

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

LUTON TOWN HALL, MANCHESTER STREET, LUTON LU1 2AF

ON

MONDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY ONE

Before:

Ms Sarah Hamilton, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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Time noted: 10.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the Eastern region. My name is Sarah Hamilton and I am an Assistant Commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England. I was appointed by the Commission to assist them in their task of making representations for new constituencies in the Eastern region. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow, and I am also responsible, with my fellow Assistant Commissioner, Laura Smallwood, 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 Tim Bowden, who is sitting next to me. Tim will shortly provide an explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for new constituencies in this region. He will tell you how you can make written representations and he will deal with one or two other administrative matters.

The hearing today is scheduled to run from 10 am until 8 pm and tomorrow it is scheduled to run from 9 am to 5 pm. I can vary that timetable and I will take into account the attendance and the demand for opportunities to speak. I should point out that under the legislation that governs the Commission's review, each public hearing must be held over two days and cannot be extended into a third.

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

I will now hand over to Tim who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for Eastern region.

MR BOWDEN: Thank you, Sarah. Thank you very much, and good morning. As Sarah has mentioned, my name is Tim Bowden and I am Head of Reviews at the Commission and 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 hearing runs smoothly.

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

We use the European electoral regions as a template for the allocation of the 499 constituencies to which England is entitled; thus, not including the two constituencies 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 based approach we adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

I would now like to talk about the Commission's initial proposals for the Eastern region. The region has been allocated 57 constituencies, a reduction of 1 from the current number. Our proposals leave 6 of the 58 existing constituencies unchanged. As it has not always been possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties in the Eastern region, we have grouped some county and local authority areas into sub-regions. The number of constituencies allocated to each sub-region is determined by the electorate of the combined local authorities. Consequently, it has been necessary to propose some constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries.

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

In Bedfordshire, Essex and Suffolk it has been possible to propose a pattern of constituencies that is within the boundaries of each historical county. The statutory rules allow us to take into account local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015. These include both the external boundaries of local councils and their internal boundaries, known as wards or electoral divisions.

We seek to avoid dividing wards between constituencies wherever possible. Wards are well defined and well understood units which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. We consider that any division of these units between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for electoral registration and returning officers who are responsible for the running of elections. It is our view that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified, and our initial proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes 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 up to and including until Monday 5 December, so that there is still time after the next two days 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, and in a number of places of deposit around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at BCE2018.org.uk. I 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 the public consultation and you will be asked to provide us with your name and address if you make an oral representation. The Commission is legally obliged to take a record of the public hearing and, as you can see, over your right-hand shoulders, we are taking a video recording from which we will create a verbatim transcript. The Commission is required to publish the record of the public hearing along with all written representations for a four-week period, during which members of the public have an opportunity to comment on those representations. We expect this period to occur during the spring of next year.

The publication of the hearing records and written representations include certain personal data of those who have made representations. I therefore invite all those

contributing to read the Commission's data protection and privacy policy, a copy of which we have with us and, again, is available on our website.

Just before handing back to Sarah to chair the hearing, a few administrative matters. We are not expecting any fire alarms to go off this morning. There will be a test tomorrow morning at 10.30, which we will put on the record tomorrow morning when we begin. If a fire alarm does go off the exit is out of the doors you came in and down the stairs, with the meeting point in front of the war memorial in the town centre. Toilets are directly outside this room. Finally, if you have a mobile phone we ask you to put it on to vibrate or silent. If you want to take a call during the hearing we ask you politely to leave the room.

Thank you very much indeed. I now pass back to Sarah to chair the hearing. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Tim. If we can our first speaker, please, Andrew Selous MP, to come and stand here, and start by giving your name and address, please.

MR SELOUS: (MP for South West Bedfordshire) I am Andrew Selous, MP for South West Bedfordshire, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Just to start by saying I recognise this is a difficult job for the Boundary Commission for England but I do think it is important that the number of electors in each constituency is fair. It currently is not at the moment; you have some constituencies with around 40,000 and others with over 90,000 and if there were to be no change the 2020 election would be on 20 year-old out of date data and I do not think that would be acceptable for the Mother of Parliaments and the democracy of the United Kingdom.

It goes without saying that as the Member of Parliament for the current South West Bedfordshire constituency I am, of course, very sorry to see any part of my constituency removed; that very much includes the town of Houghton Regis as well as the village of Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade. It also goes without saying that if I was fortunate enough to be re-selected and re-elected I would, of course, represent all the new areas in my future constituency to the best of my ability.

I would like to thank the Boundary Commission for England for keeping Dunstable within the South West Bedfordshire constituency. That is a major and welcome change from what you proposed last time, and that is very welcome indeed. I would like to put my thanks on the record for that.

I would strongly, however, object to the villages of Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade being taken out of the South West Bedfordshire constituency. My proposal is that it would make much more sense to move the whole of the Caddington Ward into the South West Bedfordshire constituency, given what you have just said about your preference being for not splitting wards in two. There are a number of reasons why I think it would make more sense to have the whole of the Caddington ward in the South West Bedfordshire constituency, the first of which is that Manshead school is in the Caddington ward but it is literally just over the border of the edge of the town of Dunstable. Most of the schoolchildren within Manshead school and other schools on that site, at the moment, are my constituents. The vast majority would come from Dunstable and the neighbouring villages of South West Bedfordshire, which I represent.

At the moment, we have a situation where I, frankly, regard Manshead as my school because the children in it are my constituents, as their parents are, but it is just outside the physical boundary of my constituency. Were you to bring the whole of the Caddington ward into the South West Bedfordshire constituency you would deal with that issue, which is a significant issue, and that would be a big improvement.

There is a lot of similarity between the villages of Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade, and the villages of Caddington, Hyde and Slip End. There are a number of businesses both sides of the A5, on the Caddington side and the Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade side, which are much used by people in the whole of the Caddington ward. For example, the Tack Haven business in Kensworth has many customers and many people that come to it from Caddington, Hyde and Slip End, and if I take a business in Woodside, for example, Village Groomers, again there are many people in Studham, Kensworth and Whipsnade that use that local business. There is a lot of trade going between all those villages within the Caddington ward south of Dunstable.

There is a particular concern around the future arrangements for the funding of small village schools, and the head teacher of Studham village school, along with the chair of governors, has written a letter to the Boundary Commission. They sent a copy to the headquarters in London and I have handed over a hard copy here this morning. The head teacher and the chair of governors both strongly ask that the village of Studham remain within the South West Bedfordshire constituency, particularly on that issue of the funding of small village schools. They want to stay with a Member of Parliament that deals largely with central Bedfordshire council to make the strongest possible case for the future fair funding of smaller village schools.

Kensworth Primary School in the neighbouring village has fully associated itself with that letter and they are referred to in the first paragraph of the letter, and have given

their assent and agreement to the representation made by the head teacher and chair of governors of Studham Village School.

I will draw my remarks to a close but I hope that all those points will be borne in mind when the Commissioners complete their job, which I accept is a difficult and not an easy one. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Do we have any questions for clarification? If you wait for the microphone and start by giving your name, please.

MR CARTWRIGHT: Russell Cartwright. I am Secretary of Luton South Labour Party but I also work for Kelvin Hopkins, MP for Luton North. In respect of the Caddington ward, which is now lodged in the old Caddington ward before central Bedfordshire redrew their ward boundaries, would you have a preference for asking the Boundary Commission to use its reserve powers to divide the current Caddington ward down the line of the Watling Street A5, which is a Roman road and was the original boundary up until 2013 for the ward? Would you be putting any submission in in that respect?

MR ANDREW SELOUS: Are you happy for me to just answer that?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR SELOUS: If that was the only way in which the villages of Studham, Kensworth and Whipsnade could be kept within the South West Bedfordshire constituency, yes, but I have heard what the Boundary Commission has said about their preference for not splitting wards. I would certainly welcome any proposal that would enable Kensworth, Studham and Whipsnade to stay within the South West Bedfordshire constituency. If that was the only way to do it then I would welcome it, yes.

MR CARTWRIGHT: My final question is the figures that would come out of putting the current Caddington ward into South West Bedfordshire would that affect the tolerances for Luton South - presumably not South West Bedfordshire, if you are suggesting it - but would Luton South be just as the Commission has proposed but less Caddington ---

MR SELOUS: I cannot answer that question directly now because I do not have a calculator in front of me to go through the figures. My memory is there is obviously a tolerance of around about 5,000, is there not, between the 73,000 and 78,000 mark. I am afraid I cannot answer that question now, but if we both go home and get our calculators out we will be able to get the answer to that. I know the current, overall,

proposal that has been put forward, the figures do work and fit within the lower and the upper threshold set by the Boundary Commission for England.

MR CARTWRIGHT: Thank you. No further questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do we have any other questions? (No response) Thank you very much for your time. If we could now ask Mr Kelvin Hopkins, please. Mr Hopkins, again, if you could start by giving your full name and address, thank you.

MR HOPKINS: (MP for Luton North) Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to this inquiry. My name is Kelvin Hopkins, Member of Parliament for Luton North since 1977. My home address is 1 Alexandra Avenue, Luton, Beds, LU3 1HE. Of course, the House of Commons is my working address.

I came along, basically, to say I accept in broad terms what the Boundary Commission has recommended. I, along with many of my colleagues, am very unhappy about the increasing size of constituencies and the reduction in the number of them, but accept the principle of equalisation of electorates because, obviously, that is democratically fair. In Luton, of course, we have insufficient numbers of electors to make two complete constituencies within the borough boundary, so we have to take some areas from outside the borough boundaries. The proposals put forward are very sensible in that there are minimal changes internally in Luton, one ward shifts from Luton North to Luton South, namely Barnfield, and then both constituencies had to take in areas from outside the town to make up their sufficient numbers within the tolerances.

I have to say that the previous approach, which was to put Dunstable in with Luton North, was, for me, equally acceptable to putting Houghton Regis in, but Houghton Regis - I am very happy with that; I think it is sensible, it is a contiguous urban area and an area I know personally very well indeed, and I have campaigned both in Dunstable and in Houghton Regis on several occasions, and I think populations are rather somewhat similar as well. We have Central Bedfordshire College in Dunstable, which takes a lot of my constituents, so we are part of the same urban area, and I think that what has been proposed is very sensible.

A number of different formulations could be used, and I have drawn lines on maps myself to look at different alternatives, but I have to say that I think what the Boundary Commission has done is sensible. As far as Luton North is concerned, I think we would accept and warmly support what the Boundary Commission has proposed. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Mr Hopkins. Any questions for Mr Hopkins? (No response) Thank you. Do we have anybody else who would like to speak at this stage? We did have a speaker but for 10.20, who has not yet turned up, so I am going to adjourn for ten minutes to see whether he turns up. We will adjourn until 10.35. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

Time noted: 11.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to Day 1 of Luton's hearing. We are continuing this morning with hearing from members of the public regarding the Commission's initial proposals, and I would like to ask Mr Mick Wright to come up and speak. Mr Wright, if you would like to come up to the lectern. As you are making your way, Mr Wright, when you start speaking, if I could ask you to give your full name and address for the record, and just to let you know that all proceedings are being filmed today. Thank you.

MR WRIGHT: As I understand it, about ten minutes?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is right.

MR WRIGHT: I have two issues I would like to address.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you could start with giving your full name and address.

MR WRIGHT: Yes, my full name and address is Michael Robert Wright, I appear on the Electoral Register, and it is 33 Gatehill Gardens, Luton LU3 4EZ. The first issue is the use of the Electoral Register to decide on the parliamentary boundaries. I think two alternatives should have been examined more closely or should have been deployed, even, if you use the total population of a particular area, subject to there being a correlation between how many electors there are amongst the whole population, or use the number of eligible voters. That is probably a representation you are going to hear from other people, so perhaps I should put it in a bit of local context as I know it.

Luton tends to have a transitory population. I think it has one of the most transitory populations in the UK, from memory - that can alter of course being the nature of it. There is a high turnover of people in Luton. There is obviously a high number of voters from ethnic minorities as the most recent study of the 2011 showed, I think that is now

44% of the whole town come from ethnic minorities. There is a high number of students because of the university and there is a higher than average number of socially deprived areas, and that is still the case, again from the Census data from 2011. Those all tend to be people who are under represented on the Electoral Register for one reason or another.

Therefore, if you were to take just the people who are on the Electoral Register as your base then it is going to be a skewed calculation of the number of seats right from the start. Luton has a particular context about that and Luton North, I would suggest, is probably not as affected by it as Luton South, but it is still affected by it - there are deprived wards, there are a number of students, and so on and so forth, the same as there is in the South.

I think that is what I wanted to say about the alternatives. There has been a lot of discussion about that and I do not think I particularly need to add to it, particularly from the Electoral Reform Society.

The thing I would say is about the community of interest between Luton and Houghton Regis, to which some people have said, "Well, where has Luton got a community of interest outside of its borders?" Certainly, to me, there does not seem to be any with Houghton Regis. I am a long-term resident of Luton but I have relatives in Houghton Regis; my in-laws live there; my mother lives there; I have a sister-in-law there, and a niece and her family live in Houghton Regis. I am fairly well aware of what goes on in Houghton Regis.

Houghton Regis has always been in a different local authority area, right back from the days of the Luton Rural District Council, and it became South Beds and, obviously, went into Central Beds, so you have an area that is under a different local authority. That is not, perhaps, that impact, but it does mean that the community there has grown to be markedly different, I would suggest, to that in Luton. Houghton Regis has also had a long tradition of having its own town council system that does not exist in Luton. Although there has been some attempt to set up town councils, I do not think they have succeeded, whereas Houghton Regis certainly has a very active town council.

The only other thing I want to say is looking at the proposals, there is a large expansion due of the housing area north of Houghton Regis. That figure is given in various different estimates. Perhaps if we take the one from the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, 6,950 houses to be built, just about all of them in the two wards you can see up there, Tithe Farm ward and Houghton Hall ward. Some are in the Toddington ward and a bit in the Parkside ward, but actually the vast majority of that very large expansion of

population is in those two wards, if they carry on with those - and as far as I am aware they are the 2010 wards of Central Bedfordshire. No account seems to have been taken of that in the discussions. You might say, if they are not there, how can you take account of them?

Now that we are starting to see that North Luton Bypass has gone in, which the builders made a very large contribution to, I cannot see them not wanting to maximise the return on their asset and build the houses. I think that is going to happen a lot quicker than some people seem to think it is going to happen. I do not think 20 years is anything like the timescale; five years, perhaps? But there will be a huge expansion to the north of Houghton Regis, and no mention is made of that in any of the proposals. If it was ten or 15 houses, yes, I could understand that; that is not going to be significant, but I would suggest 6,950 houses is extremely significant. If you took the standard number of houses and translate that into electorate, you could be talking 10,000 or 12,000 people, which, as I say, does not seem to have been taken account of.

Okay, I think that is it. That was, hopefully, succinct.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mr Wright. Do you have any questions, Mr Wright? (No response) Great. Thank you very much for your time in coming today. The next speaker is Mr Adrian Spurrell. Are you here? Thank you. Again, Mr Spurrell, if you could start by giving your full name and address.

MR SPURRELL: I am Adrian Spurrell; I live 1 Massey Close, Kempston, MK42 8JY. I have been asked by a friend of mine to come and talk about Great Finborough, Suffolk, if that is okay. He is a bit frustrated that there was not a hearing in Suffolk, because he could not get there. Basically, he thinks the proposed Bury St Edmunds constituency is incoherent with both Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket and the constituency, but not a lot of the territory in between. For him it is important that Great Finborough is in the same constituency as Stowmarket. The suggestion is that Onehouse, Rattlesden and Needham Market should leave the Bury St Edmunds constituency and will fit in South Suffolk, so you get Rattlesden and Onehouse out, Needham Market in. That will leave two areas of roughly the same size.

I would just also like to bring up a comment made by the previous speaker about the date of electoral roll used; I think it should have been the one - if we can protest that please - it should be in the most recent and most likely the most numerous one, which is for the referendum. Quite a lot of people signed up at that time, and I think it is more likely to be an accurate representation of the numbers. Also, it seems that the level of variation that has been allowed in the constituency sizes is very low, and I think there

should be more tolerance, so maybe looking at ten per cent rather than, I think it is, five per cent that you have done. That is all I wanted to say, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do we have any questions of Mr Spurrell? (No response) Thank you for your time.

MR SPURRELL: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is not due until midday, so I will adjourn until 12 o'clock. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

Time noted: 1.20 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back to Luton on Day 1 of the public hearing. I understand we have Councillor John Young, who would like to speak. Mr Young, would you like to come up to the front. If you could start by telling us your full name and address, for the record, and just to let you know that all proceedings are being filmed today.

CLLR YOUNG: My full name is John Victor Young. I am a Councillor on Luton Borough Council and I am Deputy Group Leader of the Conservatives.

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

CLLR YOUNG: My address is 51 Heron Drive, Luton Beds, LU2 7LZ.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

CLLR YOUNG: Fairly short. I wish to endorse the proposals put forward by the Conservative Party. Just a few pointers, really, on why some of the changes should take place. At the present moment Luton South has half of one of the divisions in Central Beds - that is Caddington, Slip End and Hyde. Kensworth and Whipsnade are in Central Beds district. Unification of the two would be greatly helped by everybody who lives in those areas.

The problem is, I believe, you have put them into Luton South and their real home, I think, is in South West Beds. The reason for that is that I used to be a postman and I

used to deliver in that area. The postal town for Caddington, Slip End and Hyde, et cetera, is Luton. When you deliver the mail, virtually nobody ever put "Luton" on the address; they just hate the word "Luton". There has been a number of occasions when people have done various things to try not to be part of Luton; they will do everything else but be part of Luton. In fact, about ten years ago, a group of people got together, got a big petition together to really change even the postal code. The normal, natural emphasis of Caddington, Slip End and Hyde tends to be towards Dunstable or south to Harpenden and St Albans. Therefore, the Conservative proposal to put the full ward of Caddington, Slip End, Hyde, Kensworth and Whipsnade should be in the South West Beds.

The advantage of that with the Conservative proposal makes Luton South totally in the borough, which I think is a good thing. Going on to the north - in fact, it is where -- Yes, I do still live in the north but if you're going to try and put me in the south -- I believe putting Saints and Challney into Luton South and bringing in some of the wards from Mid-Beds and South West Beds will make a consistent constituency. In fact, a lot of Luton (North) used to contain these wards. Before, I think it was, 1997 they used to be called "Luton West". It really is just expanding back into their old areas. Therefore, I endorse the Conservative proposals for the changes in the south.

I have also, in my many years of canvassing, been round Bedford. You have moved Elstow ward into Bedford. Having canvassed around there quite a lot and know a number of people, people in Elstow detest being part of Bedford. In fact, they have a 100-yard strip of land which is Green Belt which protects the two from each other, and they fight nail and tooth to keep it that way because they do not want to be part of Bedford. Probably a more sensible solution put forward is to include Kempston Rural rather than Elstow. At one stage the constituency used to be part of Bedford and Kempston, and so tagging on Kempston - "Rural" on the end - and with all the new development going on round there, all these sorts of people will move towards Kempston and Bedford to do their shopping.

That is all I can say and I wholly agree with the Conservative proposals for Bedfordshire.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Do we have any questions for clarification to Mr Young? (No response) Mr Young, thank you very much for your time.

CLLR YOUNG: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Unless there is anybody else who would like to speak, I will now adjourn until 2.30. Thank you.

After the luncheon adjournment

Time noted: 4.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to Luton on Day 1 of the public hearing. It is now 4.30. We have a member of the public, Mr Rob Wald, if you would like to step forward, Mr Wald, and give your name and address, please, for the record. Just to let you know, everything is being recorded today.

MR WALD: Okay. That is fine. My name, as I say, is Robert Wald, but usually just Rob Wald. My address is 6 Keats Close Bedford, MK40 2AR. The thought I had in reading this, because as I say I did not know the boundaries until I came here, I come from Bedford, and it is a borough constituency, I think we call it, which is therefore mainly an urban area. The easiest way, I would have thought, to keep the majority in urban, or not more obviously so, would be to put the Eastcotts ward in instead of the Elstow and Stewartby ward. I think that is about 500 fewer electors but since the Bedford Constituency, as proposed, is going to be bigger than the Mid Bedfordshire Constituency, as proposed, it would, if anything, mean the difference between the two would be less. That's all, really.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great, thank you. Do we have any questions for clarification? (No response) Thank you for your time. As we do not have any other speakers, I will now adjourn until 5.30. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

Time noted: 5.27 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to Luton on Day 1 of the public hearing here. It is now almost 5.30. We are continuing with hearing from members of the public regarding the Commission's initial proposals for the East of England. I understand we have Mr Brendan O'Brien. Mr O'Brien, if you would like to come up and stand at the front here, and if you could start with giving us your full name and address, and just to let you know that all proceedings are being recorded.

MR O'BRIEN: My name is Brendan O'Brien. My address is 166 Hillcroft Crescent, Watford WD19 4NZ. I am giving a submission by Watford Constituency Labour Party. I am an officer of Watford Constituency Labour Party and, also, a member of Watford Rural Parish Council, representing the South Oxhey ward.

Watford Labour Party strongly supports the proposals by the Boundary Commission for a new, slightly amended, Watford constituency and opposes other alternative configurations, which are both less desirable and less coherent than the Boundary Commission's initial proposals. The following are our comments on the situation south of Watford. As the Boundary Commission correctly notes, there have been local authority boundary changes since the last parliamentary boundary review in 2011-12. In particular, within the Three Rivers District Council area there has been major restructuring south of Watford and within the Watford Rural Parish Area. The former wards of Hayling and Oxhey Hall have now been merged, as have the former wards Northwick and Ashridge, to create new wards of Oxhey Hall and Hayling and South Oxhey, respectively, as noted in paragraph 37 of the Boundary Commission's report.

The former Oxhey Hall ward resides within the Watford constituency, whereas the former Hayling ward resides within the South West Herts constituency. Given that the Boundary Commission's criteria is to avoid creating new parliamentary constituency boundaries that cross ward boundaries, then, clearly, the new Oxhey Hall and Hayling ward need to be within a single constituency.

In our view, the best option is for this ward to be within a new Watford constituency, as you propose. Both parts of the new ward are bound to the parkland known as South Oxhey playing fields between Hayling Road, Hillcroft Crescent and Green Lane, which is well used by all local residents and was, clearly, the logic behind creating a single set of ward councillors to represent the area. The park is also used by residents of Oxhey ward to the north, which is within Watford constituency, and by residents of South Oxhey ward to the south. It would make no sense, we submit, to separate the South Oxhey ward from Oxhey Hall and Hayling by an arbitrary parliamentary boundary that would run straight down the middle of Gosforth Lane, at one point. If only one of these wards were in the Watford constituency.

The considerable merit of the initial proposals in respect of South Oxhey is that they ensure that the vast majority of the estate is encompassed in a single parliamentary constituency. The wards are also part of the Watford Rural Parish Council. The clue is in the name; this whole area has strong links created post-war with Watford. It is a Watford postal address, Watford postal code, with direct rail and bus transport links into the centre of Watford, which is much nearer than the outlying areas of Abbots Langley

parish. South Oxhey does not orientate itself towards Rickmansworth, which is the hub of the South West Herts constituency. There is not even a bus service between the two areas; you need to change in Watford.

Insofar as the Carpenders Park ward is concerned, it was determined at the last pre-election review and implemented without notable dissent, that it should form part of the Hertsmere constituency. Whilst the boundaries have been slightly altered the settlement of Carpenders Park forms the vast majority of the present ward, and the housing is principally private bungalows, which sets it apart from South Oxhey. They are chalk and cheese, by any measure. Carpenders Park is a bit of an orphan when it comes to links; it is, however, bordered by the A4008, which leads to Bushey, which is part of the Hertsmere constituency. Therefore, placing Carpenders Park in Hertsmere would enable the equalisation of voting populations in Hertfordshire.

We hope that you will confirm your initial proposals for the Watford Rural Parish Council area, which have the considerable advantage of placing the vast majority of the parish in a single constituency, thus respecting community ties within the constraints in which you operate.

The following are our comments on the situation north of Watford. There are three wards north of Watford, comprising Abbots Langley Parish Council within the Three Rivers District Council area. One part of the Abbots Langley and Bedmond ward is already within the St Albans constituency, that being the village of Bedmond. Therefore, it is common sense to include the neighbouring village of Abbots Langley within that constituency too, thus uniting the area into a single constituency.

On balance, we support the proposals to move Gade Valley to Hemel Hempstead, thus uniting Kings Langley ward (physically situated in the Gade Valley) with other properties sharing a Kings Langley postal address. They have a common bond.

We also support the logic of including Leavesden in the constituency of St Albans, which is easily accessed by local routes and the A405. Essentially, this would mean that two of the three district wards, of Abbots Langley, Parish Council and Parish, would be within the St Albans constituency in their entirety. Were Leavesden to remain in Watford then the Parish Council would be split asunder and an undesirable carve up between three constituencies, whereas we know the advantage of the Boundary Commission proposals is that they minimise that necessary division to just two constituencies.

We are aware that an argument may be made that Leavesden should be part of Watford, as there are a number of places where the ward boundaries of Leavesden and Watford cross roads. However, by the same token, the same argument could be made elsewhere, as many of the 12 wards of Watford Borough that are Three Rivers wards have roads where some houses in the same road are in different council areas. This is as a result of urban sprawl out of Watford. It is not possible to create a clean Watford constituency that avoids this.

Finally, the remaining comments are about future developments. The population of Watford continues to grow quite rapidly. The Local Government Boundary Commission's 2015 report on the electoral review of Watford Borough Council took into account the projected increase in the voting population of Watford Borough from 71,321 in 2015 to 77,923 in 2020 (see paragraphs 9 and 13). There are huge planned housing developments at Watford Junction and adjacent to the hospital - Watford Health campus, as well as others. The voting population in the Boundary Commission's initial proposals gives leeway for growth within parameters in the new Watford constituency. Adding Leavesden ward or maintaining the status quo would jeopardise the equalisation of numbers of voters within constituencies within this part of Hertfordshire, and potentially mean that Watford constituency could exceed the parameters by 2020, which rather defeats the object of the exercise.

Using the published figures to add Leavesden ward to the Watford constituency would increase it from 72,878 in the Boundary Commission's proposal, to 77,989. Given that the Local Government Boundary Commission has accepted that the voting population of Watford will rise by a further 6,602, as stated above, then the constituency would total 84,591 by the year 2020, hugely in excess of the quota.

For these reasons we strongly support the Commission's initial proposals to be the final recommendations in due course.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Do we have any questions for clarification? (No response) Thank you for your time in coming here.

MR O'BRIEN: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is at 6.30, so we will adjourn until then. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

Time noted: 6.20 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to Luton and Day 1 of the public hearing. We are continuing to hear from members of the public regarding the Commission's initial proposals, and we have our next speaker here, Mr Bodrul Amin. Mr Amin, if you would like to come and stand next to me at the front here, and if you could start off by giving your full name and address. Also, to let you know all proceedings are being recorded today. Thank you.

MR AMIN: My name is Bodrul Amin; address of 2 Blenheim Crescent, Luton LU3 1HA. Just in case you did not get it, my name is Bodrul Amin. In terms of the Boundary Commission proposals, ideally the two Westminster parliamentary constituencies would fall entirely within the borough of Luton. However, in order to fall within the range of electors required in every constituency in this parliamentary boundary review, population from outside the borough of Luton has to be added. Luton South WPC has contained half of the Caddington ward for many years, and looks towards the town. The Boundary Commission for England proposals put the rest of the Caddington ward into New Luton South WPC. The Commission's proposals result in a minimal amount of change to the two Luton constituencies, as well as moving the rest of the Caddington ward into Luton South. It moves a smaller, two council member ward, Barnfield from the North to the South. Luton North gains Houghton Regis. Although Houghton Regis does fall outside the borough it does have a natural affinity to Luton and follows natural communities. Moving Houghton Regis into Luton North is a better option than part of Dunstable, which identifies itself as a distinct town into the new constituency.

I therefore fully support these proposals of the BCE.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mr Amin. Do we have any questions? (No response) Thanks very much for coming this evening.

MR AMIN: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is Rachel Hopkins. Again, Ms Hopkins, if you can start by giving your full name and address. Thank you.

MS HOPKINS: Hello. My name is Rachel Hopkins, and my home address is 95 Havelock Road, Luton LU2 7PP. Firstly, I should say that I am a local councillor in Luton, so I would like to welcome you, if you have not been formally welcomed yet. I am not sure who spoke earlier in the day.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MS HOPKINS: I wanted to come along and speak today as I am also the Labour councillor for Barnfield ward, which is the ward that is being proposed to move between Luton North and Luton South. I, too, echo the previous respondent's comments about supporting the proposals. In an ideal situation, Luton would keep two constituencies. We are a large town. However, the numbers rule, so we need to look at something that would bring around change but not too disruptive.

In that respect, starting with Barnfield, it is a very residential area. I am a born and bred Lutonian, I have lived in Barnfield, previously, for ten years. I now live just over the boundary in High Town. I ebb and flow regularly. I cannot see that being a difficulty. Overall, I agree with the points around bringing Houghton Regis, as a whole, into Luton North. I think at the previous review the proposal was to bring all of Dunstable in. We have a great affinity with both those areas. We are a conurbation, but with respect to the whole Town Council of Dunstable or Houghton Regis. Given the numbers now, bringing Houghton Regis in, I think, again, it draws in quite naturally.

The splitting of the ward in relation to Caddington to even up the numbers to bring it in, I can recognise there will be some residents who feel they are quite a way away, but it works a lot better than a variety of villages to the north being brought in, where you are uniting the parish down there - the existing wards - et cetera et cetera. All in all, I think, where I am coming from is support for those proposals as well, and just wanted to come and speak to you about that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great. Thanks very much. Do we have any questions of Ms Hopkins? (No response) Again, thanks for your time.

MS HOPKINS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We do not have any speakers for the next hour, so I will adjourn until 7.30. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

Time noted: 7.20 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, it is now 7.20 and we have just had notification that the last speaker has cancelled, so I intend to close for today and we will be back here tomorrow at 9 am. Thank you.

The hearing adjourned at 7.20 pm until 9 am on Tuesday 8 November 2016

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