

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

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DARLINGTON

ON

THURSDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY ONE

Before:

Ms Eileen Brady, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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83 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0HW
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THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to this public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries in the North East Region.

My name is Eileen Brady 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 North East Region. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow. I am also responsible, with my fellow Assistant Commissioner Adele Baumgardt.

who is seated to my left at the front here, 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 Staff, led by Donna Smith, who is sitting to my left. Donna Smith will shortly provide an explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for new constituencies in this region. She will tell you how you can make written representations and she will deal with one or two administrative matters.

The hearing schedule is listed to run from 10.00 am today until 8.00 pm, and tomorrow it is scheduled to run from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. I can vary the timetable and I will take into account the attendance and 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 North East Region. A number of people have already registered to speak and have been given a timeslot 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 the proposals, nor is this a hearing for an opportunity to cross-examine others who speak during the presentation. People may seek to put questions for clarification purposes to the speakers but they should do that through me, the Chair.

I will now hand over to Donna Smith, who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the North East Region. Thank you.

MS SMITH: Thank you very much and good morning. As Eileen has mentioned, my name is Donna Smith and I am a member of the Commission staff. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their role to recommend new Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries and, at this hearing I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearings run smoothly. As Eileen has stated, they will chair the hearing itself and it is their responsibility to run the hearing at their discretion and take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here to support Eileen in carrying out her role. Please ask one of us outside of the hearing if you need any help or assistance.

I would now like to talk about the Commission's initial proposals for the North East Region, which were published on the 13 September 2016. The Commission's proposals for this region are for 25 constituencies, a reduction of four. Our proposals leave three of the existing constituencies unchanged. We used 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. This 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 base approach we adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

In considering the composition of each European Electoral Region we noted that it might not be possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties. The North East has been allocated 25 constituencies, a reduction of four from the current number. Our proposals leave three of the 29 existing constituencies unchanged. More substantial change is required however in other parts of the region. We are proposing one constituency within Tyne and Wear that crosses the River Tyne. We have also proposed one constituency that crosses the River Tees. We are proposing one constituency that crosses the boundary between Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, which combines the town of Stannington with wards from the northern part of Newcastle. In addition, we are proposing one constituency that includes wards from County Durham and the Borough of Gateshead, combining the town of Rowlands Gill and the town of Consett. The Borough of Middlesbrough is divided between three constituencies and the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees is divided between three constituencies. The Borough of Darlington is wholly contained in one constituency.

The statutory rules allow us to take into account Local Government Boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015. These include the external boundaries of local councils and their internal boundaries, known as wards or electoral divisions. We seek to avoid dividing wards between constituencies where 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 would 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 also available on our website in a number of places of deposit around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at www.bce2018.org.uk. I do urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December.

Finally, 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 make an oral presentation. The Commission is legally obliged to take a recording of the public hearings and, as you can see, we are taking a 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 during spring of next year. The publication of those hearing recordings and written representations will include 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 which is also available on our website.

At this stage I will now hand back to the Chair to begin the public hearing and thank you for your attendance today. Quickly, before I do that, as a matter of housekeeping, there is no fire drill scheduled for today so, if the fire alarm goes off it is the real thing. Please use the fire exit and our meeting point is the sweet shop across the road. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that Donna. We will return now to the schedule for this morning's public hearings in our location of Darlington. The first scheduled person listed to speak is James Wharton, if you would come forward please. As indicated, you have to outline, for the purposes of the record, your name and your address details.

MR JAMES WHARTON: (MP for Stockton South) Yes, I have written it on the sheet on my way in. My name is James Wharton, I am the MP for Stockton South. Is the House of Commons okay for an address or do you want my home address? Is that okay?

I would like to talk about Stockton West and Middlesbrough West and Stockton East.

Thank you very much, thank you Assistant Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen. I first want to start by saying that I recognise the challenge that the Boundary Commission faces with the legislation and the rather strict requirements within which the Commission is required to work. I recognise and accept those restrictions and do not intend therefore to waste anybody's time by debating the merits or otherwise of them. I recognise the decision that you have taken to undertake the Boundary Review on a European regional basis and to reduce the number of constituencies in the North East of England, a decision to which I do not object.

I am particularly interested in the two proposed new constituencies of Stockton West and Middlesbrough West and Stockton East, both covering part of what is currently my constituency Stockton South, which is here (indicating). Overall I think that this is a reasonable proposal from the Boundary Commission, I think that it has some quite significant merits in addressing what have been long standing issues with the constituency's layout in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees but, I do think that it could be improved.

I think I will talk first, if that is all right, about the reasons that I think that Stockton West should be supported, subject to the amendments that I would then propose ought to be made.

I will start with Yarm and Eaglescliffe. You have got a town here, Yarm and a town here, Eaglescliffe. Yarm High Street is here in the little loop in the river. Yarm and Eaglescliffe both have a voting population of about 8,000 and both pivot around that high street, Yarm High Street there, Eaglescliffe does not have a high street as such of its own but, as you can see there is a massive population here and a massive population here, this is the high street to which both gravitate (indicating). Both communities are very strongly linked. I live in Eaglescliffe on the Eaglescliffe side and use Yarm all of the time, as indeed do many of my constituents. There are lots of families that live across both. Both towns are similar in nature. They share bus routes, they share concerns and have many similar impacts from local events. Therefore, I think it is welcome that they have been kept together in the proposal put forward by the Boundary Commission for Stockton West.

Stockton West also then brings in this area here through the west part of Stockton, these rural villages. Elton and Long Newton, up until the 2005 general election, were part of the Stockton South constituency, they were removed following a Boundary Review at that time. We have always contended that was a mistake. I still receive

significant amounts of correspondence from constituents in Elton and Long Newton, who still believe that they are in the Stockton South constituency. Elton and Long Newton, until the local government boundaries were redistributed in 2007 - if I remember correctly, it may have been slightly earlier than that, I think it was 2007 - were part of Preston ward, which actually took in part of Northern Eaglescliffe.

There are strong community ties between the rural parishes here and the Yarm and Eaglescliffe part of the current Stockton South constituency, which unfortunately were broken in 2005 (indicating). This recommendation reunites those communities, which I think is welcome. Similarly it retains in one constituency, the rural villages of Carlton, Thorpe Thewles, Redmarshall, Stillington, Wolviston and Wynyard, which is just off the map, which we do not particularly need to see but it is up towards the north. These are the rural villages that make up both that north western fringe of the borough of Stockton-on-Tees but also the corridor to a great extent, between Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington. Again it is welcome that they are to be united in one constituency. It is I think something that is overdue to recognise the cohesive nature of the rural community on the fringes of Stockton and I welcome that the Stockton West proposal brings them together with one Member of Parliament.

One of the more controversial points, I suspect, of the proposal, is going to be Billingham West, which is here, being not with the rest of Billingham, which is proposed to go off into Hartlepool. It is this ward here. As you can see, the massive population is this part of it, there is actually nothing in this bottom bit, people live there. However, Billingham West actually quite rightly can retain a strong link with the Northern Parishes Ward, which is this rural ward to the top. The village here, Wolviston, next to Billingham West there – which funnily enough, is where I grew up – is where many of the children from Billingham West will go to primary school, it is where many of the families will have close social ties, it is where again they share bus routes, they share other administrative connections. If part of Billingham is to be separated out, and I accept that that will be a bone of contention - I suspect it will - Billingham West is the right ward for it to be because Billingham West is somewhat separate to the rest of Billingham. You can see that by the nature of the way it sticks out here, compared to the mass of Billingham there, it is a different type of community and it does look reasonably to the parishes around it rather than just to Billingham itself. (indicating) Again the proposal for Billingham West to stay with Northern Parishes, as part of the Boundary Commission's draft proposals is, I think, welcome.

There are however some areas where I think the Boundary Commission has got it wrong and where there is room for improvement. Most significantly, the splitting of Norton, which is here (indicating). We have two-thirds of Norton, two wards out of the three in the Stockton West and one in the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency. I think this is unwelcome and unnecessary. To have Norton West and Norton North separated from the other Norton ward, Norton South, is a strange decision. I suspect I know why it has come about. The Norton South ward has been

discussed and debated in a number of boundary hearings in the past and it has always been determined that it should not be split from the Stockton Town Centre ward, and that is because there is a large industrial estate, Portrack, which is dissected by the boundary of the two wards and which, for very good reasons, should be kept whole. I entirely support the principle, which I suspect is the reason for the division that we see in the current proposal, that Norton South should remain with Stockton Town Centre. What seems strange however, is that then Norton North and Norton West have been removed and placed in a different constituency. Norton predates Stockton as a settlement, it has a long established and very strong community identity, it is one village and should be kept whole if at all possible. Given there is no strong reason that I can see, other than meeting the number requirements, which I will come to address shortly, for the constituencies to divide it, I would suggest and have submitted documents to this effect, that the Commission should consider reuniting Norton in one constituency and that that constituency should be Middlesbrough West and Stockton East.

Similarly, there is a ward, which sits about here, called Newtown, which I have covered in my submission, which I put to you in writing, which is being divided from Stockton town centre by these proposals. (indicating) I would contend that that is a mistake. Its very name gives a hint as to its history. Newtown is an extension of Stockton town centre, which is not quite so new anymore, but which is very much part of the high street and the Town Centre Ward. It contains the train station, which is how many people will get to Stockton High Street. Stockton High Street has been a pretty hot political topic in recent years because of the work that has gone in to improve it, a very significant investment. The people of Newtown have been central to that and part of that discussion as that work has been taken forward. I believe it would be a mistake to split Newtown from the Stockton Town Centre ward. I believe the two are very closely identified and that is as distinct from the other Stockton wards that surround Newtown to its west, which are more residential in nature rather than an extension of the high street. So whilst I think it is reasonable to split Stockton, I do not think it is reasonable to split Newtown from Stockton town centre, and I hope that might be reconsidered.

Were we to bring the two Norton wards and the Newtown ward into Middlesbrough West and Stockton East, that would obviously present an issue with the numbers, however, there is a very logical final proposal, which I would ask to be taken into consideration, which is the anomaly in the map that is currently proposed of Ingleby Barwick here. Ingleby Barwick is a large new build housing development – I say new build, it is now about 30/35 years old – it was all fields historically when many of the traditional maps were talked about in this place, but it is now a large and increasingly settled community. It is very closely aligned with Yarm and with Eaglescliffe. Conyers School in Yarm has about 500 pupils from Ingleby Barwick, who go there every day. Egglecliff School in Eaglescliffe, has about 300 pupils from Ingleby Barwick, who go there every day. Ingleby Barwick gravitates towards Yarm High Street, and people from Yarm and Eaglescliffe would move towards Ingleby Barwick, where there is a larger Tesco for when they want to do that sort of shopping. I know this from my

surgeries, when I have done surgeries at Ingleby Barwick Tesco, I stand outside with a banner and people can come and talk to me. Invariably I get as many people from Yarm and Eaglescliffe as I do from Ingleby Barwick. I also know this from my life in Yarm where I see people from Ingleby Barwick day in day out, who talk to me in the high street, who I bump into who are using those facilities.

These three towns, Ingleby Barwick, Eaglescliffe and Yarm, make up a cohesive and very closely linked community, which I think should not be divided.

It happens to be also convenient that, if we were to reunite the two Norton wards and Newtown ward were to be reunited with Stockton town centre, which it should be, that then allows for Ingleby Barwick to be moved back into the constituency with Yarm and Eaglescliffe, where it has always been and the numbers then work very well and actually bring both constituencies closer to quota.

Ingleby Barwick East ward also includes the villages of Hilton and Maltby which are just about there – it is not marked on this map. The villages of Hilton and Maltby closely identify with the village of Kirklevington here, again sharing many issues (indicating), Hilton uses Yarm on its address and sees itself very much part of Yarm, even though it is in Ingleby Barwick ward. That would reunite those communities and it would also unite the southern part of the rural fringe of the borough of Stockton-on-Tees in one community, which I think would be a welcome move. Many of those small villages face very similar issues. Not only are the communities linked, not only do the parish councils work together and sit together and meet together, but they all face issues such as, for example, future proposals for planning such as Stockton's housing land assessment consultation. They impact on villages in a way that is different from how they impact on some of the urban parts of the constituency. That has reinforced the links between some of those rural communities, and it has meant that they work together because they face together many similar issues.

My proposal is that, overall I support the principle of the Boundary Commission's changes, however Norton should undoubtedly be reunited. My contention is it should be reunited in the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency, that allows it to retain its link between Stockton town centre and Norton South and it allows also the link between Stockton Town Centre ward and Mandale Ward and Thornaby, which is just over the river but, if you go and visit, you will see is an extension of the commercial area in the centre of Stockton to be retained. Indeed, Mandale ward in Thornaby used to be called Stockton South by many for the development that took place there as part of the high street, even though Thornaby is a distinct community.

I think Newtown should also be reunited with Stockton town centre. It is a mistake to divide that community, particularly given the period of change through which it is going and I think, and am absolutely convinced, that Ingleby Barwick should be united with Yarm and with Eaglescliffe, where their children go to school, where they shop, where

they live, where their friends and their families live, where they move often if they are to relocate to the home in which they are based and people are bringing up their families.

Altogether this proposal, which I have given in more detail in writing to the Commission, I think is a more cohesive, less significant change, better represents and identifies the pre-existing community ties and would, without significant disruption to the other proposals the Boundary Commission has made, allow communities to be reunited and a constituency that is more coherent and therefore, can be more effectively represented by its Member of Parliament, whoever that might be, to be brought together by the Boundary Commission when these reforms ultimately are enacted by Parliament.

Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Would you mind remaining there in order for any members of the audience who wish to seek any points of clarification. There are no takers so, in light of that, we conclude that. Thank you very much.

We will move on to the next person listed to make a presentation and that would be Ian Galletley. Just outline your name for the record and your address.

CLLR GALLETLEY: My name is Ian Galletley, I am a Darlington Borough Councillor, this hearing is almost in my ward but not quite. I am also the Chairman of South Durham Conservatives, which covers the areas of the current constituencies of Darlington and Sedgfield and a former Chairman of the North East Conservative Party.

I am not here to make an alternative submission, I am here to make comments on three constituencies, if I may. First, in support of one particular recommendation made by the previous speaker. Secondly, to comment on the proposals for Darlington. Thirdly, to comment on the proposals for Barnard Castle in particular in the Bishop Auckland constituency.

If I might start with the east. I do not wish to reiterate a great deal of what Mr Wharton said, but if I could just point out what we might call the psychosocial aspect of your proposals for Ingleby Barwick. Simply looking at a map, or reading the history of the place, does not give one a clear indication of what kind of place it is. It virtually did not exist a couple of decades ago, it was farmland. It is by popular repute, the largest single privately owned housing development in Western Europe. It is enormous. It has grown and grown and is still increasing in size to the south. Most of the people who live there have moved reasonably locally, but one thing they have very much in common they are upwardly mobile, you may say, but they also move there and often feel uprooted. Many of them have moved aspirationally from inner city areas to the east. One thing they frequently complain about is the lack of an identity. It has not got an established shopping centre, there are shops but there is not a place that can be

called the town centre. It relies extensively on its neighbouring areas for many of its services. As Mr Wharton said, it relies extremely heavily for its education. It does have a secondary school now, it does have primary schools but the new free school, which is there, is not large enough to take all the children, many of whom historically have gone to Yarm and Eaglescliffe. Most of the people there travel out for all sorts of reasons. They all travel out to work, enormous numbers of them commute in and out, most of whom go to Stockton and surrounding areas for their work and to Darlington along the A66.

Their primary focus is towards Stockton. They talk about Stockton Borough Council. They generate a great deal of constituency work because of the process of settling in to a new community. There are a great many teenage and primary school children there and they need the structure that gives them, I think, all sorts of stability. To uproot them and put them into another parliamentary organisation is an unnecessary change. We do accept that change is inevitable, but what should I believe be a guiding principle should be the minimum necessary change. Your proposal, whilst making sense on a map, just involves far more change of representation than would otherwise be necessary. I would ask you please, when you go away and consider these hearings, to look carefully at Ingleby Barwick, and say, why does this need to move into that constituency, other than for numbers? I would suggest that in terms of the people who live there, they require to know who they are, where they go for advice, who they go to for support.

So I do not support your proposal for Ingleby Barwick. That of course means that, by the same token, I do have to support Mr Wharton's proposals for further to the north to even up the numbers. Please do not under estimate the significance of what you are proposing, for a place that has not serious difficulties but identity difficulties. If you put further change on it I think you will be compounding the sense of the need to settle that is not being helped by these proposals.

If I could therefore move to your proposals for Darlington. I doubt if you have proposed anything that has been so universally accepted as a good idea. As a reasonably long term member of the council here, it has always been difficult to cope with the divide within the administration at local government level of the area being in two constituencies, particularly the way it was defined in the past where, for Hurworth-on-Tees in the south to get to the centre of the old Sedgefield constituency, you had to go through Darlington pretty well anyway; all the way round it. The old constituency made no sense at all and the villages surrounding Darlington are very different in character from the rest of the existing constituencies, and I think most people regard it as inevitable that it should be disposed of.

I would ask you to stand firm with your proposal for this. It may be that you will hear suggestions that one of the rural wards be not included in the constituency. If you were to receive such a recommendation, I would find that incomprehensible. I think you

would probably find some kind of minor revolt in the western villages because they are, to all intents and purposes, identical in their type; the majority of people pay council tax to Darlington, they are administered by the local government there; they work in Darlington; they rely on it for their hospitals and schools and everything. To just say, for some obscure reason, that one part of it should be added for purely arithmetic reasons to another constituency, would be completely unacceptable I think to the people who live particularly on the western side there. So I would ask you please to implement the proposals for Darlington in full.

Then if we move to the west. Having lived and worked in Barnard Castle for some years, I find that many Boundary Commission proposals are contentious, some are difficult to understand. The proposal for Barnard Castle is really quite worthy of derision. It actually has been a source of great humour in the town because it makes no sense whatsoever. If one thing that I say were to stick in your mind it is this: if you ask someone from Swaledale or Wharfedale in Yorkshire, where they come from, they will say they come from Yorkshire. If you ask someone from Teesdale where they come from, they will say they come from Teesdale. The reason for that is that they do not regard themselves as members of Durham county, they say they are from Teesdale. It is highly specific. If you go a valley further north, you go to Weardale and people are proud to call themselves County Durham people. The idea of dividing this lovely little market town down the middle of a road in an arbitrary way is quite frankly absurd, and it could easily be offset by the inclusion of other villages into the constituency further to the north.

I will not pre-empt submissions that other people will be making who actually live there but please, for your own wellbeing and also for your reputation sake, I do ask you to reconsider this because it makes no sense whatsoever. All you have to do is read the local newspaper there to see with almost contempt how the recommendations are regarded. It seems to be – let us put it charitably – proposed by someone who does not know the place. It will make little difference to the representation of it, it is just very important to the people who live there to feel that they are a single identity.

Thank you for your time, and welcome to Darlington.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Would you mind remaining there if anybody wishes to seek some clarification. They are invited to do so now. It does not appear there is any need for clarification. Thank you.

Our next scheduled person is Phil Wilson. Thank you, if you would like to come forward and, once again, outline your name and details for the purpose of the record.

MR PHIL WILSON: (Member of Parliament for Sedgefield) I am Phil Wilson, Member of Parliament for Sedgefield.

I just wanted to make a few comments about the changes as they affect the constituency of Sedgefield. It covers 150 square miles, it is very rural, very diverse, but obviously not as diverse as the constituents in Durham further to the west of the county. I have obviously taken the rural aspect of Darlington - all the villages, Heighington, Middleton St George, Hurworth - I have taken in Newtown, I have taken Sedgefield Village, which is a town which is a market town, and then I have taken several communities which are former coal mining communities. So it is a diverse kind of arrangement we have in the constituency, which is not untypical of other constituencies in the North East and especially in Durham, which is, as you know, a rural constituency.

I know the Darlington wards under the Commission's proposals that are in my constituency are to join a new Darlington constituency that will be co-terminus with the Darlington Borough, but until now Darlington has actually been that sort of self-contained unit, so to speak, or an urban area. Other parts of the borough, which are very rural, have been part of either Sedgefield constituency or Bishop Auckland constituency, they actually have not been in the Darlington constituency for about 100 years. Over the course of the last 100 years, like I said, they have been in either Bishop Auckland or Sedgefield. However, with the exception of Ferryhill, the remainder of the Sedgefield constituency remains intact. What has happened is, there has been some additional wards further to the east in the county that have been added to the area.

I want to mention, because the boundaries are based now on the size of electorates, and everything around communities and settlements is second, I just wanted to say one or two things about the effects on one or two of the communities in Sedgefield, and especially Ferryhill.

Ferryhill is going to the Bishop Auckland constituency although it has been a part of Sedgefield since 1983, and before the boundaries were abolished in the early 1970s I think was also a part of the constituency then. Sedgefield has a very close relationship with Chilton, which is about a mile to the south of Ferryhill, they are both former coal mining communities. You have got Ferryhill Station, which is part of the Ferryhill local government ward, which is actually known locally as Chilton Lane, so there is a kind of affinity between the two areas there. A lot of the children who live in Chilton end up going to the business college or the comprehensive school in Ferryhill, so there is a close bond between the two on many other arrangements. The GP surgeries, for example, come under the same doctors as well.

What people have also said about the constituency is that it is huge, and people are saying from Aycliffe over to De Bruce, which is in Hartlepool, is quite a distance, which is about 20 to 25 miles. But if you look at the existing constituency, from Piercebridge all the way over to Thornley, it is over 30 miles. So it is a constituency where people have always had to travel distances to administer it and there was a time when Hart itself used to be in the Sedgefield constituency, but that was a long time ago. So there is an affinity there going back over a long time. Also, the ward of Blackhalls was

actually split between Easington and Sedgefield because Station Town is part of the Sedgefield constituency as well.

I note that there are seven existing seats in Darlington and Durham, successive constituencies, where the vast majority of the population, the electorate, are actually staying within the existing boundaries, which is to be welcomed.

However, there are a couple of communities, which I have mentioned, like Ferryhill, which is going to transfer to Bishop Auckland, which I think should remain part of Ferryhill and I would like to see that happen if it could be taken into consideration. That means that the figures, for example, for Bishop Auckland would have to change. Therefore, I would say that one of the wards from Darlington, which is Heighington and Coniscliffe, should go into the Bishop Auckland constituency to make up the figures.

Again, people might argue it is splitting communities, but this is happening all over the county, if indeed not all over the country, and what we need to try and do is to minimise that as much as possible. Speaking as somebody who actually lives in Heighington I do not say these things lightly. There are a lot of links obviously with Darlington but for example, if I am going shopping, I do not go to Darlington I go to Tindall Crescent and Bishop Auckland to do my shopping. Heighington itself is maybe two miles from Shildon. It is actually closer to Shildon and aspects of Bishop Auckland than it is to Darlington itself.

Like I have said, both these Darlington villages have never been in a Darlington constituency for a long, long time if ever, especially since the end of the First World War, because they are rural villages and they have always been part of either Bishop Auckland or Sedgefield.

I think also to balance the numbers, the other thing to take into consideration is moving Coxhoe into Durham. Durham has a great affinity, being another coal mining community, with the City of Durham, it is literally just down the road from there from the city. It has always been, as far as I can remember, part of a City of Durham constituency. I think that is something that needs to be taken into consideration.

On the whole, I accept you are doing your best - and I know it is very difficult because of the equation you have to take into consideration - and trying to keep some sort of communities together. However the ones such as Ferryhill and its relationship with Shildon and the rest of the constituency, is something that I would like to be taken into consideration.

Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that useful presentation. Could you remain there to see if there is anybody seeking any clarification on any points? No further clarification needed. Thank you again.

Our next scheduled person listed is Guy Opperman. It does not appear that that listed speaker is present at the moment. As such then we can move to Catherine Gilsonan if she is here and she is happy to come forward. I know we are early for you. Thank you very much. Again, outline your name and details for the purpose of the record.

MRS GILSENAN: My name is Catherine Gilsonan. I am a resident of Middleton St George.

I wish to speak in support of the Boundary Commission's initial proposals for the new Darlington constituency, and that the remaining wards of the Borough of Darlington, a unitary authority, have been able to be included. Thus the new constituency would be co-terminus with the borough boundaries.

The residents of Middleton St George have campaigned for many years for the village to be included within Darlington parliamentary constituency. I feel that a democratic entitlement of voters to choose where and how they wish to vote, based on those strong local ties is crucial.

In the previous Boundary Review of 2011 to 2013, I made the case that the village of Middleton St George, one of the villages within the Borough of Darlington and along with the other villages of Hurworth, Heighington and Coniscliffe, needed to be included within the Darlington constituency and not, as is currently the case, within the Sedgefield constituency.

I am very pleased that the Commission, in its proposals for Darlington in the current review, was able to include the remaining wards and therefore the villages, which include Middleton St George within the proposed new Darlington constituency.

I would also support the Commission's proposals for the new constituency of East Durham, which includes Sedgefield and Newton Aycliffe, and is more logical in terms of geography and local links.

I will outline the reasons why the Commission's initial proposals should be supported, but would like firstly to state that my views are not based on anything other than a democratic entitlement of voters to choose where they vote on local links.

Special geographical considerations including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency: the newly proposed Darlington constituency, based on the electorate of December 2015, will have a population of 74,929, which is comfortably within the range required. The new proposed Darlington constituency is logical in terms

of geography and accessibility since the new constituency would in effect be the whole of the Borough of Darlington and, therefore accessible both in terms of administration and in terms of transport links.

Currently, since Middleton St George is in Sedgefield constituency, voters rarely see their MP as, good though he is, the constituency office is in Newton Aycliffe, some 11 miles from the village and not directly accessible by public transport; train every two hours, bus journey of one hour with a change at the centre of Darlington.

In terms of local government boundaries, as they existed on 7 May 2015, Sadberge in Middleton St George is a local constituency ward in Darlington now. Middleton St George residents pay council tax to Darlington Borough Council, and Darlington Borough Council determines planning applications relevant to Middleton St George.

The 2014 Local Government Boundary Commission Review resulted in changes to the ward boundaries in the area. The former Middleton St George ward became Sadberge and Middleton St George ward. I am pleased to see that the entirety of this new ward is within the proposed Darlington constituency.

Although the present Commission's remit is not to take into account any further changes after 7 May 2015, I would just like to mention the subsequent Community Governance Review that had to take place within Darlington following these ward changes and, explain that even though alternations have taken place within parish areas, as a result the parishes now within the new wards logically fit in with the new proposed Darlington constituency. All activity within the village of Middleton St George is run in conjunction with Darlington and therefore, affects the residents of the village. Indeed, major development work within the village is undertaken with Darlington Borough Council. A few years ago, for example, there was the major redevelopment of Dinsdale Railway Station in the heart of the village and this was done jointly with Network Rail.

Darlington Borough Council also consider planning applications. In recent years we have had to respond to major housing applications attending planning committees at Darlington Borough Council. We are also working with Darlington Borough Council on our Neighbourhood Urban Development Plan. It is therefore extremely important that Middleton St George is included within the Darlington constituency.

Boundaries of existing constituencies: in the last Review I made the case that Middleton St George, a semi-rural village similar to the other villages surrounding Darlington, should be part of the constituency of Darlington and not Sedgefield constituency. Back in 2002 Councillor Richmond was advocating the proposal for the inclusion that all villages within the constituency of Darlington. The whole of Darlington should have one MP. The people of the rural part of Darlington have more in common with the town than they have with Sedgefield.

Some of the history of the boundaries and the previous campaigns: history shows that the villages around Darlington have always wished to belong to the parliamentary constituency of Darlington but, until now it has not been possible to include them all. I welcome the new proposal. Although the parliamentary constituency maps of 1966, 1967 and 1968 show that all the villages surrounding Darlington were part of Sedgefield at the time. It must be borne in mind that this was before the construction of Newton Aycliffe and Newtown.

Boundaries created by the Government Act 1972: Aycliffe Newtown was extending, laying mainly in the district of Sedgefield, but included a small part of the parish of Heighington in the Borough of Darlington.

Result: the part of Heighington in Newton Aycliffe would come under Sedgefield and part of Heighington and Darlington would come under Darlington. Darlington parliamentary constituency has been in existence since 1868. Sedgefield constituency was created in 1918, abolished in 1974 and recreated in 1983, whilst Darlington parliamentary constituency has been in existence since 1868 enjoying historical and cultural links with Middleton St George, Sedgefield parliamentary constituency was created much later, in 1918 being then abolished in 1974 and only recreated in 1983. Therefore, Middleton St George has not always been in the constituency of Sedgefield. It was in Bishop Auckland County constituency during the period of 1974 to 1982, even though there are no local government links, special geographical links or cultural ties with Bishop Auckland. When the rural ward of Middleton St George was in Sedgefield constituency and then in Bishop Auckland constituency this was before the inception and growth of the new town of Newton Aycliffe. Recent developments including, for example, the importance of the new Hitachi factory, mean that Newton Aycliffe is going to grow even more. Any proposals for the Sedgefield constituency therefore must take this into account and allow Middleton St George to come under Darlington.

There is no sound reason why Middleton St George and the other villages should not be within Darlington constituency. The villages around Darlington have been pressing for inclusion in the Darlington parliamentary constituency for many years. In 1993 there was a 700 name petition from Middleton St George, the village was 100% in favour of joining Darlington. However, at that review the Boundary Commission proposal was to give Sedgefield 6,000 voters from Bishop Auckland, rather than assign 5,000 from Darlington to Darlington. The main reason given by the Boundary Commission in the 2002 Review for not including the surrounding villages in Darlington i.e. reclaiming them from Sedgefield was that this would cause an imbalance in the constituencies.

After the last election a lot of people were saying that they could not understand why they were covered by the Sedgefield MP when the Darlington MP has more relevance to their lives. That was Councillor Richmond again in 2002.

Local ties and links: the villages surrounding Darlington have, over time, suffered from a feeling of alienation in terms of their parliamentary constituency. They have also suffered from an unfortunate misperception regarding what were deemed to be their important local links. Explaining its decision to make only minor changes in 2003 to the boundaries the Commission spokesman said, although the Assistant Commissioner accepted that while many of the residents of the four rural wards, which the Commission proposed should remain in Sedgefield, would prefer to be in a Darlington constituency, he considered that if they were transferred some minor local links would be broken with the rest of Sedgefield, such as those with Newton Aycliffe. These local links with Newton Aycliffe and Sedgefield were not as strong as the local links the villages have with Darlington, which are incredibly strong, with Darlington Borough Council for payment of services, as mentioned above, with Darlington Council wards, as I have mentioned above, local government.

In terms of geographical and transport links, Middleton St George is far closer to the urban boundary of Darlington, one mile, than to Newton Aycliffe, 11 miles or to Sedgefield, 11 miles. The village of Middleton St George is linked to Darlington by road via the A67 at a distance of one mile from the boundary of Darlington, taking only a few minutes by car. It is also linked by the Service 12 bus and a rail link. On the contrary, Newton Aycliffe is 11 miles away and not directly accessible by public transport. The train is every two hours. Bus journey of one hour with a change in the centre of Darlington, while Sedgefield is around a similar distance but only accessible via minor roads taking longer timewise, and there are no public transport links to Sedgefield, only a train to Thornaby followed by a bus.

Health services: many residents of the village access health and other essential services, in Darlington. Many also have family in Darlington with older family members in residential care homes in the town.

Work, school, college, library and culture: many in the village work, go to college, play sport and enjoy social and cultural activities in Darlington. They support local sports teams. Middleton St George currently finds itself in no man's land, adrift without an anchor, disenfranchised with voters who hardly ever see their current MP, good though he is.

Residents cannot understand why their feelings have been overruled in favour of figures. For many years it has been a frontier village being pulled in both directions. People are losing their democratic voice and may be disinclined to vote in general elections.

In conclusion, I support the initial proposals of the Boundary Commission to include Middleton St George and all the villages around Darlington within Darlington constituency for the following reasons:

In terms of geography: the electoral population is within the range required. The whole constituency would be logical in terms of accessibility. The current situation is illogical because the villages are too far away from the centre of Sedgfield constituency.

In terms of the Local Government Boundaries as they existed in May 2015: with the changes following the Local Government Boundary Review of 2014, the new wards sit comfortably within the proposed parliamentary constituency of Darlington. Also with the electorate paying their council tax to Darlington Borough Council and the council determining planning applications, which is an issue which is becoming ever more significant, there would now be a logical and cohesive relationship in terms of important matters of local representation and administration.

In terms of the boundaries of the existing constituencies: looking at the electoral boundary history of the area Middleton St George has no place in Sedgfield. Along with the other villages surrounding Darlington it was originally in Sedgfield constituency however, this was before the arrival of the new town of Newton Aycliffe, which required adjustments to Darlington and Sedgfield constituencies. Sedgfield has been consistently changed, abolished, recreated, redrawn according. Middleton St George campaigned for many years to be included in the constituency of Darlington. The newly proposed constituency of East Durham, which includes both Sedgfield and Newton Aycliffe, is more logical in terms of geography, local government and historical and cultural links.

In terms of the local links: the local links to Newton Aycliffe, referred to by the Boundary Commission in its review of 2002 to 2003, are not as strong as those Middleton St George has to Darlington.

In terms of geographical distance and transport links, as well as in social and cultural and all other aspects: Middleton St George is closer i.e. one mile to Darlington than to Newton Aycliffe or Sedgfield, 11 miles and has stronger ties.

Finally, I am pleased that having taken account of all the previous submissions in 2011/2013, the Boundary Commission have finally been able to accommodate all of the villages, including Middleton St George and bring them into the proposed new Darlington constituency. I therefore support the proposals of the Boundary Commission.

Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that varied and useful submission. Can I just check whether you have submitted that written submission to the Commission yet or do you have copies here you could leave?

MRS GILSENAN: I have uploaded it on to the website but I also have a copy.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That would be useful, I appreciate it, thank you. Could you just remain there also to see if anybody is looking for any clarification on any points you raised. It does not appear so. Thank you again.

The next person scheduled who wishes to take the opportunity availed of our hearings this morning is Mr Blanchflower if I am right. Would you like the opportunity to speak, are you ready at the moment or would you like some more time? (Discussion off the record about the next speaker)

For the purposes of the record, just introduce yourself and your address details.

MR TINSLEY: My name is Fraser Tinsley, I am Chairman of North West Durham Constituency Labour Party, I am also County Councillor for the Division of Willington and Hunwick, which is part of Durham County Council.

Just a very short submission. I just want to refer to the settlement of Willington and Crook. It is just to refer to these two areas. My division I represent is Willington and Hunwick and it incorporates this area here towards Durham city and down towards Bishop Auckland here. The submission relates specifically to the relationship with the division here, which is Crook. Essentially what I am stating is that Willington and Crook together have a very strong relationship. They share a secondary school, Parkside Academy, where 700 children, essentially from both settlements attend school between the ages of 11 and 16. There are historic links that go back to the pre 1974 reorganisation of Government when Willington and Crook Urban District Council operated together. There are many other services, such as the local job centre, which is located in Crook and serves the Willington area. Also, there is a 20 minute bus service, which operates between the two settlements and gives connectivity. Crook provides the main retail location in the area and that will be enhanced shortly with the provision of two new supermarkets, which will reinforce the position of Crook as the main retail location for Willington in the area. There are also significant social links and cultural links in terms of sports clubs and such like.

That is essentially it. I just wanted to bring that to your attention today.

Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for giving us that information. Can I just check and see if there is anybody present who would like to seek any clarification on the points? No. Thank you very much again.

Is there anybody else who is attending this morning who would like the opportunity to speak?

Having completed our schedule early this morning we will adjourn and take a break until 11.30 am. Thank you.

Time Noted: 11.05 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 11.30 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We are returning to the morning schedule and the next person listed to speak is Mr Andy Blanchflower. If you would like to come forward and give your name and address details as you have done already in the earlier proceedings. Thank you. Would you like the map to present something in particular? What would you like to put on the map?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Durham Coastal Area. Good morning, I am Andy Blanchflower, 15 School Avenue, Gateshead, representing North East England Green Party. I thank the Commission and everyone here for allowing me to speak again at the south of the region hearing.

I want to reiterate that the Green Party has consulted with the 13 local parties in the North East extensively over a six week period, to come up with various proposals that best suit the community interest and local ties and also fit in with trying to maintain local authority links as well and existing parliamentary constituencies.

I said earlier in the week that I would speak about County Durham. Our party in County Durham, which has various satellite groups within the County of Durham, has asked that as much as possible that County Durham proposals remain within the borough boundary. Given that County Durham has just over five notionally equivalent space for seats, this is almost possible. We can do this within the tight allowances that are required and I can distribute information on this to anyone who wants it later on and, we will be submitting written proposals by 5 December for this.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is there something specific you would like highlighted on the screen?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: First of all, the entire County Durham coastline. We and our members and residents we know support as proposed the Easington and Hart constituency, which covers the entire County Durham coastline from Seaham down to Crimdon Dene. Also, accepting the Commission's proposal that we include two of the Hartlepool wards, De Bruce and Hart, which are down here (indicating). This would anyway be required if ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What are the wards you are referring to there?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: The ones that you propose, Hart and De Bruce, those two there that are in Hartlepool but, as you can see in your proposals, they would not be within a constituency which is primarily in County Durham. Putting these two wards into County Durham also has the advantage that the area covered by the former Cleveland Council, in other words the boroughs of Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Hartlepool, would have the right amount of wards to make up the numbers, given that things are very close.

These two wards and Blackhalls and Wingate, Passfield, the two Peterlee divisions, the Shotten and South Hettton, the Holden one, the Easington, the Murton, the Dawdon, the Deneside and then of course Seaham, do make up an identifiable community of a traditional working coal mining area, a traditional area that looks to the coast of Durham that has a similar identity. This would make up a constituency of 76,503.

Adjoining here we have already had representations regarding Sedgefield and, without going into each separate division in Sedgefield or anywhere else, because there are 63 divisions of course within County Durham, we propose Sedgefield and Spennymoor, a constituency of 73,182, that would include all three divisions of Aycliffe. It would keep the ward that has been mentioned earlier by a speaker, of Chilton within the Sedgefield area.

Then moving north to the City of Durham, we have proposed a constituency which would be geographically centrally based upon Durham City, and that would have 78,342. As I say, I can give more detail on the proposals later to anyone who is interested.

To the north, a North Durham constituency would have the advantage that it would retain all four Chester-le-Street divisions within the same constituency. It would keep the areas to the west of Chester-le-Street, which have a good road connection, the areas around Stanley and to the edge of Consett in here. Fourteen divisions it is proposed in a North Durham constituency of 78,333.

Then we move to the Durham Dales and Bishop Auckland constituency, and we would like to stress that in our proposal for this constituency of 77,181 we would retain both the Barnard Castle divisions in the same constituency. This has been a concern of members as well and also of people who have made representations. We would further up keep Tow Law within this constituency, which of course it looks to.

The only change that has to be made is right to the north west of County Durham. We would have to put Burnopfield and Dipton within a Gateshead constituency, which

otherwise would entirely be the west of Gateshead. That constituency would have 72,371.

I would like to just emphasise finally in summing up that this is the best deal possible within the tight parameters for County Durham, in that it does not take or put in any connection with Sunderland. It does not take or put in any connection with Darlington, and there is just one division of the 63 divisions in County Durham, the Burnopfield and Dipton that goes into a Gateshead constituency and, the two Hartlepool constituencies I mentioned, added. This is the best that we believe can be done for maintaining the cohesion of Durham as a County and, for continuing local ties.

I thank you for your time listening to me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that Mr Blanchflower. Is there anybody present who would like to seek clarification? Thank you very much.

For the purposes of the record, state your name and address.

MR HINDLE: Frank Hindle, from the Liberal Democrats. Can you just clarify for me please, the West Durham constituency that you are suggesting, which wards are at the northern edge of that?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: West Durham, you are talking about the one at Durham Dales and Bishop Auckland?

MR HINDLE: Yes.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Yes, well I will give you a copy of this Frank but, Barnard Castle East, Barnard Castle West, Bishop Auckland Town and Consett South, Coundon, Crook, Evenwood, Lanchester, Shildon and Dene Valley, Tow Law, Weardale, West Auckland and Woodhouse Close.

MR HINDLE: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is there anybody else seeking further clarification? No. In light of that, thank you very much for the presentation, Mr Blanchflower.

There does not appear to be anybody listed to speak at the moment, so we will adjourn the matter until 12.30 pm. Thank you.

Time Noted: 11.45 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 12.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you everyone for bearing with us here. It appears we have no further speakers to make presentations at the moment. We will resume the hearing at five past one. Thank you.

Time Noted: 12.31 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 1.05 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, we are a little bit ahead of schedule and, if it suits the presenters, we could proceed now and, if it suits Bridget Phillipson to come forward, you are very welcome. Will you take time to introduce yourselves, your names and addresses before each of you start your presentations? Can I also clarify if you have prepared material or is it just your own? No worries. For the purposes of the record, would you announce your name and address please?

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: (Member of Parliament, Houghton and Sunderland South) Bridget Phillipson, Member of Parliament for Houghton and Sunderland South and the address is 106 Newbottle Street, Houghton-le-Spring.

I asked when I rang up if Julie Elliott could also come along at same time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: (Member of Parliament, Sunderland Central) I am Julie Elliott, Member of Parliament for Sunderland Central, address, 10 Norfolk Street in Sunderland.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Ms Elliott, are you going to speak first then?

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: Thank you very much.

First, thank you for the opportunity of being able to talk with you this afternoon. I want to cover three things in what I want to say today. Firstly, I want to address the proposal that Bridget submitted from both of us. I also want to comment on the Liberal Democrat submission, which affects my constituency and also, on our colleague Sharon Hodgson, the third MP in Sunderland, who I think spoke to you on Monday.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have already heard from Ms Hodgson, yes.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: On the proposal that myself and Bridget submitted, currently the City of Sunderland local authority area has three constituencies entirely co-terminus with local authority boundaries, which is an ideal solution. We know with the new numbers and everything that is not possible. The Boundary Commission's proposals split the geographic area of the local authority, Sunderland, into six constituencies, covering four local authority areas. The proposal that Bridget and I have submitted would reduce that to five constituencies and three local authority areas.

What we have proposed is that Washington West ward, which under your proposals is in a Gateshead constituency, would move back into the Jarrow and Washington seat, and Wardley and Leam Lane, which is currently in the Jarrow constituency, would move into the Gateshead seat.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That last one again?

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: Wardley and Leam Lane would move into the Gateshead seat, which would do two things; it would create a constituency entirely within Gateshead boundaries, and it would also mean that the Jarrow constituency would be made up just with two local authority areas, so there would be a knock-on there. It is a straightforward change of wards and numbers. It would mean Washington would only be divided between two constituencies, rather than three, so there is no detrimental knock-on effect, it actually pulls together communities that already exist, which the Boundary Commission's proposals would split, and it would make less disruption in the Washington end of the constituency.

In a broader Sunderland sense, the issue is with creating many, many different constituencies in different local authority areas, and we work very much together the three of us across the City, and the least disruption to that that is possible in terms of representing the various communities; it would just limit that a little bit. It is still going to be changed and we totally appreciate that but, it does seem to me that it is a very straightforward sort of realigning, knowing local knowledge. That is our proposal.

I wanted to speak a little bit about the Liberal Democrats proposal, which I had sight of the other day. A broad point across Tyne and Wear is that there are three constituencies under your proposals that remain unchanged, I think that might be the case across the region, one of which is the constituency I represent. The Liberal Democrat proposal is to change all but one of them, so it is changing mine and changing North Tyneside, which to me seems a bit of change for the sake of change.

In terms of the specifics of what they are proposing on the constituency I currently represent, they are talking about moving Fulwell ward into South Shields. Fulwell and St Peter's wards on the north side of the River Wear are basically one community, so they feed into the same schools, whatever local groups exist - you can see there (indicating) Fulwell in St Peter's - whichever local groups exist, whether it is mother and toddler groups or whatever, they meet across. Anybody who lives in Fulwell and St Peter's ward would not distinguish the areas, it is only people who are political who would. From an economic point of view, in the Bay of Seaburn, which straddles both of those wards, there is a Seafront Traders' Association, all the businesses, all where the regeneration is going on, you have got it there as Whitburn Bay, that is one seafront area from there right along. The Seafront Traders' Association, at the minute it is undergoing a lot of consultation on massive regeneration and that one area is basically one community. The idea of Fulwell moving into South Shields is very, very strange on a community basis. If anything it would move the other way because Whitburn - I am from Whitburn, although it is not in my constituency it was where I was born and lived for the first 30 years of my life - people actually look to Sunderland rather the other way because they have Sunderland postcodes and so on and so forth. That end of it would cause quite a lot of disruption, I would have said, to the people who live in those areas.

At the other end of the constituency, they are proposing losing Ryhope, gaining St Anne's, Silksworth and Sandhill. In principle there is nothing really wrong with that, there are no real links, linking those areas together, they are distinct communities but, it would cause quite a massive upheaval, for the sake of it. I do not really understand why you would want to do that. Actually the synergies of communities at that end of the constituency, are between Ryhope, Doxford and Silksworth and if there were any changes at that end that would be the logical group that would go together. Ryhope, Silksworth and Sandhill are very distinct areas, there would not be a linkage. I think it would just create disruption for the sake of it.

Moving on finally to our colleague, Sharon Hodgson's proposals. In her submissions she supported the change that Bridget and I have proposed, to do with Washington West and Wardley, Leam Lane proposals. All three Sunderland MPs are in agreement to that proposal but, the proposal she made regarding keeping Washington together, we totally understand that in an ideal world we would keep Washington together because Washington is a town within a local authority area, however I just simply do not think the numbers work out. The knock-on implications I do not think have been totally thought through for the wards that she is proposing putting together. The proposal she comes up with, linking Whitburn and the Boldons, St Chads and Silksworth, there are simply no links across that way, there are no community links. Transport links you would be travelling out of the constituency to travel back in. As I say, coming originally from the village of Whitburn, I cannot think when I would have first gone to Silksworth; it would be a different place. I genuinely just do not think that the knock-on implications numbers wise and the boundaries make much sense, although I totally understand the emotion of trying to keep Washington together.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. If you would just bear with me for a moment. The normal procedure is that at the end of each presentation the audience are given a chance to clarify and, because of the fact that you are working together, it would be better for simplicity, to allow people to ask you a few questions on clarification only.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: That is absolutely fine.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would anybody like to take the opportunity? Do not forget to announce your name and address details for the record, thank you.

MR HINDLE: Thank you. It is Frank Hindle from the Liberal Democrat Party. Can I ask first of all for clarification, because we have not seen your submission in writing therefore I am just trying to take it in. Is it different to the Labour Party submission that we heard on Monday?

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: The proposal we have submitted is the one ward change, which is different. I think the Labour Party is not changing that bit.

MR HINDLE: Thank you. You have said quite a bit about the Liberal Democrat's submission and said quite a few things to contradict it. It strikes me as a strange process, Madam Chair, because I did not think that is what was happening today.

Can I just point out that the Liberal Democrat proposal, like yourself is concerned with the number of constituencies that are in the Sunderland area and it reduces to four, it manages to keep all of Washington together. I am aware of the links between Whitburn and Fulwell and that is one reason why they are in the same constituency, they do fit in the same constituency. With regard to Ryhope we do not propose to link that with Silksworth, at this current stage.

If I could see your proposals in writing we would be very happy to look at them and see if we can incorporate them in.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: I have not proposed anything to do with your proposals, all I have done is ---

MR HINDLE: No, I think you have made a submission here to the Commission, which I have not seen in writing, yet you are commenting on my submission. Thank you.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: Can I come back on that?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We really are just looking for clarification. If you want to debate the contents of the proposals this is really ---

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: Yes, but he has misrepresented what I have said.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you wish to re-clarify that.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: The clarification is, our submission is entirely to do with moving one ward out of the Jarrow constituency proposed by the Boundary Commission, into the Gateshead constituency and, moving one ward out of Gateshead back into that, which is Washington West. That is what our proposal says.

MR HINDLE: The two wards are?

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: That is our entire proposal.

MR HINDLE: No, the names of the two wards?

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: I have already said them. It is moving Washington West back into Jarrow and the Washington seat that is proposed, and moving Wardley and Leam Lane from the Jarrow proposed seat into a Gateshead seat.

MR HINDLE: Thank you.

MS JULIE ELLIOTT: As far as your proposals, all I have done is comment on the impact that I think your proposals would have on the people I currently represent.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Is there any further clarification sought? No, it does not appear so.

Thank you very much for that presentation.

Now we will move on to the next speaker, who is Bridget Phillipson.

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: Thank you very much, Chair and thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

I have not much further to add to the comments from Julie Elliott. I support what Julie has to say, particularly around the Washington West proposed change that we have submitted.

The only addition that I wanted to make was to talk a bit about Doxford ward, which is currently within Houghton and Sunderland South but would move into the Easington and Houghton constituency, under the Boundary Commission's proposals. I would like

to suggest that Doxford ward could move into the new Sunderland West constituency, with the ward of Birtley coming out. There are various ways in which that could be accomplished.

The advantage of doing that would be that the new Sunderland West seat would cover Sunderland entirely, it would be a seat composed only of wards from the City of Sunderland and would not be a cross-border constituency.

I think it would also better reflect the existing community ties between Doxford and Silksworth, which are in effect, one community with shared local services, shared transport links and where children from both Doxford and Silksworth attend the same local schools. The way in which the local authority boundaries were drawn up, covering the Doxford and Silksworth Wards, means it was rather arbitrary and Doxford already contains part of Silksworth. I think in proposing to put Doxford into the Sunderland West constituency, together with Silksworth, would better allow existing community ties to be respected. The local community groups, schools and transport links already serve both communities. I think it would keep more of existing communities together.

That was the only further addition I had to make, Chair.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. I will allow the audience to seek clarification on any of the issues you have raised there. Do not forget to announce your name again.

MR HINDLE: Frank Hindle, Liberal Democrat. You have suggested moving Doxford in and Birtley out. That has got implications to the constituencies either side. How would you propose to handle that please?

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: There are a number of ways, Chair, in which that could be addressed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So you do not wish to elaborate on it at the moment but you are seeking clarification of that. Obviously it is reduced to writing somewhere in your presentation.

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: I can submit in writing if that would be helpful.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, it would be.

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: How that could be worked through.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes please.

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: There are a number of different ways in which I think that could be quite easily achieved.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Obviously you have got until 5 December to do that, that would be very useful. Thank you very much.

MS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Does anybody seek any clarification? It does not appear so. Thank you very much, ladies, for attending today. Thank you.

Our next speaker is scheduled to speak in about five minutes, so we will resume then. Thank you.

Time noted: 12.45 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 12.50 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In terms of our scheduling for today, it appears that our next listed person to speak will be at 2.30 pm. In light of that we will take a break now until 2.20 pm. Thank you.

Time Noted: 12.51 pm

After the luncheon break

Time Noted: 2.20 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon and welcome back everyone to the resumption of the public hearing here in Darlington, concerning the Boundary Commission's proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries. I will do a brief reintroduction for the purposes of those who have not been present this morning. My name is Eileen Brady and I am Chair of this hearing today, assisted in the task by another Assistant Commissioner who has been appointed, Adele Baumgardt, who is seated to my left. I am also assisted in the task by the assistance of the members of the Commission staff and by Donna Smith, who is sitting beside me here at the table.

Now I have completed those formalities I would ask the next speaker, Dr Tait to introduce himself for the purposes of the record, with your name and address and then proceed to make your presentation.

DR TAIT: My name is John Tait. I live at 8 Durham Road, Thorpe Thewles, Stockton-on-Tees TS21 3JN.

I am here speaking to you primarily because I am the Chairman of the North East Party, I was also a parliamentary candidate in the 2015 general election and am a declared, insofar as one can be at this stage, mayoral candidate for the Tees Valley Mayoral election. I should say I have worked in local government in this area for many years, mainly as a parish councillor, I was 19 years a parish councillor in one of the Stockton districts and have been active in various campaigning roles and so on. Though I must say I have never been a member of a political party until two years ago and never thought I would be.

The main business today. We have spent quite a bit of time analysing the proposals and there is much of it we like, particularly in County Durham where we are quite well represented. We recognise and support particularly the basis on which a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament will be achieved. We do not believe the difference between the existing system and the rather fewer Members of Parliament makes a difference to democratic accountability. Therefore, obviously we have to accept the implications of that for the way constituencies are drawn in the north east of England.

We are particularly happy with the way the Easington and Houghton constituency is drawn, this seems to us a step forward. We also have liked the proposed redrawing in the Redcar and the south east-most part of Cleveland. As is pointed out in the review, this does mean some quite extensive implications for the reduced number of constituencies, which has created some problems for us in trying to balance out the constraints. One of our conclusions, though I appreciate for our current purposes there is nothing to be done about this, fit into within a 5% as opposed to a 10% size, is very difficult whilst putting on other important constraints, like having constituencies that represent a group of communities in some obvious sense. You cannot go on about that but we appreciate this is a difficult job and perhaps in future legislation can provide slightly wider boundaries, and that would make it much easier.

As we move though to the north and west, up to this area around Hartlepool, parts of East Durham and the Stockton/Middlesbrough area and to some extent also Darlington, we believe there are some really objectionable parts of the current proposal.

Hartlepool is slightly smaller than the boundaries in which you are working in terms of numbers of electors. The proposal is essentially to put part of Billingham in with Hartlepool. Billingham and Hartlepool are not the same community in any sense. Worse than that, the current proposals, as can be seen in fact, even on a map of this scale, takes a populated part of Billingham in the west and separates it from the rest. This is clearly a single community here, divided by a rural area from Hartlepool

(indicating). It is a relatively small single community with four council wards in it currently and, we really think that the Commission should think again about placing a constituency boundary through that community of Billingham.

We also think at the north end, the current East Durham constituency, which runs really quite a way to the west to Newton Aycliffe, is a bit of a dog's breakfast. Part of our proposals would be to look again at the wards that are removed from the northern part of Hartlepool and the Blackhalls ward from this part of East Durham, the one ward immediately on the coast. If you went up there and knew the district as well as I do, you would realise they are separated by countryside and are not at all easy to cross into the rest of East Durham. You have two major roads on the A19 but there are actually no roads, so this is quite a complicated and difficult journey. There is no sense of community there. It would make much more sense - these places have a natural orientation north and south - to have them with Hartlepool, if at all possible.

We would like to shake up, as a consequence of that to obviously balance the numbers, and put the Billingham area in with a redefinition in the areas of Stockton. Also current local authority boundaries are not a high priority in your Review, and we think a lower priority, I appreciate the changes of constituency, but a lower priority should be given to maintaining Darlington as a single constituency, particularly as it does not really represent a community.

The wards on the eastern side of Darlington, these rural ones form a group of villages, ones incidentally I have represented over a long period. There is kind of a rural area here, which has recognised communities, for example, the Church of England parishes include Little Stainton – and you can see [here](#) a number of parish churches in with the rural parishes in the Northern Parishes and western parishes of Stockton (indicating). By moving those and putting in some of the areas further to the north and west, we believe there is a solution possible at least in outline numerically, that will allow Billingham to remain a single community and provide much better representation to this section right in the east of Durham and the parts of Hartlepool, which will now be represented by an MP, which includes a number of areas with which they have nothing in common, well to the east, who is representing Newton Aycliffe, Sedgfield and so on.

I cannot pretend I have got a workable scheme that goes to the detail. Just before we started we talked about better IT solutions for this, but I have played with the broad numbers in spreadsheets and I believe there is solution there, particularly if you consider splitting wards, which again is not a high priority. My view, at least morally, is it is representation of communities that should be the highest priority.

Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that presentation. We now turn to ask the audience if they have any points they wish to raise for clarification that concerns the presentation?

Can you give your name and address please.

MR WILLIAMS: Richard Williams the Labour Party, Labour Central, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

You talk about the Little Stainton area, which ward is that in, in Darlington?

DR TAIT: I need the map in front of me. I know the areas rather than the ward boundaries because it is not an area in which I have campaigned. It is the one that includes Middleton St George, I was not sure whether there were two wards in that area or just the one.

MR WILLIAMS: Your suggestion is that goes in with, is it the Northern Parishes you mentioned?

DR TAIT: Yes. Essentially we consider that rural part of Darlington as part of the Stockton rural community. It was part, I should say, of the Durham Rural Council prior to 1974. Although it is a limited extent, I think I can to some extent speak for those communities; they feel part of a broader rural community more than they feel a part of Darlington. I think few of them would object to that. It would allow some other areas, for example, further north to be put in with Darlington, like Aycliffe immediately from that East Durham Ward. I think there is another pattern to be put there that does more to respect the difference between the rural areas, actual communities, transport links and the difference between urban and rural communities.

MR WILLIAMS: And you said you represented that area, how did you represent that?

DR TAIT: As a parish councillor on one of the parish councils in the Northern Parishes in Stockton.

MR WILLIAMS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. Is there anybody else seeking clarification? It does not appear so. Thank you very much for that very useful presentation. Obviously you will submit anything further that you devise for the Commission to look at.

DR TAIT: Okay. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are slightly ahead of schedule. Would Barry Gorman be in a position to come up and present your views, if it suits? Obviously I have to repeat again that you have to state your name and your address for the purposes of the recording.

MR GORMAN: Barry Gorman, one of the 560,000 “fed up, had enough” Teesiders. We are sick to death of being used as a political football by the three main parties and the bosses down there in London.

Back in the early 1960s this gentleman called Franklin Medhurst and three other people with half a dozen local Teessiders, put together the County of Teesside and they did it in record time. It had never been attempted before. They did it in a year and ten months. How they did it, they sat down with the people of Teesside and they consulted them every step of the way. After six years being bedded in this was a fantastic council. London Town put their nose in and they destroyed Teesside County Council and created a monster, called County Cleveland.

County Teesside was all industrial. County Cleveland added on all the rural areas of East Cleveland. Rural areas and industrial areas are two different animals all together. Ever since then all we have had is just being messed about time and time again by the Boundary Commission and the politicians. The councillors in the town hall, because they did not want this County Teesside, they wanted their own little fiefdoms, and this is what this is all about. The big boys in London from the three main parties are trying to cut it all up so it is in their favour.

In the St George’s Hotel at Teesside International Airport a few years ago, the Boundary Commission was there then and I gave the gentleman on the Boundary Commission an A3 envelope full of information and the views of the people of Teesside. They never even bothered to contact us.

On Tuesday 27.09.2016, I wrote to the Boundary Commission, here is the letter. Up to press, they have never bothered to answer the people of Teesside.

The points I am going to make now are very relevant to what has happened. All we want is our County of Teesside back. We want our own Lord Lieutenants, our own County Standard and our southern border written in stone by an Act of Parliament. This will stop Westminster, and their acolytes in the town halls on Teesside, using the people to their own ends.

I will just read these two pages out: City Regions, combined authorities, elected Mayors, elected Police and Crime Commissioners. It is just jobs for the local party boys and girls, nobody asked for, only wanted by London Town and the local town hall puppet gloves in the North East of England. All Labour-run authorities who constantly complain in the local press and media about the cuts to budgets and slashing of vital council

services, cuts in wages for the staff and people being made redundant because of Westminster's slash and burn policies at local level. So why has the Labour, Police and Crime Commissioner for Teesside, not consulted the people of Teesside on subsidising Conservative Council tax payers over in Yorkshire on Cleveland Police for working with North Yorkshire Police Force Scenes of Crime Squads? Why are there not enough police to do the job in the first place and, why will the Police and Crime Commissioner along with the Chief Constable of Cleveland not tell the people of Teesside how much extra monies we are going to have to pay in council tax to subsidise their Tory Party tax payers in North Yorkshire, voters with some Liberal Democrat councillors over there in that part of North Yorkshire County Council Area.

The North East of England would have had a North East Police Force 12 years ago but for a Redcar and Cleveland Labour Councillor, Dave McLuckie, who was also the young elected chairman of the late Cleveland Police Authority, who ran around the North East of England with a video in his hands telling everybody, "We do not need a North East Police Force because of the cost to run such a Police Force of that size".

Now, to the best of my knowledge, that little exercise cost approximately £120,000 and, while he took it upon himself to run round the North East, Guisborough Town Council, which is in the Redcar and Cleveland Council Area, had to cancel the bairns' Christmas parade with reindeers and all the trimmings because Cleveland Police could not afford the £2,000 to police the parade. So Guisborough Town Council had to cancel the bairns' Christmas treat, which they always looked forward to; the same every year from all over the Cleveland Police Area.

Now, this is how we found out that the Police and Crime Commissioner had decided, along with the Cleveland Chief Constable, Ian Spittle, to join forces with North Yorkshire Police Force for this new thing. This is in the *Evening Gazette* on Wednesday 02.11. this is this one, this is how we found out. On top of that Middlesbrough Labour Council, one of their ex-Labour Councillors, he stood down because they wanted to close the James Cook Museum, Captain Cook's Museum in Stewart Park and the Labour Council denied this.

After a meeting on Friday 11 November there was a big barney outside the town hall and it was a Labour Councillor had a go at this ex-Labour Councillor and the police were called. The police had to investigate because the town hall called them. It was found out that the ex-councillor had nothing to do with it, he had never committed a crime, he was set upon verbally by a fellow ex-Labour Councillor.

As I say, all this all costs money and money that the people of Teesside cannot afford. Had the councillors put their petty self-interest to one side all them years ago we would have had a fully paid up North East Police Force and we could have worked with other police forces because they had 2.5 million people paying into the pot. You've got 560,000 in Teesside and they are in the top 12 of the most deprived areas in Britain.

So, where are we? The North East has got the highest unemployment still in the whole of Britain, so where is the money coming from to subsidise these other police forces? We are sick to death of all this. Had enough of it. We are sick to death of the Boundary Commission. We are sick to death of the tuppenny halfpenny councillors from the three main parties and UKIP, because they are all part of it and, we are utterly sick to death of Westminster of using the North East and Cumbria as a political football because our next door neighbour is Scotland.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Could you just remain there and see if there is anybody seeking clarification on any points you have raised? It does not appear so. Thank you very much.

MR GORMAN: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next scheduled person is not listed until 3.30 pm, so we will resume the hearing at 3.20 pm, we will take a break until then. Thank you.

Time Noted: 2.35 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 3.20 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon everyone and welcome back to the hearings here in Darlington this afternoon. In relation to the hearing, the scheduled person has not arrived and we will take a short break and resume the hearing in ten minutes, just after 3.30 pm. Thank you.

Time Noted 3.21 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 3.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon. We are resuming our hearings this afternoon in Darlington. The next scheduled person to speak is Guy Opperman. If you would not mind coming forward please to the lectern and introducing your name and address for the purposes of the record please.

MR GUY OPPERMAN: (Member of Parliament for Hexham) Good afternoon Madam. My name is Guy Thomas Opperman. I am the Member of Parliament for the Hexham constituency, my address is House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 1AA.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you want to proceed with your presentation?

MR GUY OPPERMAN: Yes. Madam, I would make three basic points.

I would start with the Newcastle North West seat and the Ponteland East ward - I am sure you have heard plenty from my councillors and various people in relation to that, whether it is Eileen Armstrong or the written representations that I know you have received. I would make the representation very strongly that the Ponteland East Ward is significantly different in its nature, shape and character from the rest of Newcastle. I do not believe it would be a good thing that Ponteland itself, as a large village community, small town - it likes to call itself a village - should be split. I think the absolute crucial argument, and I bow to your better expertise upon consideration of the figures, is that you can do the Northumberland envelope without putting a part of Northumberland into Newcastle. It must surely, as an overriding principle, if it is at all possible, be correct to ensure that the three Northumberland constituencies stay in Northumberland. Clearly if that is impossible for whatever reason, because of numbers or other considerations, then I fully understand you have to make an alternative decision. As a fundamental principle that surely has to be right.

The representations I have received and I think you will continue to receive from the smaller villages of Whalton, Ogle and the surrounding smaller communities to the top part of the community - I am talking about Ponteland East, the top bit of the Ponteland East, there you see Whalton and Ogle, Saltwick - those village communities are utterly distinct and different from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Clearly county boundaries have got to go somewhere but on no account could you say that Whalton looks, or Ogle or Saltwick or Crawford's Hill look south east towards Newcastle. Whalton in particular, Madam, is a significant village with its own school, with its own significant community, which is very much part of Northumberland.

If I ask the map to be taken a bit further south. The Ponteland community, clearly the county boundary is below us, effectively at the airport you see at the centre bottom of the picture there (indicating). I want to try and give you the background to this, we have fought a massive battle to ensure that the green belt that divides the outer urban fringe of Newcastle and the part of the Northumberland community that stops and ends with Ponteland, that we retain a green belt there. The community have fought hugely to retain that part of Ponteland for the best part of five years, pre-dating the last Boundary Review, I have to say, to ensure that the green belt that exists all around Ponteland and that effectively, divides Newcastle from Ponteland, is retained. It would seem a bizarre situation that, having fought not to be part of the expanding nature of the largest city in

the region, that you are then lumped in with them. That would particularly, I have to say, be illogical to the man in the street, rather than the individual councillor or others who will be making representations on this matter. Trying to go to the citizens of the Eland Haugh Estate or East Ponteland and say, you know how we fought so hard to stay part of Northumberland, to divide these two communities, retain a green lung between us and then not be in a position to do that on an ongoing basis, would be very difficult indeed.

Madam, I know my time is limited, so I will move briefly, if I can, to the map of the Hexham constituency itself and, if I can focus on the northern part of the proposed constituency around Morpeth and Rothbury, the present dividing line, as I can tell you if you hold it there, is in broad terms the road, the A696, that goes from the Scottish border, through Otterburn and then heads down in broad terms down towards Newcastle. That is the present broad dividing line. It ducks in and out very slightly because of natural contours. The reality is that you would be adding on a very significant part of rural West Northumberland, in the form of Rothbury into the west, that is almost all the Northumberland National Park, and you would also then be adding on the county town of Morpeth to the constituency.

Clearly, there are many wonderful things about representing the Hexham constituency but, it is the largest constituency I believe in the whole of the country and, we would be making this, by a massive chalk, the largest constituency in the country if we added on rural Rothbury ward and all of the Northumberland National Park, the three wards of Morpeth and the two, Longhorsley and Pegswood wards that surround Morpeth to the north and to the north west. In reality therefore, you would be adding, I believe it is five or six wards on top of the present constituency, one of which would be super rural, two of which would be pretty rural and three of which would be the urban county town of Morpeth. On sheer logistics it would make the biggest constituency by a long, long chalk.

Given that I enjoy the distinction of having to drive two and a half hours across the constituency at the present stage, I do not even want to contemplate how long it would take me to get from the south west part, which is Alston effectively, on the Cumbrian/Durham Border, all the way up to beyond that map near the top bit of the Scottish Border. It is a proper journey. You can talk about roads and other people will have talked to you about roads, the essence of it is, is that the reality is that the roads go from Newcastle or Hexham, so the A696 goes to Newcastle, the A68 goes to Hexham up to Scotland and Jedburgh and beyond. Or, you go up the northern roads that go up the corridor along the coast, whether it is the A1 or the subsidiaries of the A1. Nothing goes across. The natural direction of travel is for any particular person, you are either Scottish, stay north of the border or you head to Hexham for obvious reasons, or go around it and head to Newcastle or, you stay in Northumberland coastal. The present Berwick constituency and the proposed constituency that I know Roger Pratt

put forward to you, that is in reality a Northumberland coastal constituency with rural add-ons that go naturally with it.

I think the point is well made. If there are questions you wish to ask I am delighted to amplify, I can chat away in more detail.

The final point I would make in relation to the Cramlington map; I know that you have heard from Councillor Barry Flux - I believe is map 4, if that helps you.

If you go to the Cramlington map, which is in the Blythe Valley community, so bottom right. Our proposal Madam, is that we take the five wards of Cramlington to the left-hand side of the road. To my mind that is by far the most logical extension of what I presently have as a community. It allows us to retain the three Northumberland constituencies without losing one illogically into Newcastle. My present boundary already goes to the quite large village of Stannington, which you see at 10 o'clock on the map. Stannington, for example, has a significant school, it is a significant conurbation. Stannington to Cramlington is barely a mile and a half to two miles. The consequence is, I already go that far, it is a natural extension clearly, as with all boundary changes you add on a significant number of people, such is life. But, it is a much more natural fit. I still probably will have the largest constituency in the country but we believe it makes the best sense and, as you have heard from various other people, it allows for a more natural fit of the other two communities to form the other two constituencies.

In broad terms those would be the three sets of submissions I would make to you. I can happily amplify, if you would like me to do so, in relation to the specifics of why Ponteland would regard this as an utterly illogical split. I would urge you, if you think about nothing else, to think about the retention of Northumberland with the one community.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. We have had submissions that you are already referring to have been made by Eileen Armstrong and others. Have you any further material you are going to submit yourself for the ---

MR GUY OPPERMAN: I am going to wait and go away and consult with Eileen, she is one of my county councillors, I know her very well. If she felt that there was a point that she really did not feel that she had made in any more detail, I could make further submissions if necessary.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is just to give you the opportunity until the 5 December, it is just to refer you to that.

MR GUY OPPERMAN: Indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am not saying you have to do it but the opportunity is there.

MR GUY OPPERMAN: No. My thoughts entirely.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In terms of what you have presented, the procedure now is for me to ask the audience, is there anybody wishes to seek clarification only of what you have mentioned. Would anybody like to seek clarification? Please refer to your name and address for the purposes of the record.

Please refer to your name and address for the purposes of the record.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER (Name inaudible): With regard to Cramlington, I think you said you were taking everything west of the A189.

MR GUY OPPERMAN: It is as per the recommendations of Barry Flux.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: If I understand it correctly, the Cramlington East ward would not be part of your proposed constituency.

MR GUY OPPERMAN: Indeed.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That then splits Cramlington does it, in the middle of Cramlington?

MR GUY OPPERMAN: Yes. I think the crucial difference of the argument, clearly no one would want to split up a town, everyone understands, the Chairman fully understands that you start from a position, you do not want to split a particular village or town. The crucial difference for me is this: is that Cramlington stays within a Northumberland constituency, which makes a massive difference, rather than going into a Newcastle constituency, so that is the first thing.

The second is, the conurbations around there, whether it is Cramlington to Blythe to Bedlington, they are very, very tight, they are very, very close. The distances and the differences between those areas are relatively small. They have the same Police and Crime Commissioner, they have the same health authority, they have the same organisation for schools, they have the same various other public services. There is nothing to do with Newcastle with those things. If you start splitting Ponteland then I think you are in a situation where you are saying, you are part of Northumberland but actually now your elected representative is going to be from Newcastle, it is different circumstances et cetera, et cetera and all of that that flows.

Self-evidently there has to be some split somewhere, of course that has to take place. It is not comparing apples and pears but there is a very, very significant difference.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would anybody else require some clarification? It seems that nobody else is seeking any further details from you so that is concluding your presentation. Thank you very much for the useful information.

MR GUY OPPERMAN: Thank you. I do appreciate it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

We have no further scheduled presenters at the moment so we will adjourn matters until 4.30 pm.

Time Noted: 3.45 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 4.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening ladies and gentlemen, it is just to let you know that our next scheduled speaker is not listed until 6.00 pm and, in light of that we will adjourn matters until 5.45 pm and we will resume proceedings then. Thank you.

Time Noted: 4.31 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 5.45 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. We are resuming the hearings today in Darlington. We are awaiting some presenters to arrive. At the moment, according to our schedule, the next person to attend should be arriving at 6.00 pm. In light of that, we will take a break until 6.00 pm.

Time Noted: 5.46 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 6.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. Welcome back. We are still awaiting presenters to arrive and, as it stands, according to the schedule we probably will not be dealing with the next attendee until 6.20 pm. If somebody arrives

before then we will slot them in and deal with them accordingly. Until 6.20 pm we will have a pause in the proceedings. Thank you.

Time Noted: 6.01 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 6.20 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Once again we are resuming the hearings. If there is anybody who would like to come forward and make a presentation, please do. It does not appear that anybody has attended, according to the slots that were allocated. We will return at 6.30 pm to see if a presenter arrives. Thank you.

Time Noted: 6.21 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 6.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. We return to the public hearing here in Darlington this evening. In relation to the speakers that are listed to present their views, since 6 o'clock we really have not had anyone show up. They have been contacted but we have not been successful in getting through to them. That aside, we will be available here and take a break in proceedings until 6.40 pm to allow the arrival of any persons who wish to make their views known. Thank you.

Time Noted: 6.31 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 6.40 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. Welcome back to the resumption of the hearing here in Darlington. The scheduled speakers have not arrived but a scheduled speaker for a little while has arrived. Would you be prepared to come forward and make your presentation, if it suits you? Okay, come forward to the lectern please and announce your name and address for the purposes of the recording please.

MR BLISSETT: I am Councillor John Blissett. I am the Town Mayor of Barnard Castle. My response is made on behalf of the Town Council and represents a unanimous unresolved position of the Town Council in respect of the response to the Boundary Commission for England's Review of the Parliamentary Constituencies in England and,

reflects the clear and consistent opposition felt to any proposal which would actually split Barnard Castle between two constituencies.

Barnard Castle is a civil parish in County Durham with a population of 5,500. For historic reasons the parish does not include the whole of the built-up area of the town and is split between two electoral divisions of Durham County Council, Barnard Castle East and Barnard Castle West. Together with the urban portions of Startforth parish and Marwood parish, which are its immediate neighbours, Barnard Castle's overall population is just over 7,000 based on the 2011 census. It is Teesdale's major centre of population and sits at the foot of the dale on the River Tees, which forms a pre-1974 boundary between Yorkshire and Durham.

I recognise that Parliament has specified that the 2018 Review must review the number of constituencies in the UK to 600 from the current 650 and that every new constituency must have roughly the same number of electors, no fewer than 71,031 and no more than 78,407.

The initial proposals published on the 13 September 2016 for the new constituencies in England, will result in splitting the parish of Barnard Castle between two proposed parliamentary constituencies, Bishop Auckland and West Durham and Teesdale.

The Town Council opposes this split absolutely because it would needlessly separate our community between two large rural constituencies, both of which would be centred on the urban areas of County Durham, miles away from Teesdale and remote from its everyday links, covering work, commerce, education and leisure.

To retain both parts of Barnard Castle in one constituency requires a corresponding move of another division in the opposite direction. The most straightforward substitution, bearing in mind that the division in question must border the other proposed constituency, is to move Barnard Castle West into the Bishop Auckland constituency and to move Willington and Hunwick into the West Durham and Teesdale constituency. The resulting electorate would be Bishop Auckland 72,464 and West Durham and Teesdale, 75,005. Both results are within the Commission's target range.

The logical reason for responding in this way is that the proposals retain the objectives set by the Commission by the 2011 Act and in particular they maintain the obvious ties between the two halves of the parish of Barnard Castle, which would otherwise be split between two constituencies needlessly.

On the basis of retaining the parish and town of Barnard Castle within one constituency, in respecting the proximity and relationship of Willington and Hunwick to Crook and considering the boundaries of the existing parliamentary constituency, the Commission should refine its proposals to move Barnard Castle West into the Bishop Auckland constituency and, to move Willington and Hunwick into the West Durham and Teesdale

constituency. The names of the resultant constituencies should then be Bishop Auckland and Teesdale and West Durham.

Above all, Barnard Castle should not be split between two constituencies but be with the historically significant area of Teesdale together in one constituency of suitable size, shape and accessibility, which is constructed from County Council Divisional Borders as they existed on 7 May 2015. The boundaries of the existing constituencies and the clear local ties would be broken by changes in constituencies that split Barnard Castle and Teesdale. I will leave this as well, it is a load of figures with population numbers. (indicating)

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are you going to submit that in, are you leaving a copy of that?

MR BLISSETT: I will leave this with you. That is my summary.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. The normal procedure is that after a person has made their presentation, the audience are invited to seek some clarification on something you have said to allow you explain it a bit further. Is there anybody seeking any clarification?

Indicate your name and address for the purposes of the record.

MR WILLIAMS: Richard Williams, Labour Party, Kings Manor, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The thrust of your proposal seems to be to try to keep the Barnard Castle Wards together. Is there any preference into which seats they are kept? You have moved them into Bishop Auckland; would it work equally as well to keep them in West Durham and move the other Bishop Auckland seats, or is there some sort of link with Bishop Auckland?

MR BLISSETT: The natural use that we have in Barnard Castle is that Bishop Auckland is one of our major points, we actually go en route; Bishop Auckland rather than anywhere else. It has been a natural one for Lord knows how many years and really it should not be split.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is there anybody else seeking clarification on the points raised? No, it does not appear so. Thank you very much for taking time to attend this evening and to make that presentation. We will accept that copy of your paper. Thank you very much.

The next scheduled speaker is Dr Sutherland, would you prefer to come up now, thank you. Just to repeat, each speaker has to outline their name and address for the purposes of the recording.

DR SUTHERLAND: Yes, I have done.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you announce it into the microphone as well, thanks.

DR SUTHERLAND: My name is Judi Sutherland. My address is Willowfield, Darlington Road, Barnard Castle. I am a local politician and I am on the Town Council, although I am speaking today on a private capacity and you have already heard from the Mayor of our Town Council.

As have many people in Teesdale, I have two areas of concern. One is that Teesdale itself, which is the area consisting of Barnard Castle East and West seats, is very much an integrated and self-contained whole. My other concern is which constituency that those two seats should remain in.

To introduce the topic, I want to impress on you exactly how self-contained and how isolated we are. Barnard Castle itself is the only sizeable town in Teesdale, there are about 5,500 people in the town and a few outlying villages. It sits in the North Pennines at about 600 feet, I am assuming that most of you do not know the area.

The nearest largest town is Bishop Auckland, as John Blissett has just said, which has got 24,000 people in it. It is 15 miles and 25 minutes from us. The nearest town larger than that is here in Darlington, 106,000 people, 16 miles and 30 minutes away. We have to be pretty much everything to everybody in that town because it is 15 miles to anywhere. Our nearest cities are Durham, which is our county town, which is 45 minutes away. The nearest larger cities, Newcastle, York and Carlisle, are all over an hour away.

We are very much an agricultural community. We have a few employers, including a pharmaceutical company, other than that most people work in public services or in agriculture.

The effect that your proposal of splitting these two wards into separate constituencies would have: obviously the town is already split down the middle for county council wards, and that is bad enough, but to exacerbate that by splitting us for parliamentary purposes as well just makes the problem worse. Actually you will see from the paperwork that I have sent you that Barnard Castle East and Barnard Castle West split right down the centre of our only shopping street which is Horsemarket, which then runs into Market Place; it is all continuous. It is the centre of our town, you want to split it down the middle.

To do that would mean that in terms of parliamentary work, in Barnard Castle East we would have the only GP surgery in town, the Community Hospital, the Arts Centre, the Library, the Bowes Museum, which is a world class art museum and the car parks. In

Barnard Castle West we would have the only state secondary school, the leisure centre, our largest employer on the industrial estate and the castle itself, which is managed by English Heritage and obviously is what the town is named for.

Which MP do we go and see if we have got a problem with something on the other side of the street from where we happen to live? Your proposal means that the people of Barnard Castle West would have to go and see an MP who is probably going to live 40 to 50 miles away, not to say that they will not have constituency surgeries but I do not imagine they will happen very often.

To give an example of the bizarre consequence of the proposal, one of the things we are dealing with at the moment is the issue of HGV traffic coming down the town, which is causing a lot of congestion, we have very narrow streets and also they are damaging a world class scheduled monument, which is the Butter Market, a Georgian building in the middle of the street. Your proposal means that one MP would be interested in the traffic going north to south, a different MP would be interested in the traffic going south to north. You can see it does not make any sense.

Barnard Castle was the centre of the district of Teesdale, so Barnard Castle East contains Lower Teesdale, small villages, which run from Barnard Castle to the border with Darlington Borough. Barnard Castle West runs into Upper Teesdale, which is a very isolated farming community. What I have sent to you on paper is a topographical map, you can see that Upper Teesdale is sandwiched between two great massive hillsides, including the highest point in the Pennines, this is just up to the west of us. It has got no geographical links with Weardale, which is slightly to the east and certainly no geographical links beyond that to Consett, Rowlands Gill and Blaydon. If you are running ahead of time tonight it is possibly because some people from the Upper Dale cannot get here. It has been snowing in Barnard Castle today, I had to scrape the ice off my car. As you go further and further into the Upper Dale that is likely to be snow that is lying very thickly. Some of the routes between Teesdale and Weardale will be impassable in bad weather. That is why the people of West Teesdale of the Upper Dale, come down to Barnard Castle for their shopping because they are following the river down the valley, it is the easiest place for them to get to.

I hope I have convinced you that for cultural and geographical reasons, Barnard Castle is the centre of a small, isolated region, which really does not need to be split down, it needs to stay together.

The next question is, if Teesdale stays together which constituency should it stay in? To my mind, the proposed constituency of West Durham is a bit of a platypus, it looks like it has been made up of all the bits left over when everything else is finished. It reaches from the borders of Cumbria at one side, all the way up to the edge of Newcastle and Gateshead urban conurbation at the other side. Geographically there is nothing in common between the people of Teesdale, in the west, and those people who

are virtually in urban Newcastle in the east. It is 50 miles from Bowes to Rowlands Gill and it takes over an hour and a quarter to get there because we are not talking about motorways in landscape like this.

We assume that any MP who sits for West Durham will focus themselves on the north east of that region because that is where most of the population is. Their concerns and their interests will be with what are essentially dormitory towns for Newcastle. They will be facing east and north east, and what goes on in an agricultural community in the North Pennines is remote culturally and geographically from them. They are probably not best placed to serve our interests.

When Teesdale people need to access services, which are not provided in a tiny town of 5,000 people, they would tend to go to Bishop Auckland and Darlington. To give you some examples:

We have one dental surgery in Barnard Castle, the next nearest one is 9 miles away in West Auckland; we have one library, the next nearest one is in Bishop Auckland; our nearest urgent care centre is in Bishop Auckland; our nearest FE college is in Bishop Auckland; our nearest Accident and Emergency at the moment is in Darlington; we have no cinemas, the nearest one is in Darlington; we have one supermarket, if we want something bigger, we go to Bishop Auckland or Darlington, both 15 miles away; our nearest large DIY store is in Bishop Auckland; our nearest department store is in Darlington; our nearest railway stations are Bishop Auckland for a branch line, Darlington for mainline, both 15 miles from us; bus services will take us to Bishop Auckland and Darlington and, strangely, to Richmond in North Yorkshire; we do not even have a bus service to our own county town, it is certainly not easy to get to Consett, Rowlands Gill or Blaydon.

People in outlying Barnard Castle East villages, such as Gainford and Staindrop, may be equidistant from Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland and Darlington and you have rightly said that they should stay with the Bishop Auckland constituency. But people in Barnard Castle West, because of the geography and the weather, if they cannot get what they want in Barnard Castle, they are much more likely to go to Bishop Auckland or Darlington than to any of the other places in the proposed West Durham constituency.

There are also many commuters living in Barnard Castle. Most of them commute to Bishop Auckland and to Darlington, some of them maybe to Durham. On the whole that is where our community is focussed.

These are our community links. When we consider who we want to represent us in Parliament, because we use the facilities in Bishop Auckland so readily, what happens there is of interest to us. If the MP for Bishop Auckland is fighting for bus services in Bishop Auckland, she is fighting for our bus services. If the MP for Bishop Auckland is

fighting for services at the local hospital, she is fighting for our hospital. It makes absolutely no sense to try and link us as a community with anywhere else but Bishop Auckland or Darlington.

We have nothing in common with Consett, Rowlands Gill and Blaydon. Most people in Teesdale have no reason to ever go there. Their concerns are not our concerns. What happens there does not affect us. What happens in Teesdale does not affect them. There is no coherence in the plan to split off that part of Teesdale and put it with those communities.

In conclusion, in order to meet your remit as set out on your website, you say the Commission will also try to reflect geographic factors and local ties. I hope I have demonstrated that your current proposals do that in no way whatsoever and you really need to think again about what you do with Barnard Castle East and Barnard Castle West. They must be kept together in the same constituency and that constituency should be Bishop Auckland, where our interests are best represented.

That is all I want to say, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that very helpful presentation, especially on a night like tonight. Thank you for attending. The formality is that normally we ask the audience then if they want to ask any points for clarification only. I will open the floor to anybody who wishes to seek any points for further clarification. No, it does not appear so. Once again, thank you very much.

In order to keep the opportunity open for people to arrive this evening and present their views on the Boundary Commission's proposals, I am going to adjourn the hearing until 7.15 pm. Thank you.

Time Noted: 7.00 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 7.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. We are returning to the hearing this evening. It does not appear that there are any further speakers attending to make any presentations regarding the Boundary Commission's proposals. They have been contacted, people who were listed earlier in the evening and we have not been successful in getting through to them to see what their explanations are for not arriving. We have completed other presentations but we are going to draw a close to today's proceedings and resume tomorrow morning at 9.00 am. Thank you.

Adjourned until 9.00 am on Friday 18 November 2016

Time Noted: 7.16 pm

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