people in Castle Point are incredibly concerned that this would weaken that sense of identity and make it easier, perhaps in subsequent changes, for other political alterations to take place and for us eventually to be subsumed into either Southend or Basildon. We are a small borough but we have a very strong sense of identity.

The other thing to say is that, when it comes to the other side of the borough, our boundaries are a bit more fluid. There are two towns. When I refer to Benfleet I actually refer to South Benfleet. North Benfleet, and, indeed, Bowers Gifford, are in the Basildon authority, and previously to that, when we were a different borough, when we think of the parliamentary boundary, the South East Essex or South Essex parliamentary boundary, we would always go into Rayleigh or Basildon, but that boundary had always been incredibly firm in between Hadleigh and Leigh, and our identity as Castle Point has come about too. The people of Castle Point, if you ask them, are perfectly happy for Castle Point to be added to in some way as a parliamentary boundary, but I think their preference, from their own ties and their own experience, would be not to be split up and to have part of Castle Point parliamentary constituency become part of Southend.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Mr Sheldon. Are there any questions from the audience? Could you give your name, please?

CLLR ROBINSON: Stephen Robinson from the Liberal Democrats. I just want to clarify whether you are proposing anything else, because something needs to be done to

make the numbers work. Castle Point has to have something added and you have not said what you would add.

MR SHELDON: I am absolutely aware that Castle Point is not big enough. However, I am not an expert. I would not like to think I am standing here for some political reason. Unfortunately, all I can offer you are problems and no solutions, but the one problem I think most people in Castle Point, and certainly everybody who has expressed an opinion to me, is that we do not want any of that blurring of the boundaries between us and Southend. Forgive me if I am wrong, but I think I remember reading that where possible you try and avoid the blurring of different levels of authority over county boundaries or unitary boundaries, and this is a clear violation. Do not get me wrong; I can see why you have done it. I have done some reading and Essex certainly is an area that needs to be looked at, but when the people of Castle Point looked at it at various community meetings we felt like you have done a lot to deal with the problems at the top of the county, but when you come further down things start to get a little bit misshapen and we feel like we are between that and having Canvey Island that you cannot really move; it is a massive peninsular with 30,000 people on it. We feel like we have fallen foul of that rule when we should not have done.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

CLLR ROBINSON: Just two more points. One, you would accept that Southend and Essex County Council share a waste plan, so Southend does work with the rest of Essex on waste management ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I do not think that really is for clarification.

MR SHELDON: Waste management, yes, but not waste disposal. I think they deal with it later on down the chain, but if you are in your Volvo and you are dropping off at the tip you still have to pay £30, I think.

CLLR ROBINSON: Waste disposal is a shared responsibility because we have a shared waste plan. The other point was that on the ground, I think, there are nine separate side roads between Southend and Hadleigh which are divided by the boundary between Southend and Castle Point in the area that you identified on the map. I understand where you are coming from, but I am just saying that the evidence is not overwhelming that somehow the line between Southend and Castle Point is this huge inviolable boundary.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think that is going to be a matter for the Assistant Commissioners to review the evidence. We have heard what Mr Sheldon said.

MR SHELDON: Forgive me, but have you also counted the amount that would currently go across? I think you would find it would probably be a little bit more, if I am honest with you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any other questions? (None) Thank you very much, Mr Sheldon.

MR SHELDON: Thank you very much for listening to my submissions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do we have Mr Bill Scott with us? He was due at three o'clock. As he is not here, is there anybody else in the room who has not booked in but wishes to speak? (None) In that case we will adjourn until 3.45, thank you.

Time noted: 3.12 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 3.45 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to Chelmsford. It is 3.45. We do not have any other speakers booked in now, so I am going to adjourn for an hour until 4.45. Just to let you know, we do not have anyone booked in at 4.45 but I will come back in an hour's time just in case anybody else has arrived. Thank you.

Time noted: 3.45 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 4.44 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, everyone. It is now just before 4.45 on Day One in Chelmsford. As we have no members of the public wishing to speak at this time we will now adjourn until 5.45. Thank you.

Time noted: 4.45 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 5.55 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to Chelmsford. It is now 5.55. We do not have any members of the public, so we will now adjourn until 6.15. Thank you.

Time noted: 5.55 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 6.43 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening, everyone. Welcome back to Chelmsford. It is now quarter past six. Again, we do not have any members of the public who would like to speak at this stage, so I am going to adjourn until 6.30 when our next speaker is due. Thank you.

Time noted: 6.15 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 6.33 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening, everyone. Welcome back to Day One of Chelmsford. For the benefit of member of the public, Mr Cutler, who has just joined us, we are inviting members of the public to come and talk to us for about ten minutes. Mr Cutler, when you come up would you please give your full name and address for the record. Just to let you know, all proceedings are being recorded. Thank you.

MR CUTLER: Good evening, everybody. I am James Cutler, 59 Glenmere Park Avenue, Benfleet, Essex. Thank you very much for still being here this evening. I am last. Does that make me the main event? (Laughter)

Just a little bit about myself. I am James. I was born on 10 May 1983. That holds a little bit of significance because a month later Sir Bernard Braine was made the MP of

newly formed Castle Point, so I have all of my life lived in Castle Point as it is. During that time I have lived in Thundersley, went to school in Hadleigh, lived in Benfleet, worked in Hadleigh, lived in Hadleigh, worked in Benfleet, never really looking back and never considered I was crossing any boundaries at any point, until, of course, this has come up and now I am being asked to let you know how the proposed changes affect the average life.

We do not really see a massive border between Hadleigh and Thundersley and Benfleet. The line that is the crux of it is the Victoria House roundabout. There is a single street, houses on either side. It is not a big barrier, like one would say Sadlers Farm could be on the other side at Pitsea. The people from Hadleigh, Benfleet and Thundersley integrate seamlessly the whole time, and as someone who has lived there for 33 years I have never considered myself crossing any sort of border. I may see that more if there was a different MP for either side. The challenges that are challenged by Hadleigh, Benfleet and Thundersley are exactly the same challenges. Canvey Island, as we all know, is its own little area and the islanders there refer to themselves thus, but the mainland, as it is known locally, they all see themselves as one unit.

As a mathematical exercise I thoroughly liked what the Boundary Commission had done with the numbers, getting everything right with Castle Point. However, when you are short of 3,490 people and you end up wanting to move more like 27,000 people around to come to a decent figure, I do wonder if perhaps there may be a slightly simpler way of going about this. Four wards seem a little excessive and that is a big change to any area.

This morning, because I knew I was coming here, I decided to do a little research on what the different parties would like and their views on things. I myself am a Conservative. I know this does not come into it too much, but I saw what was posted, and I would assume in a letter directed to the Boundary Commission from the Labour Party, the Castle Point Constituency's Labour Party's response to the Boundary Commission's proposals for 2018. If I may I would like to read a very brief statement of that which I thoroughly support, and it is not often that the two leading parties come on the same page.

"Castle Point has a well defined western border with Basildon District, namely, the A130. Access to and from Castle Point can only sensibly be accessed via the somewhat congested Sadlers Farm roundabout. Further, the existing ward boundary between Castle Point, Cedar Hall and Victoria wards, which would form the eastern boundary of the proposed new constituency is somewhat tortuous in that it would stray

to the west of the A129 close to the intersection with the A13. This would therefore be a very unnatural boundary.”

That last line I would completely concur with. It is an extremely unnatural boundary. While I do not come to you with solutions, I would like you to reconsider Hadleigh as leaving Castle Point. Ladies and gentlemen, do you have any questions, please?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any questions of clarification? (None) Mr Cutler, many thanks for your time and we do appreciate you coming. All the comments from the public will be fed back and we will be considering it and decide whether there are any better proposals that we can make.

MR CUTLER: Wonderful. Thank you ever so much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. It is now five to seven. We do not have any other members of the public at the moment but I appreciate that there might be traffic difficulties and some people might still be trying to get here, so in the interests of fairness and letting everyone have their say I am going to adjourn until quarter past seven, and if people have not turned up by then we will consider closing for today. Thank you.

Time noted: 6.55 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 7.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, everyone. Welcome back to Chelmsford for the last time today. It is now quarter past seven. As we have no members of the public booked in to speak I would like to thank everyone for coming today. We will now close today's proceedings and open again tomorrow morning at 9.00 am. Thank you.

Adjourned at 7.15 pm until Tuesday 1 November 2016 at 9.00 am

A

MS ALLEN, 34, 35

C

MR COOK, 12, 18
MR CUTLER, 45, 47

H

MR HARTLEY, 2
MR HUGGINS, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35

K

CLLR KENDALL, 26

P

MR PRATT, 5, 11, 18, 25, 32

R

CLLR ROBINSON, 19, 25, 33, 39, 42, 43
SIR BOB RUSSELL, 27

S

MR SHELDON, 40, 43, 44

T

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, 2, 4, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47

U

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER, 25

W

MR WEST, 38, 39