

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

ROYAL PUMP ROOMS, THE PARADE, LEAMINGTON CV32 4AA

ON

THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY ONE

Before:

Ms Margaret Gilmore, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

Transcribed from audio by W B Gurney & Sons LLP
83 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HW
Telephone Number: 0207 960 6089

At 10.00 am:

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 constituencies and the boundaries in the West Midlands region.

My name is Margaret Gilmore. I am an Assistant Commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England. I was appointed by the Commission to help them in their task of making recommendations for new constituencies in the West Midlands region. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow.

With my fellow Assistant Commissioner, David Latham, who is sitting here, I am responsible also for analysing all the representations received about the Initial Proposals for this region and then presenting recommendations to the Commission as to whether or not those Initial Proposals should be revised.

I am assisted here today by members of the Commission's staff, led by Gerald Tessier, who is sitting next to me. Gerald 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 administrative matters.

The hearing today is scheduled to run from 10.00 until 8.00 pm. Tomorrow, it is scheduled to run from 9.00 until 5.00. 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 to a third.

The purpose of this public hearing is to allow people to make oral representations about the Initial Proposals for the West Midlands region. A number of people have already registered to speak. They have been given a time slot and I will invite them to speak at the appropriate time. Where there is free time during the day or at the end of the day, 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 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 Gerald who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's Initial Proposals for the West Midlands.

MR TESSIER: Yes, thank you, and good morning everyone. As Margaret has

mentioned, my name is Gerald Tessier and I am a member of the Commission's staff. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their role to recommend new parliamentary constituency boundaries.

At this hearing, I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly. As Margaret has already stated, she will chair the hearing itself and it is her responsibility to run the hearings at her discretion and take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here today to support Margaret in carrying out her role. Please ask any one of us outside the hearing if you need any help or assistance.

I would like to talk now about the Commission's Initial Proposals for the new constituency boundaries in the West Midlands region which were published on 13 September 2016. In considering the composition of each electoral region, we noted that it might not be possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties. Therefore, we have grouped some 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. The Commission's proposals for the West Midlands are for 53 constituencies, a reduction of six. Our proposals leave seven 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. That is 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 based approach we adopted in formulating our Initial Proposals.

Consequently, it has been necessary to produce some constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries and to alter the boundary of some existing constituencies that have an electorate within 5 per cent of the electoral quota which could otherwise be left unchanged, so as to ensure that the electorates of all constituencies throughout the region are within 5 per cent of the electoral quota.

We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Staffordshire and the south of Stoke-on-Trent. Three of the existing constituencies in Staffordshire are unchanged. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Shropshire and the unitary authority of Telford and Wrekin and combines the towns of Bridgnorth and Wellington.

One constituency in Shropshire is unchanged. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Shropshire and Herefordshire which combines the towns of Ludlow and Leominster. Another proposed constituency contains electors from Worcestershire and Herefordshire which combines the towns of Great Malvern and Ledbury.

Additionally, we propose that electors from the south-east of the county of Worcestershire are combined with electors from the south-west of Warwickshire in one constituency. We also propose that electors from Solihull are combined with some electors from Warwickshire. Three constituencies in the county of the West Midlands are unchanged.

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 have a broad community of interest. We consider that any division of these units between constituencies will be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for electoral registration and returning officers, who are responsible for running elections.

It is our view that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified and our Initial Proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes to split wards, strong evidence and justification will need to be provided and the extent of such ward splitting should be kept to a minimum.

The scale of change in this review is significant and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation period. We are consulting on our proposals until Monday 5 December 2016 and 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. 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 www.bce.2018.org.uk. I do urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December 2016. Finally, I would like to remind all participants that this hearing is part of a public consultation. 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 hearings and, as you can see, we are taking a video recording from which we will create a verbatim transcript. The Commission is required to publish its recording 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 these representations. We expect this period to occur during 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 Policy, a copy of which we have with us - the copies are pinned to the board at the back there --- and which is also available on your website.

A couple of quick matters of housekeeping. There is no planned fire alarm, so if the fire alarm bells do go off please evacuate the building as quickly as possible. If you could always use that exit and try not to go out that way, although there is a perfectly good cafe next door which I would invite all people to use.

If you require the toilets, they are out through those doors to your right and along what I believe is called the 'marble corridor', which looks very nice down that way. At this stage, I will now hand you back to the chair to begin the public hearing and thank you for your attendance today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Gerald. Well, I think it is going to be a really interesting two days and so I am starting the day with a very clear head here. You will see the maps that you are talking about. Hopefully, we will be able to get them up on the screen. Ask for what you need. We can do it. There is a pointer sticker there.

Just to remind you, you are being filmed and to emphasise what Gerald has just said that, by law, we do need you to give your name and your address. At which point, it would be great to hear from our first speaker, who is Jerry Weber from Leamington Spa. We will get Leamington up, if we can, lovely. If you need the wards, just say, or if you want us to point to anything around.

MR WEBER: No, I will be fine.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So name and address would be lovely.

MR WEBER (Labour Party): Thank you. Good morning. My name is Jerry Weber. I am the Chair of Warwick and Leamington Labour Party and I am speaking in a formal capacity for the local party. I am also going to speak, when I speak it will be following the West Midlands Regional Labour Party view on the Boundary Commission and their recommendations.

I will be expressing the deep concerns shared by many people in Warwick and Leamington, from local political parties and local organisations and businesses as well as residents. Without exception, when I have discussed the proposal to split the two

towns of Warwick and Leamington, the response has always been, "Why?" We are aware that the Commission has been set a difficult task by Government to not only reduce the number of MPs but to remove the anomaly of different constituency size.

On the other hand, a key consideration for the Commission to consider is, "Any local ties that would be broken by changes to constituencies." The proposed split of Warwick and Leamington would be a terrible blow to local residents, a tie that has been in place since the emergence of Leamington as a spa town in the early 19th Century.

Warwick and Leamington are two towns that live and work as one community. The proposed changes will align both Warwick and Leamington with two other towns with which we have very little common association. Let me start in a historical context. Warwick is an ancient market and county town with a history of over a thousand years.

Its younger sibling, Leamington, grew from a village in the early 19th Century into a thriving spa town. It was no accident that it became a single constituency in 1885. It was created because the two towns worked and lived closely together. During a recent radio interview, I was asked, quite rightly, why should we object to a proposal just because it has been in existence for 131 years? Why were we objecting to change just for the sake of it?

My answer was that there is more to this than just resisting change. We truly believe that Warwick and Leamington form a community of common interest, common culture, common trade and industry and a common future. Not only are the two towns geographically linked with no green space separating them, but they also complement each other by their particular and diverse strengths.

As I said before, Warwick is the county town and Leamington is a retail and leisure destination. Whilst splitting Warwick and Leamington may serve an arithmetic model, we believe that it would be detrimental to community cohesion. Post-War boundary reviews have all correctly concluded that the two towns form an integrated community and are best served as one constituency.

We believe that having two MPs serving the two towns with two other towns, in Kenilworth and Stratford, will make it difficult for an MP to fulfil their role as representatives of a viable community. For example, Warwick and Stratford are nine miles apart, in different local authorities and with different outlooks and there is no connection politically between the two. Every aspect of contemporary life in the towns of Warwick and Leamington support this view.

Economic vitality. The two towns form an integrated travel-to-work area and business organisations such as the Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Local Enterprise Partnership treat the two towns as one economic entity. Warwick and Leamington form a strong mix of activity, with high-tech, manufacturing and research businesses

continuing to choose Warwick and Leamington as their home.

Businesses moved to the area largely due to the attractiveness and connection between Warwick and Leamington. A recent arrival, the furniture manufacturer, Vitsoe, have chosen this site on the border of the two towns because they see the area as a very attractive offer for their workforce. I should say a lot of energy was put in by our local MP and councillors to try and persuade Vitsoe to come and it was the attractiveness that drew them to the town.

Our major business and technology parks, representing the latest phase of a business investment, are located midway between the towns giving easy access to all residents. The 2011 Census data shows that 25,000 people travel less than 5 kilometres to work, clear evidence that both towns form one integrated travel area. Tourism, of course, is a major service sector, with both Warwick serving the historic attraction and Leamington as a short break destination.

Public service provision. All our public transport services are structured in a way that treat Leamington and Warwick as one unit. Bus routes, for example, reflect the patterns of movement used for travel-to-work, to school and shopping and leisure. All these reflect no discernible boundary between the two towns.

Bus services such as the G1 route, which originates in Whitnash, travels through Leamington and ends up in Warwick and travels through from Leamington to Warwick, goes through our housing estates, giving local people the opportunity to choose which way they go. Other bus routes also reflect this.

Education. Co-operation between schools in the two towns is close and reflects a single entity. Many of the primary schools located in either Warwick or Leamington feed to secondary schools located in the other town. The main hub of Warwickshire College, which is an FE college, is based in Leamington and the college is the main supplier for the Warwick and Leamington area. The Trident Centre, a campus of Warwickshire College, is also in Warwick with strong employer links again serving Warwick and Leamington.

In terms of the health services, the NHS service provision is seamless between the two towns with the urban area represented by one major hospital, Warwick, while the Heathcote Rehabilitation Hospital also provides services for both towns. There is also an issue with the fire station based in Leamington where both towns are served with a response time of between eight and ten minutes for Warwick and Leamington.

If the Commission proceeded with its proposal, there would be two fire stations in Kenilworth and Leamington and only one serving Warwick and Stratford. The new police station and Justice Centre was conceived to serve both Warwick and Leamington, replacing the police station and law courts in Warwick. This landmark

centre of excellence serves both towns as well as the surrounding area. The Justice Centre was specifically designed to bring multiple services together under one roof in order to break down traditional barriers between criminal justice agencies and to facilities more integrated working across the towns.

Warwick and Leamington also exhibit similar characteristics with its rich ethnic diversity, reflected through the urban area. The Sikh community, with its magnificent gurdwara, is technically located in Warwick, but serves both the Sikh community in both towns. Similarly, the Muslim community is organised in a way that reflects the unity of the area with the Leamington Masjid and Muslim community centre based in Leamington but serving both towns. Local Christian churches in Warwick and Leamington also work together with the Church of England, for example, having a Warwick and Leamington Deanery.

Community organisations also predominantly serve both communities. Tomorrow, one of our speakers will be expanding on this point. A simple web search reveals that there are 19 societies and clubs that have a catchment area within Warwick and Leamington. On the other hand, Warwick, Leamington and Kenilworth have only two; Warwick and Kenilworth have one, and there are no clubs or societies that recognise Warwick and Stratford as their catchment area. None of these organisations do this because of the constituency boundary. They do it because it reflects the reality that this is one community within two towns.

The Boundary Commission is required to consider community links and there is a compelling case to be made for keeping Warwick and Leamington together, not least because of the close physical and emotional connection between the two towns and our local government arrangements.

The Commission's proposal to split Warwick and Leamington leaves businesses and residents both bemused and surprised. People do not understand why our parliamentary representation has been split into two when Warwick and Leamington is, and has been, a very natural single constituency for over 130 years. We believe that there is a compelling argument why this should continue. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Are there any points or questions from the floor? (No response). Before you go, I have a couple of questions because I think our next speaker is not due until 10.30. Obviously, I should point out that our job here is to listen to the points you make and that was a very useful summary or a picture painted of the local community, for which thank you. You mentioned the industrial estate, are you able to just with the pointer which is --- well, you can point at it. It is better if you use the pointer, actually, because then we can catch what you are saying on the mic.

MR WEBER: They are around this area here, I believe (inaudible).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

MR WEBER: It is quite difficult to see.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: But to the right (inaudible). That is the middle of Warwick.

MR WEBER: That is the middle of Warwick.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So to the right of your little finger, that is Heathcote.

MR WEBER: So it is sort of around there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. So the ---

MR WEBER: There are also --- there is hi-tech just below Warwick, which must be around here. That is Bridge End, so it must be around this area here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. So if you pop back to the mic so we can catch what you are saying, thank you. The question I suppose I was asking is it crosses over the boundary, does it, that industrial area? There is a question for somebody to clarify at some point.

MR WEBER: Right. They are in between, but some are in Warwick and some straddle over to Leamington.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The second point you raised was about the fire brigade. Are you saying that if the constituencies changed, therefore the fire brigade is not going to do a response across?

MR WEBER: No, the response time would be the same, but it is the fact that we have one constituency and Stratford is so far away.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The third thing is that there are, as you know, counter-proposals but I note that, while you have focused very much on why these two should stay together, we have not heard any counter-proposals from you as to what we could do instead - which is fine, you do not need to do that and I am sure we will be hearing some later and we have seen some already in writing - but do you have any view?

MR WEBER: Are you asking me, do I have counter-proposals?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What would you like instead, yes?

MR WEBER: Well, the regional party has produced a very detailed counter-proposal and we are accepting their proposal.

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

MR WEBER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That was very useful. Could we have our next speaker, please, who is Mr Brandon Clayton. Just a quick reminder, we need your name and address. There is a pointer there if you want to point at any particular maps or if you want us to bring anything up, thank you.

MR CLAYTON (Conservative Party): Thank you. My name is Brandon Clayton. My address is 95 Jersey Close, Redditch, Worcestershire. I am here to represent Redditch County constituency and to speak on behalf of the Conservative Party in Redditch.

We knew our boundaries would change because our area is quite small in terms of the number of electors. We are happy with the proposed changes to increase the number of electors in this constituency. The new constituency proposal is to have the whole of Redditch and part of the existing constituency of Bromsgrove.

We would like to change the name from its current name of Redditch County to North Worcestershire to reflect the changes of the constituency. We have spoken to our MP and a number of people from Bromsgrove who all agree with the name change. Do you wish me to show it on the map?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you would like, yes, please. Why not? Every little helps here.

MR CLAYTON: Where Redditch is there, the new proposal is for that area there, which is Bromsgrove. Of course, that part there is actually, this part here is the existing Bromsgrove constituency. Therefore, we would like the name changed from just Redditch because all of that there is part of the new constituency, which is Bromsgrove and, therefore, to have the name changed to North Worcestershire we think would make more sense and reflect the whole area because this is North Worcestershire.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, I get that.

MR CLAYTON: Is that okay?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great. But you are happy otherwise with this particular change?

MR CLAYTON: Yes, we are, we are very happy. We realise the amount of people

through our area we would have to change because our area is too small, so we knew the boundaries would change anyway. It makes more sense to us to have it here and so we are quite happy with the boundary changes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Before you go, a couple of things. It is extremely important for us to hear about support as well as objections so that we can get into proportion how much support and how much objection. I appreciate you showing that and we will certainly listen to your point. Any questions from the floor? We have one question here.

MR MURRAY (Liberal Democrats): David Murray, West Midlands Liberal Democrats. You were talking about changing the name to North Worcestershire but, in fact, would not Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest consider themselves as North Worcestershire as well and would that not just be confusing, whereas Redditch is identified on the actual town?

MR CLAYTON: Well, to look at it in the round, if you look at it that way we can all see why it needs to change, because of the two different constituencies, existing constituencies change. Geographically, are we saying that the Wyre Forest part there would be looking at North Worcestershire? If you look at the boundary and the way the demographic is, north is that part.

Our college used to be was called North Worcestershire College, which is based in Redditch. Therefore, it would follow for the constituency to be called North Worcestershire, you see. It is a name which people in Bromsgrove and in Redditch agree with. That is the reason why the proposal is for North Worcester, as I say, because the college was called North Worcestershire College which is in Redditch.

Now it is joined with Worcester College, the two colleges have joined together, now it is the Heart of Worcestershire College. Therefore, as I say, that is why the proposal was for North Worcestershire area. In my opinion, Wyre Forest is in East Worcestershire not North Worcestershire.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, very useful. Any further points of clarification? (No response). In which case, thank you very much indeed for your time.

MR CLAYTON: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is Alexander Hall in the room? No. David Preston? No. In which case, I do not know whether, John Blundell, you feel ready, having just walked in, to take to the floor? You might as well. Just to remind you, we will need your name and address. You are being filmed and you can point at the maps up there. As I say, if we could have your name and address and hear what you have to say.

CLLR BLUNDELL (Coventry): Well, I am Cllr John Blundell. I am leader of the Conservative Group on Coventry City Council. My address is 36 Haycroft. I represent the Wainbody ward and Haycroft is in the Wainbody ward just off the Kenilworth Road.

I am here, basically, to support the Conservative proposals which would mean that Coventry City would be wholly contained. There would be three constituencies within the boundaries of Coventry City. In order to supplement Coventry South, it would include the town of Kenilworth. I have looked at the Boundary Commission's proposals.

The proposals would be to have Coventry, Coventry North West and that would include a number of the villages in the Solihull constituency, of which we feel that there is no connection between Coventry West. In particular, there is a ward Holbrook and places such as Knowle. It would also extend the Coventry West constituency over a far greater geographical area.

Going back to the proposals which we have, which would be Coventry North West, Coventry East and Coventry South and Kenilworth, what that do is there are very good transport links between Coventry South and Kenilworth. It would also preserve the historic identity of Warwick and Leamington being contained as one seat. The University of Warwick would lie wholly within Coventry South and Kenilworth and we feel that is of considerable importance.

There is also the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership and, again, there are very strong links between Coventry and Warwickshire. This would preserve the link between Coventry and Warwickshire. Kenilworth is a town of 20,000, or thereabouts, electors. It would make perfect sense to include that within the five wards as proposed in Coventry.

I am just thinking if there are any more sort of aspects which I can sort of put forward. If you look at the other plans, we noticed that the Green Party also mirrors our proposals. The Liberal Democrats' plans have the principle of going south, but I think they include another ward, probably Cubbington as opposed to the town of Kenilworth.

We feel quite strongly that our proposals are logical and they fit. There has always been a link between Coventry and Kenilworth. A lot of people who live in Kenilworth actually work in Coventry. It would ensure that the compactness would be a sensible arrangement.

I have just briefly looked at the Labour Party's proposals with views to taking Westwood ward and Wainbody ward and putting them in Rugby and Southam. We see absolutely no logic for that whatsoever. Also, we feel that the Boundary Commission's proposals, which would be to include five villages added on to the Coventry West, again we feel strongly that there is no sort of identifiable links between those villages and Coventry. I think that is about it, unless there are any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any points of clarification from the floor? (No response). There is another counter-proposal that you did not really mention there, and I just wondered what your view on that would be, which would be Kenilworth being linked with Southam.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Sorry, the counter-proposal of Kenilworth being linked with Southam?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Well, I think if you look historically, Kenilworth used to be linked with Warwick and Leamington and then it was linked with the town of Rugby. It does create a rather sort of odd shaped constituency when it was linked with Southam. You are talking about the counter-proposal which would include the two wards of Westwood and Wainbody in Kenilworth and Southam, are you not?

We do not think there is any logic to that. Historically, the links between Coventry South and Kenilworth are very strong. I would point to the University of Warwick as being sort of a unifying factor in that, as well as good commuter links. I personally would not countenance that proposal. I would strongly advocate for Coventry South and Kenilworth, which means that the effect on the other two Coventry constituencies would be as is.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Public transport, you are saying, between the Coventry area and Kenilworth is good?

CLLR BLUNDELL: Yes, indeed, yes. There are regular buses because you have got the University of Warwick, so there are regular bus services which run from Coventry. I think it is the X16, the X17 and the X18 which run to sort of Kenilworth and, obviously, the market towns, Leamington and Warwick, beyond Kenilworth.

Again, that is mainly because of the university. A lot of students from the university do choose to live in Leamington and, obviously, you realise Kenilworth is a small town directly sort of between Coventry and Leamington. It would actually ensure that that continuity was kept and we think it is a very logical proposal.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Am I right to understand the current proposals then, as far as the university goes, splits the university across a boundary?

CLLR BLUNDELL: It does, because at the moment the university would be in a Kenilworth ward. If you do not include that with Coventry, then you would get split constituencies. Currently, it is split. It is in the constituency of Kenilworth and Southam and Coventry South. The proposals that we are advocating would ensure that the

university is contained solely within the Coventry South and Kenilworth, because Rugby and Kenilworth actually have all the three Kenilworth town wards in.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, really useful.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Okay, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: There is some logic in taking the next speaker who was due after you because he is also talking about Coventry. Would you be happy to do that? That is Mr Taylor. If we do that, Mr Hall, are you happy to wait for another ten or so minutes?

MR HALL: As long as I can return to my car by 11.30.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will absolutely make sure. Let us take then Mr Taylor, just because there is logic in it and then we will come back to you.

CLLR TAYLOR (Coventry): Good morning. I am Ken Taylor, councillor in Coventry representing Earlsdon ward, but I am here really on the basis that I am Chairman of the Coventry Conservative Association. I will address a number of issues which, to a degree, may duplicate what has been said by my colleague, but I may add a little bit more to them.

I think to address what we are proposing in the Conservative's drive on Kenilworth is we saw that the link is there and always has been there. This is the direction we feel we should be moving in, bearing in mind the communication between those two areas. Kenilworth is only about a mile and a half from Coventry's boundaries and, if it is that, that is the centre of the town and so there is a lot of flow.

Also, of course, the communication links are absolutely brilliant down there, so there is this sort of natural combination and bringing together, which we feel would work also certainly on the basis of the university and bringing that also under the one. That has always been a bit of a problem over the years, having the university in two constituencies.

It is about a community. It is about the links. It is about the people who live in both of those areas being part of the same local community and being. Also, I do not want to sort of classify people, but the reality is Coventry South is more linked to Kenilworth and Warwickshire than it is maybe to the north of the City. It is the more affluent area, if you would like to put it that way.

Can I just talk then about the proposals the Boundary Commission have about the Meriden. The difference there is dramatic in my view. We are talking about trying to link quite an industrial type of area up there, specifically Holbrook which is an area

where we are trying to link into these particular proposals. Holbrook has no relationship whatsoever with the Meriden type area. It faces into the City. It is a city ward and I do not see that it would work at all.

Plus, of course, the links between Coventry and Meriden are very poor in terms of the communication in terms of transport. I do not think you would find anybody outside the boundaries of Coventry in Meriden who actually feels they have any relationship with Coventry whatsoever. They face towards Solihull and that is where they belong with the likes of Knowle and Balsall Common and areas like that.

That is the real big one, as far as I am concerned. There is not this community being. It is just us pushing them two together because it happens to suit us for numbers, and that really quite concerns me. If I could look at some of the proposals. Well, of course, the Liberal Democrats' one is talking about keeping the numbers low on the Coventry South side on the basis that they will come into play and students will start voting on a more regular basis.

My experience is they will not and, even if they did, there is a five-year gap now which I think is very reasonable, that if we needed to change the boundary in five years' time you could change them in five years' time after the first one. The idea that we will plan in case they come in and start voting, I think that is a crazy idea. We have got to sort of view for the future.

The Green Party one is very, very similar to ours. The one I find absolutely absurd is the Labour Party. I am making these points to you, and I know it is not maybe the way it should be but I really think this is a bonkers idea. All it is doing is splitting Coventry apart, taking three wards here and three wards here and sticking them into Warwickshire.

What relationship has Coventry South got with Stratford-on-Avon, for goodness sake? It is a long way away from us and it has no relationship. It is 20 odd miles or whatever it is. We have no relationship whatsoever with them, and to try to join us into there. I have to say to you sincerely I think this is the most political one I have got here.

We all politicians look at this from a political point of view, but this one is absurd. All it is doing is retaining the strongest Labour constituency in Coventry, which is Coventry North East, and then splitting off the wards in the remaining part of Coventry and throwing them out into Warwickshire. Whatever geographical area that covers seems to be irrelevant.

I notice a couple of these but if you look at, for instance, the proposal for Coventry West and Atherstone, there are three wards, Holbrook included, and 14 other wards from outside of Warwickshire. Well, it will not work. If it is put in place, it is put in place but it is just an absolutely bonkers idea.

The idea of Coventry being in that sort of splitting up the City, although we can stand here and say, well, it does not have any effect, it does have an effect when you start to elect people because the MPs have a focus and the largest part of their proportion of their constituency is in the outlying areas. Coventry is going to be neglected and I feel that trying to split it down would be a very, very bad idea. I am very much opposed to that.

Really, going back to what has been said before, I just think that Coventry South will work with Kenilworth because of the communications, because of the relationships and because of the university. Simply those three things really. Without going over the top about it I think the others, as I said, are a little off the planet apart from maybe the Liberal and the Green Party. The Labour Party seem to be more focused on retaining political positions as against getting the thing right. That is me, thank you. Sorry, questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely, we will not let you go yet. Do we have any points of clarification or any questions from the floor? Yes, we have one here.

LORD HAYWARD (Conservative Party): Lord Hayward from the Conservative Party. Ken, just using the pointer can you show ---

CLLR TAYLOR: Hang on, yes.

LORD HAYWARD: No, you have got to stay by the microphone so that you can be recorded.

CLLR TAYLOR: There is Coventry.

LORD HAYWARD: Can you show, for the benefit, where the University of Warwick is situated and how it ---

CLLR TAYLOR: It is about there.

LORD HAYWARD: That is not it. The map has got to be moved upwards. Thanks, Gerald. You have got Wainbody ward and you have got Westwood, so you are coming down.

CLLR TAYLOR: That is it there.

LORD HAYWARD: No, it is not. No, that is the centre of the City.

CLLR TAYLOR: This is the Kenilworth Road.

LORD HAYWARD: No, that is the centre.

CLLR TAYLOR: Down here.

LORD HAYWARD: John, can I ask Cllr Blundell.

CLLR TAYLOR: John, you can see this better than I can. I am sorry, my eyesight is not playing well for this. That is it there, is it? Here you are, you do it. I am sorry about this, but my hands are a lot shakier than they used to be.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Clarity is important. It is a not a problem at all.

CLLR TAYLOR: Press this up and hold.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The top button. That is it, you have got it.

CLLR BLUNDELL: So if we come down, that is the railway line and the Kenilworth Road is coming down here. The University of Warwick is situated, I think I am about right in saying that is ---

LORD HAYWARD: That is the A45 you have got there, John.

CLLR BLUNDELL: The A45.

LORD HAYWARD: You are further south.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Ah, right, sorry.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If we take out the blue.

CLLR BLUNDELL: That is the railway line.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Take out existing and that will take ---

CLLR BLUNDELL: And then we have got here, I think this is the boundary, is it not, of Coventry?

CLLR TAYLOR: Yes.

CLLR BLUNDELL: And then, basically, the University of Warwick is --- (inaudible).

CLLR TAYLOR: That is it.

CLLR BLUNDELL: So, yes, move down, follow the railway line down.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is it, yes.

CLLR BLUNDELL: The University of Warwick is there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Perfect.

LORD HAYWARD: It is on either side of the road.

CLLR BLUNDELL: It is around here, okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

LORD HAYWARD: It is on either side of the road.

CLLR BLUNDELL: It is on either side of the road. So that is Gibbet Hill Road. You cannot really see. This is Gibbet Hill Road, is it not, here?

CLLR TAYLOR: Yes. It is either side. You can see the restriction boundary.

CLLR BLUNDELL: That is right. So it is down there.

LORD HAYWARD: The point I wanted to clarify, which is being confirmed, is that the University of Warwick site is partly in Coventry and partly related to Kenilworth.

CLLR TAYLOR: Oh, yes.

LORD HAYWARD: Hence the confusion about it. Thank you.

CLLR TAYLOR: There is a road right down the middle of it, basically.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: But it crosses the border of the proposed boundary that exists in these initial proceedings.

CLLR TAYLOR: Yes, correct.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, absolutely.

CLLR TAYLOR: It took a bit of time to get that sorted but ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, no, but it is important and we have seen it. That is very important for us. Are there any other points of clarification on this

matter? (No response). Just a couple of questions then. I am trying to think, up at the top Holbrook ward you mentioned.

CLLR TAYLOR: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And that concerned you and you felt that that did not sit comfortably in with what we have put down as Coventry West and Meriden.

CLLR TAYLOR: Absolutely. It is a very commercial and residential area. There are a lot of, what you might call, blue collar workers there. It faces to Coventry. It does not face out to the centre. That is my general view. It very much feels part of the centre of Coventry, although it is on the outskirts.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I can see, actually, looking at the map I have got in front of me, it is very built-up compared to elsewhere. Okay, thank you very much indeed for your time.

CLLR TAYLOR: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: At which point, looking at the time ticking and thinking of that car, if we could have Alexander Hall, please.

MR HALL (Conservative Party): Well, good morning. My name is Alex Hall. I am speaking today on behalf of South Warwickshire Conservatives. South Warwickshire Conservatives is the official organisation for the Conservative Party in the existing constituencies of Stratford-on-Avon and Kenilworth and Southam.

The proposal we have completely supports the official Conservative Party proposal for the West Midlands and we want to go into a little bit more detail concerning the two constituencies that we currently cover. We propose a Stratford-on-Avon seat as an extended version of the existing constituency; a Coventry South and Kenilworth seat as the necessary cross-Warwickshire county constituency; a slight revision to the Boundary Commission's Rugby and Southam seat; and, of course, we support the calls for maintaining a Warwick and Leamington seat.

Turning, first of all, to Stratford-on-Avon itself, the Boundary Commission have proposed to break up the historic town of Stratford-upon-Avon with its natural hinterland. Ms Commissioner, Stratford-upon-Avon is a world-renowned site, famous for being the home of William Shakespeare. We believe it should be recognised in its own constituency and not put in as an afterthought in a Warwick constituency.

There are villages such as Welford-on-Avon, Ettington and Luddington which are split from their natural towns of Stratford-upon-Avon and Alcester by the Boundary

Commission's proposals. These are villages and towns with exceptionally good links to Stratford-upon-Avon and absolutely no links at all to the area where the Boundary Commission have proposed to put them.

I will mention, in particular, though, Luddington. It is a place I would doubt almost anyone in this room would have heard of, but you will have certainly heard of the two people who met, courted and were reputedly married in the village of Luddington, namely William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. Due to the slight peculiarity with the way the local government boundary wards were done a couple of years ago, the parish of Luddington is, in fact, split between two wards.

What this means is that the parliamentary constituencies will actually split a parish in half. You will have the place where the most famous Stratfordians in history, Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, known throughout the world from Boston to Beijing to Brazil, split from Stratford-upon-Avon, the town with which they are connected so deeply.

The connections throughout the existing Stratford-on-Avon seat and our proposed revision to it run north to south rather than east to west. It is very simple to drive from Tanworth-in-Arden in the north of Stratford-on-Avon, into Stratford-on-Avon itself and then down south into Shipston. There are not good connections by either road or rail though running east and west, which is the way the Boundary Commission's proposals have oriented themselves.

Also, as well, it should be noted that by maintaining a Stratford-on-Avon seat you cause less disruption for Warwickshire in general. The next point is that the local district council, Stratford-on-Avon, you have proposed to split four ways. We do, of course, accept that the district council is simply too big for one constituency. Everyone agrees with that. It cannot be in one seat. It has to be in at least two.

However, there is cross-party unanimous support for it only to be split in two. In fact, at the most recent full council meeting there was a resolution passed unanimously by every Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour and independent councillor to not fragment it into four seats.

I should also mention as well in particular the ward of Tanworth-in-Arden, which is the northern-most ward in Stratford-on-Avon Council. You have proposed that to be what we might call an orphan ward in the Shirley and Solihull South seat. It would be the only Warwickshire ward in the proposed Solihull South and Shirley seat. It would take up, geographically, about 50 per cent of the constituency but about 3 per cent of the population. It is simply not a good fit with a Solihull seat at all and would just become a rump in a Solihull seat.

I believe as well that one of the after-effects of the proposals made by the Boundary

Commission is that you are splitting neighbouring Wychavon Council in Worcestershire multiple ways. I am not as familiar with Wychavon, of course. Turning though to a constituency where we largely agree with the proposals you have put forward, Rugby and Southam, South Warwickshire Conservatives support the proposal for a Rugby and Southam seat but with one very small change.

We propose that you include the Radford Semele ward from Warwick District Council instead of the Stratford-on-Avon ward of Kineton. The village of Radford Semele is well connected to the town of Southam. It is just 16 minutes' drive away on the A425 and if you want to go by public transport you have got a choice of the 63 or the 64 bus routes.

By contrast, there are no public transport links between Kineton and Southam. Kineton is a full 40 minutes' drive away from Rugby as well. Rather than putting Kineton in, which simply does not connect well to Southam at all, we propose to put in Radford Semele which is very well-connected.

Kineton, I should also mention because we propose to put that in a Stratford-on-Avon seat, it was part of Stratford-on-Avon until 2010. It is 23 minutes away by car, or 26 minutes by bus on the 270 from Stratford-on-Avon. It is also well-linked to nearby hinterland villages from Stratford-on-Avon like Wellesbourne, only nine minutes away from them.

You have, of course, a bit of a quandary in Warwickshire in that we are due to have five and a half constituencies, which simply does not go and so you need to have at least one cross-county seat. Unfortunately, the Boundary Commission's proposals do, in fact, create two. You create an Evesham and South Warwickshire cross-county seat and the aforementioned Solihull South and Shirley.

The proposals we are backing have only one cross-county seat in Warwickshire, which is Coventry South and Kenilworth. I came in at the start and heard some councillors speak very well about the links between them. Just to stress their point, travel from Kenilworth to the southern part of Coventry can take as little as 15 minutes and you have got your choice of main roads: The A429, the A46, or, if you really feel like it, the A46 and the A444. They mentioned some bus routes, I looked into it, and there is the X17, the 12X, the X68 and the X16. There are abundant public transport links.

As has already been said very clearly, the University of Warwick campus is split between two constituencies at the moment. Your proposals mean they will still be split. Our proposal for Coventry South and Kenilworth unite them in one constituency. From the outset, you did say that you wanted to link Warwickshire with Worcestershire rather than with Coventry. I did some looking into this and found quite a few links between Warwickshire and Coventry.

In terms of healthcare, we share the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS

Trust. In terms of banking, you can find branches of the Coventry Building Society in Warwick, Leamington and Stratford-upon-Avon, but we could find no such examples of similar Worcestershire based services being in Warwickshire.

The King Henry VIII School, a renowned school in Coventry, actually advertises on its website how easily accessible it is for children in Warwickshire, particularly noting Kenilworth. If you were to compare the Alcester Grammar School, which is in Warwickshire but on the border with Worcestershire, they make no mention on their website of how easily accessible it is to Worcestershire.

In terms of business, Coventry and Warwickshire share a Chamber of Commerce and we found that 80 per cent of working people living in the Coventry and Warwickshire area also work in that area. By contrast, Worcestershire shares their Chamber of Commerce with Herefordshire.

The Coventry dialling code, 024, is widely used in Warwickshire. You will not find the 01386 Evesham dialling code in Warwickshire, nor the 01905 Worcester code. Most of Warwickshire uses a CV, or a Coventry, postcode. There is one tiny village, hamlet in fact, in Warwickshire which uses a WR or Worcester postcode, but it is not in your proposed cross-county constituency.

As we have already said, the University of Warwick is in Coventry, but split at the moment. Coventry airport is in, guess where, Warwickshire. There are substantial, very real, practical, cultural, historical and transportation links between Coventry and Warwickshire which simply do not exist between Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

It should also be mentioned that Coventry was part of Warwickshire within most of our lifetimes. Turning neatly then to the proposed cross-county seat that the Boundary Commission have put forward, Evesham and South Warwickshire. It is simply two parts that are bolted together. Were you to hit the border, you literally change different local government, different postcode, different phone dialling code, everything different, different, different.

You will find it very difficult to cross the boundary from the Evesham part of the constituency to the South Warwickshire part of the constituency because, quite simply, along the border between these two parts - and they are two separate parts - there are no motorways, no A roads and there is not even a single B road connecting these two parts of the proposed constituency.

For example, if you were to travel from one side to the other, it can take roughly an hour. In fact, if you were to go on to Google Maps and ask for directions from Evesham to Shipston-on-Stour (which is the only population centre in your proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire seat), it will either recommend you drive up into Stratford-upon-Avon and then take the exceptionally good road links from Stratford to

Shipston, or it will tell you to go deep into Gloucestershire out of the region altogether. It is simply a constituency which does not work.

It should also be mentioned that, although South Warwickshire Conservatives does not cover Warwick and Leamington at the moment, we do note with dismay the proposal to break apart these two towns which are joined at the hip. In fact, if you look on one section of Wikipedia, I think it describes them as, "conjoined."

I do have to say when I drove here this morning, I followed signs to Warwick at first. Further than that, if you try and look for where the boundary between Warwick and Leamington is, I have looked on a map for a long time and it took me ages to work it out and I found lots of people, I have asked them, and they said, "I am not really sure where the boundary is."

Our proposal fully supports a Warwick and Leamington seat. Just wrapping this up, because I know I have been allotted only ten minutes, whereas the Boundary Commission proposes two cross-county seats we propose only one. The cross-county seat that we propose is easily accessible and the two parts are a natural fit, whereas the Commission's cross-county seats have two parts that are not connected and have nothing in common at all.

Of course, as I said, the Solihull South and Shirley seat where you have simply bolted on Tanworth-in-Arden to make up the numbers and that has got nothing in common with them. We believe Stratford-upon-Avon should remain connected to its natural hinterland, particularly with the natural home of William Shakespeare and Stratford-on-Avon Council should not be fragmented into four parts.

There are abundant links between Coventry and Warwickshire but not between Worcestershire and Warwickshire. Worcestershire and Warwickshire are wonderful neighbours but different counties. We fully support the Conservative Party counter-proposal which creates a Stratford-on-Avon seat based on the current constituency, tidying up the boundaries where there are some split wards, and adding in Wellesbourne East, Wellesbourne West wards and Kineton.

We support your Rugby and Southam proposal, but with Radford Semele ward replacing the very distant Kineton ward. We support the workable Coventry South and Kenilworth seat and, of course, keeping Warwick and Leamington together. If there are no questions, that brings my report to the end.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: A huge amount in there, thank you. We have got quite a bit of it documented. A reminder, of course, that we can take more written submissions right up to December 5. The more consensus we have the better, obviously. At the moment, we have a lot of proposals and counter-proposals on the table which we are working our way through. Any points of clarification questions from

the floor? (No response). Thank you very much indeed. Really useful, and I hope that we do not cause you any problems with your car.

MR HALL: I will be fine. I do have a written report which I will submit in proper form as well, which backs it up with a few more of the details in there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That would be very useful, thank you.

MR HALL: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is Mr David Preston here? He was due to speak. No sign of him. And the other person due to speak, Mr Stephen Cowden is not here either. Is there anybody in the room who would like to speak? (No response). In which case, what we are going to do is take a small adjournment. Just give me a second to work out the timings. I am afraid it is just going to be a ten minute break before we have our official break, because we do have somebody who is due here in literally ten minutes' time and we must give him a chance to take his slot. A ten-minute break, reconvene at 11.20. We are due to have a 20-minute break at 11.30.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just to say that our next speaker is a little bit delayed and not going to get here until 11.30. What I am suggesting is we are going to take our official tea break now and slot him in at 11.45. We are going now to take a break of about 25 minutes, reconvening at 11.45. Thank you.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back. Thank you very much for coming. Just a quick reminder, again, that we need to have your name and address when you take the podium. Our first speaker now is Stephen Cowden, please. We can get the map up of where we are talking about and you can use the pointer, if you choose to, to point anything out on the map.

DR COWDEN: My name is Stephen Cowden. I live at 27 Lonsdale Road, Leamington Spa CV32 7EP. I am speaking today as a member of the public and particularly as a parent. I have a concern around the separation of the two constituencies based on experience I have had in the past.

My youngest child, Emmett, is learning disabled. He currently attends Ridgeway School, which is in Warwick, in Deansway in Warwick. I have genuine concerns about what would happen and what I would have done if I was in this situation in the past. When I was approaching services for a statement of special educational needs, I needed to obtain support from my MP.

If I was to have to do that now, subsequent to the proposed change, I would be in a very difficult position of having to approach two different MPs because his school is based in Warwick and we live in Leamington. That would have been a problem. As it was, we approached the MP and, because that constituency covered the school, that made it all much more straightforward for us.

It was quite a complicated and drawn out process anyway. We were requiring a lot of documentation and stuff like that. To have to provide that twice would have made it much harder for everybody. Additionally, we also approached our MP about support around an issue known as sensory needs. He suffers from a particular condition where he needs additional support which is provided at his school.

We also approached our MP for Leamington and Warwick over that and were supported over that. Again, if I was to have to do that, if the proposed changes went ahead, I would have to then involve two MPs in the whole process. That would make it much more complicated. I might get one support me and one not. It would be a very difficult and complicated situation.

From our perspective, Warwick and Leamington are very much one community. That is very much the way we see and that is how we have experienced it. That has been much more helpful to us, particularly given the issues we have had. It is also likely that when my son leaves Ridgeway School and goes to Round Oak School, which is in Warwick, I have will have the same issues.

If any particular issues emerged about the support he was getting, about me needing support from my MP, about me having to approach the MP regarding support for additional health needs, then I would be in this same position of having to approach two different individuals and provide two lots of documentation, two lots of visits, two lots of everything.

My experience has been, just to reiterate really, that Warwick and Leamington have strong connections with each other. It has been hugely helpful for me to be able to have obtained the support of an MP around this. It has made a difference. It has opened doors for us. The situation we have been in with my son's needs has not been completely straightforward.

I am sure that there are many people who have had the same experiences as parents at the school who do live in Leamington. There are a large number of parents at the school who live in Leamington who have needed to approach the MP about support for health needs. That would all become much more complicated for them in an already complicated situation is, I suppose, what I am trying to say. Yes, that is it, thanks.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. That is a

very powerful argument there. The importance of these proposals is that we have Initial Proposals, but we have not yet put in the community element and the effect on communities. That is why we are holding these hearings. It is very good to hear from you and, of course, these can influence what we, all together, come up with in the end, so thank you. Do we have any questions from the floor or any points of clarification? (No response). I think your message was very clear. Thank you very much indeed. We much appreciate you coming in. Thank you.

DR COWDEN: Pleasure.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could we hear now, please, from John Turner?

MR TURNER: John Turner, 75 Southgate Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B44 9AP. I am a resident of Oscott ward in the Perry Barr constituency, but a large part of my family originally are from the Kingstanding ward and many of us still live there. Bringing Oscott ward into the Erdington constituency recognises the existence of a centuries old community - a community defined by its history, its man-made geography, economics and local sentiment.

It brings that locale wholly into one constituency. Kingstanding gets its name from the King standing at a pre-historic mound on Kingstanding Road, alongside the Roman road to Wall, which is known here as Icknield Street. This mound is a scheduled ancient monument dating back certainly to medieval times and derives its later use as a standing, which means a place where the king could wait and have deer driven past.

For a lot of locals, the specific sort of resonance of the Kingstanding is it is believed to be in a location where Charles I is said to have addressed new recruits from Staffordshire and the gentry of Warwickshire at the Kingstanding on 19 October 1642. It is believed that this was before he went to the Battle of Edgehill, which basically kicked off the English Civil War.

There is no reason to disbelieve this story, but the name of the mound certainly predates the 17th Century. The hump is currently in Oscott ward and so in Perry Barr constituency. Close by the hump is Kingstanding Wood, a plantation laid out after the enclosure of Perry Barr Common and Sutton Chase between 1814 and 1824.

The extensive housing estates of Kingstanding were built after 1928. At the time of the building of the estate, Kettlehouse, with over 4,000 houses, was the biggest municipal housing project in Europe. Unsurprisingly, it was known as the Kingstanding Estate. Warren Farm and Kingsvale Farm, also constructed a little later and brought into Kingstanding, brought the total of up to some 6,700 houses.

The estate itself is centred on the junction of the Kingstanding Road and the Kings

Road. This junction is known as the Kingstanding Circle and is the convergence of six roads. The Kingstanding Circle, although past its heyday, is a major shopping and services centre and public transport hub for the residents of both the Kingstanding and Oscott wards. Currently, the Circle is split in half along the Kingstanding Road, which is the boundary between the Perry Barr and Erdington constituencies.

On the Oscott ward side of the boundary are to be found the Kingstanding Community Day Nursery, the Kingstanding Library, the Kingstanding Precinct, housing the Kingstanding Royal Mail Crown Post Office and the Kingstanding Police Station. I stress the fact that when I say "Kingstanding" for all these locations, these are actually their names as used publicly by the various organisations.

Overshadowing all of those on the Oscott ward side of the Kingstanding Circle is the iconic, and I stress "iconic", Kingstanding building otherwise known as the Mecca Bingo. Originally, the Odeon Cinema was built between 1935 and 1936 and is considered to be one of the best surviving Odeon cinemas in Britain. Crucially, both the Royal Institution of British Architects and Historic England - and Historic England have listed the building as grade 2 - refer to it as Kingstanding.

It is the Kingstanding Odeon. It has been known as that ever since it was constructed, but crucially it sits in the Oscott ward. I stress about it being sort of iconic because it is a dramatic structure and it stands out as the tallest building within the locality, visible from quite a few areas from around it.

Alongside the police station and the other locations that I have mentioned that are in Oscott ward, we have quite a lot of service and retail outlets distributed around the Circle. I want to stress that this particularly indicates how important this location is, that it still actually sustains three bank branches, HSBC, Lloyds and the Halifax, one building society branch, the West Brom; other well-known companies including Greggs - okay, they are pretty common --- but Boots the chemist, Scrivens and three bookies, unusual in this sort of area particularly with these sorts of locations tending to be sort of drifting downwards.

There is the usual eclectic mix of charity shops and takeaways, but they sit alongside a lot of independent shops: Independent retailers funeral directors, a dental surgery, vets and so on. In a lot of other areas, these businesses have just disappeared and fallen away but they are still maintained.

I think it stresses the fact that this centre is at the heart of the particular community, that it actually manages to stay an independent hardware store and the rest of it, when, in fact, there are many large well-known names within a very short distance of the area. Kingstanding Circle is not a row of shops with a bus stop, but a significant local centre with more than five major bus routes passing through it, a centre currently straddling a constituency boundary.

I would like to just finish off with making a point about a little further down more towards the Kingstanding Road going south away from the Kingstanding Circle. There are two locales in the Oscott ward; again, government bodies given the name Kingstanding. We have the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency Test Centre in Oscott ward which goes specifically under the heading of Kingstanding and you will find that on the [Directgov](#) website.

We also have the Territorial Army base on the Kingstanding Road in the Oscott ward. This base has a particular significance because it is actually been the Kingstanding Drill Hall since 1938. It is also the home of the 23rd Special Air Service regiment, The Territorial Army, and again they use the word Kingstanding to denote this particular location. It also houses the 487 Squadron Air Training Core, Kingstanding and Perry Barr.

Again, you will find, if you search on the internet, that these names are used by those organisations. They are official designations. Cardinal Wiseman School, which again sits just off the Kingstanding Road but in Oscott ward, as far as it is concerned is in Kingstanding. That is the address it chooses to use.

In terms of the spiritual connections, they cross the divide, because the chaplain who visits once a week to deliver mass actually comes from Christ the King which is in the Warren Farm area of the Kingstanding ward. There are these connections that people make. The boundary is very, very porous.

I would say that for those of us born and brought up locally, and after a while incomers, it is not the Kingstanding Circle but, "the Circle." The current parliamentary boundary along the Kingstanding Road cuts the Circle in half, creating a boundary unrecognised by locals. Bringing the Circle back in would, basically, take a circle that is halved and make it whole again. That is it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Very clear and very interesting and, as I said to the speaker before, it is always good for us to get that extra local colour and begin to see some of these places in our minds. I really found that useful. Do we have any questions from the floor? (No response). Thank you. We really appreciated that you came today.

MR TURNER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speakers, I think we have got two MPs here, Jim Cunningham and Geoffrey Robinson. Are you going to be speaking together? Do we need to get two microphones to you? One by one, okay. Do alter the mics so that you can speak directly into it. It helps us a bit, thank you.

MR CUNNINGHAM (MP for Coventry South): Can I just start off by saying that I have been a Member of Parliament in Coventry since 1992. I was, first, the MP for Coventry South East and then Coventry South when the seat was created in 1997. I first became a councillor in Coventry in 1972 and was leader of Coventry City Council from 1988 until I became a Member of Parliament.

Geoffrey Robinson MP and myself have today submitted a detailed document outlining our full proposal for Coventry and Warwickshire, taking into account the wider region. Today, we wish to speak briefly in support of it. Coventry is a city with a distinct character and a long proud history. It is defined by its many qualities, but one of the greatest attributes of Coventry has always been the strong sense of community and the close-knit links that bind us together, on clear display in the aftermath of the bombing in the War.

Coventry has extremely strong local ties within the city. Furthermore, the people of Coventry have a clear sense of identity that is very much distinct from the surrounding countryside. There is a clear boundary to the city limits to the east, west and south. The one exception to this, however, is the conurbation of Bedworth to the north of Coventry.

Now the electoral quota placed by the boundary review means that, unfortunately, the three Coventry constituencies are not quite big enough to keep the current boundaries. We, therefore, appreciate that we have to expand outside of Coventry. Our proposals today provide a way to expand outside Coventry such that these precious local ties and the character of Coventry are preserved.

We propose that Coventry be linked to Bedworth to create a constituency called Coventry North West and Bedworth. We would then make small adjustments to the other two Coventry seats to create a Coventry East and a Coventry Central. We would recreate the existing seat of Warwick and Leamington, adding one ward.

We would create a new constituency of Kenilworth and Meriden, linking the town of Kenilworth with one Coventry ward and five Solihull wards. We would create most of the existing seat of Stratford-on-Avon and would add most of the existing seat of Solihull with some changes.

Our proposal would also maintain most of the existing constituency of North Warwickshire, replacing the Bedworth wards with wards from the north of Solihull District. Minor changes to the surrounding constituency would then follow. Our proposal has wide support across the constituencies affected.

Others will speak later about the specific benefits to each area. I wish to speak on behalf of Coventry. The strong local ties with Coventry simply do not extend beyond the city limits to the surrounding countryside. These rural areas consist of very different

communities with very different characteristics and needs.

Bedworth, however, is a town similar in character and needs to Coventry and flows seamlessly to the north of Coventry. The local ties between Bedworth and Coventry are strong in a way that they are not between Coventry and the surrounding rural communities to the east, west and south. In my considered opinion, this is the only logical way to expand Coventry such that the local ties and identities of Coventry and Bedworth are reflected.

My experience as an MP makes me wish to avoid constituencies which have very different communities and needs, such as mixing inner-city wards with large distant rural wards. This makes it difficult for an MP to adequately represent the needs of the communities he or she represents.

Coventry should not be carved up, creating seats which mix historically central Coventry wards with far away rural wards and communities that have little connection with Coventry. I, therefore, commend our proposals to you and urge you to give it full consideration.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you want to take questions now or do you want to do it afterwards?

MR CUNNINGHAM: We can do it afterwards.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Afterwards.

MR CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mr Robinson?

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON (MP for Coventry North West): My name is Geoffrey Robinson and I am the Member of Parliament for Coventry North West, the constituency I have served - it is very sobering to reflect on the fact, but it is a fact - for 40 years now. Through those 40 years I did not think I would like to have proposals of this kind, though I appreciate the difficulties, of course, the Boundary Commission has in so far as it must reduce the number and it has to make sure that each constituency meets the average level of seats.

I wish I could comment as follows, Madam. I fully share with Jim Cunningham's assessment of Coventry as a distinct community with strong local ties that are not shared with the rural surrounding areas. I am disappointed with the Initial Proposals, particularly in so far as they link Coventry North West, or any part of Coventry come to that, with the surrounding areas of Meriden and particularly Knowle.

I would reflect, asking everyone to reflect on the good sense of splitting Knowle effectively in two with Dorridge on one side and Knowle on the other. It really does not even dare making any sense and, as we all know, the local people there are very much against it, as we are against it for different reasons naturally as well. They are completely different in character. They have different needs. There are minimal links between the communities.

Bedworth, however, is a different matter. Bedworth is similar to Coventry with strong local ties to the north of Coventry. I must have done just about as many meetings, Madam, in Bedworth as I have done in Coventry North. Effectively, the social ties, industrial ties and job ties are all very close and it is a natural part of Coventry and of Coventry North West from the point of view that we are discussing today.

Moreover, good rail and road connections link between Bedworth and Coventry and it has been a part of all councils, I think, to improve the northern run through the NUCKLE and other projects that we have had over the years. Northern Communications, they are going to the north of Coventry.

The village of Keresley is another good example of how that fits together. At the moment, it is split between Bedworth and Coventry North West. These proposals would not just bring Bedworth into the North West or into Coventry, our natural conurbation, but it would also, of course, mean we could reunite Keresley Village which is, unfortunately, I think, an unnecessarily split at the moment.

We are trying to see it in the round and give as many good features to our proposals as we possibly can. I speak trying to dismiss every sentimental tie and every bias I have, although naturally they are there and I make no attempt to disguise them or less still to deny them, they are there.

It, nevertheless, fits, I believe, in so far as we have considered it so far, very neatly into whatever other considerations we have so far effected. We are not parochial. We never have been. We have tried to look at the wider picture and see the difficulties, I have already said, that the Boundary Commission inevitably has in this situation.

Can I just spend a few moments looking at North Warwickshire and some of the other surrounding areas? Having been through four of these already, the great difficulty it has is if you are parochial and you just look at your own area, what happens is, of course, you solve your own problems very neatly but the knock-on problems that arise from solving your own problem are, of course, an irresolvable headache for the Boundary Commission.

We have not done that and, despite my own feelings about it, we have got a set of proposals here which we believe, largely, nothing is perfect in this world, ours are not perfect. Plenty of holes can be picked in them, let us be clear. I could do it myself if

you set me the task, but on the whole as we look around the impact of our proposals on what is around them I believe it gives the best combination of results.

North Warwickshire constituency is effectively currently two communities, the borough of North Warwickshire and the town of Bedworth as I was mentioning before. There are greater ties between Bedworth and Coventry - we have said that already - than between Bedworth and the rest of North Warwickshire, though it does not really take any vital element socially, politically in any sense away from North Warwickshire. Others can speak to that, I am sure, even more pertinently than I can.

I turn to Meriden. Meriden is a large rural, essentially, country constituency. You must have heard, I am sure anybody who has lived not 40 years, or, if I took in the time I was at Jaguar, it is coming on to 50 years now in this area, will tell you about the buffer that Meriden is and the fact that they feel they are separate from Birmingham. Coventrians feel very strongly they are separated, not just by the Meriden buffer and 20 miles of motorway down there but they are a distinct community in their own right.

Of course, Meriden, now lumping that together with the North West of Coventry, does not really fit. Neither of us feel that we are a suburb of Coventry. Our newly proposed seat of Kenilworth and Meriden - that is where again it makes sense, I am sure Kenilworth will not mind going in with Meriden, I am not familiar to speak for them but I cannot see why they would - is a very, I call it, a neat proposal.

The two areas have similar characteristics, indeed, as does Arden, Meriden and Bickenhill. The constituency of Meriden and Kenilworth, as we have put it forward there, will have a homogeneous characteristic of largely rural areas and satellite villages on the outskirts of large conurbations, so nothing jars there too much.

Warwick and Leamington. Our proposal would recreate the existing constituency - not a bad idea - of Warwick and Leamington with the addition of just one ward. We fully support, therefore, the excellent campaign for those in Warwick and Leamington to maintain the historic unity between their two towns and that brings them together.

I go on to Solihull very briefly. Our proposal, also, we believe, provides a good solution to the difficulty proposed by the Birmingham ward, Sheldon, no longer being part of a Birmingham constituency. There is a slight problem there. What we have done is to recreate the existing seat of Solihull. Given that Sheldon is so large electorally and very urban, we felt it preferable to include it in the new Solihull seat to create a constituency of similar urban Birmingham facing identity.

I do not think anybody would tell you that Sheldon is, as it were, eastward facing towards Coventry and towards our areas here. I do not think that that is a jarring and out of place element. There we are. I have said what I have to say. I will end on a personal note and say I really cannot believe it is beyond the wit of man, I cannot

believe it, to say Coventry and the areas that I have just mentioned there is a social, logical, longstanding and proud community, a proud city. To split it in three ways like this, to think of linking it to Knowle, to think of bringing in Meriden, it destroys something we have a great value here.

They are wanting to recreate city growth, are they not? The whole idea of the West Midlands and the northern powerhouse and everything else is to make cities again the centre for growth. This goes in absolutely the opposite direction from that. I believe there are better alternatives and I hope you find that our one is a better one. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Now given those two presentations, are there any questions from the floor? Yes, we have a question here.

LORD HAYWARD: Lord Hayward and, in fact, a former city councillor in Coventry in Whoberley ward. Have you got copies of the maps that you have put up on there that we could have a look at?

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: Yes, absolutely, yes.

LORD HAYWARD: We wanted to know what the ward make-up is of the different Coventry constituencies that you are proposing.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: Yes, we have got full maps. We can let you have them straight away. Do you want them now or afterwards?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We can sort that afterwards.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: Absolutely, we have the fullest of maps in all detail prepared excellently by Eleanor.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions from the floor? Yes, we have one here.

CLLR TAYLOR: I just wanted to clarify with you, Mr Robinson. John Taylor, Chairman of the Conservative Association. I just wanted to clarify, a little confused I am, this is purely your representations, Mr Cunningham and Mr Robinson, it is not Coleen Fletcher's or the Labour Group or the Regional Labour Group, it is you as individuals putting forward your presentation? Because there seems to be three or four Labour backed presentations in relationship to this boundary, but this is purely yours?

MR CUNNINGHAM: It is complementary to the Labour Party's proposals.

CLLR TAYLOR: Okay, thank you.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: We are hoping it will stand on its own merits.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: As we do.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will take the next question. When you answer, if you can answer right into the microphone. It makes a difference the closer you get.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Yes, John Blundell, leader of the Conservative Group in Coventry. I take it that this proposal then would not change any of the constituencies to the south of Coventry? In particular, I am sort of looking at Wainbody and Westwood. It would keep Wainbody and Westwood ward within Coventry and not outside of Coventry. It would just purely be adding an additional ward to the north, is that correct?

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: This is Eleanor. She has done a lot of work. She knows a lot of the detail. There is a point about what you have just asked.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, sorry, if you could speak into the mic, sorry.

MS CONNOLLY: Yes, I will just answer on behalf of Geoffrey.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Hang on a second, who is speaking there?

MS CONNOLLY: My name is Eleanor Connolly. I have been assisting in the putting together of the proposal.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And we will need your address if you are going to answer?

MS CONNOLLY: Yes, it is 22 Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And happy to take it if it is a point of clarification, which I believe it is.

MS CONNOLLY: Certainly. The one ward lost from Coventry would be Wainbody. Westwood would remain within the Coventry conurbation, but Wainbody would go into the new seat of Coventry and Kenilworth.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Thank you. I represent Wainbody ward, so that is very interesting. Thank you very much indeed.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: Just to add it, it is very limited, that one exception picked on there. You must live there!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response). Just to point out, clearly, the problem we have is this lack of consensus in a complex area. We look forward to the fact that you are showing interest in the different proposals. For us, we need to know what the people living there really think too. You can, of course, reflect this in any written submissions you give, which may be different to the ones that have already been given orally. I have a couple of questions if that is okay. The counter-proposal that we have heard a little bit about this morning which would put Kenilworth into a Coventry constituency, I just wondered whether either of you had a view on that?

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: I think this is where we have the one difference with them on that. Kenilworth comes into the North West I think. I know Kenilworth very well because where I stay is actually just outside my own constituency, a few miles, and its leads onto Kenilworth and so I happen to know Kenilworth very well.

On a personal level, I understand and know them well, but the people of Coventry have no links at all with Kenilworth. Kenilworth is a lovely little town and a beautiful village and everything about it, but it does not belong to Holbrook or to Radford, Sherbourne, Bablake, people that are genuinely Coventry. They do not want to be part of Coventry, be under no illusion. They would much rather go the other way, and quite rightly so, into Meriden or their links to Knowle and Dorridge

The splitting of Knowle and Dorridge has no sense at all, no more sense than trying to bring Knowle in with Kenilworth. They would not mind, but that coming into Coventry becomes the biggest nonsense. That is the big nonsense in it all. It really is separate, different culturally, socially, historically, emotionally to the people. I know that is a secondary consideration, you have got to make the numbers fit and all that, but it is a very real big problem there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: One of the things that we do consider is things like transport and infrastructure. If you look at the various proposals that there are, certainly we can see that there is transport that goes from Kenilworth to a lot of places, not necessarily so much across to Southam which looks a little bit more difficult but there is a logic to it going up to Coventry. That is one question.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: For me, again, I am finding these acoustics very challenging.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is very difficult. You need to speak right into the microphone. The acoustics are pretty awful. The question was the importance

of transport infrastructure. Some of the counter-proposals show, which I believe you are supporting which puts Kenilworth across to a constituency with Southam.

MS CONNOLLY: No, sorry, it would link Kenilworth with Meriden.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh, going into Meriden. And the transport infrastructure, the bus infrastructure is good, is it?

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: Yes, very good, into Meriden not into Coventry. It belongs to Meriden. Meriden is a small village.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, I need you back at the microphone. Thank you very much for clarifying that, thanks. I am beginning to see that there are even more different suggestions. There is a further question. Sorry to trouble you, there is one further question if we could take it. Who do you want to address your question to? It is David behind you there.

MR MURRAY: David Murray, West Midlands Liberal Democrats. Since you have taken Bedworth away from North Warwickshire, where are you making up the difference in the electors for North Warwickshire?

MS CONNOLLY: In North Warwickshire the replacement wards would be the wards from the north of Solihull District; so the four wards, Castle Bromwich, Kingshurst and Fordbridge, Chelmsley Wood and Smith's Wood.

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: Which again is logical.

MS CONNOLLY: There are four. We believe that there are strong ties linking those nearby North Warwickshire wards.

MR ASHMAN (Conservative Party): Robert Ashman, Conservative Party. Could you tell me what ties there, and is there not two motor ways running between both those constituencies on the edge of North Warwickshire?

MS CONNOLLY: There are very strong ties. People are going to speak later. This is very much a Coventry facing intervention, but the point is that we believe that there are very strong links within those North Solihull District wards with the neighbouring North Warwickshire wards of Water Orton and the two Coleshill seats. There are historic links there.

MR ASHMAN: Someone will expand on those, but are there not two motorways and the proposed HS2 line running between them?

MS CONNOLLY: Well, there are railways and motorways going through many of the

seats.

MR ASHMAN: How many links are there between Chelmsley Wood and the Coleshill and Water Orton?

MS CONNOLLY: There are a number of roads going through it.

MR ASHMAN: There is one.

MS CONNOLLY: I mean, we are not speaking on behalf of ---

MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON: What are you trying to say?

MS CONNOLLY: We know that there are people speaking later on behalf of that area of the proposals.

MS CONNOLLY: If you have got the map, I will have a look, but I do not know what you are trying to prove?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think it is an extension of what I was asking about infrastructure and the infrastructure between places and how communities link, so clarification.

MS CONNOLLY: Somebody here is going to speak shortly on behalf of, specifically, that area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine, and it is fine for you say, 'I am not answering that'.

MS CONNOLLY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any further questions from the floor? (No response). No, I think we are there. Thank you very much indeed, gentlemen, for your clarifications there. Thank you. Let us move on to our next speaker. Our next speaker is Jenny St John, is that how I pronounce it? Thank you. Please correct me if I am wrong. If you could speak as much as you can directly into the mic.

CLLR ST JOHN (Warwick): Thank you. I am Jenny St John. I am the county councillor for Warwick North and I live in my division at 10 Eborall Close, Warwick. I am going to make four main points regarding the proposed boundaries. The historic tie between our towns since 1885 will be broken. Two, the community links and ties will be broken. Three, Warwick will be particularly badly served. Four, I believe our town will lose a unified political voice at Westminster.

Our two towns' historic tie will be broken, the first point. Warwick and Leamington have been together as a constituency since 1885, so the new boundaries would break this valued historic tie between our towns. Successive boundary reviews since 1885 have recognised and retained this tie. Warwick and Leamington are two towns joined together geographically but invisibly. To a visitor, or indeed a resident, there is no obvious border delineating where one town ends and the other starts, as there is, for example, between Warwick and Kenilworth or Warwick and Leamington. That is the first point, that the historic tie would be broken.

The second point I am going to make is that our community links and ties will also be broken. I represent around 11,000 residents in Warwick, but I also consider I am a representative resident having community links and ties in both towns and so the following examples will actually be typical for most residents.

The first one is economic links. I shop in Leamington for the main high street stores like Marks & Spencer's for example and I shop in Warwick for the market and independent shops, as well as also The Shires Retail Park which has a Leamington address but which is actually in Warwick. That demonstrates the blurring of our boundaries.

Many residents live in one town and they work in the other town. At one stage, I was actually working in both our towns part-time. I cross frequently, often daily, from one town to the other. Our G1 bus service unifies our constituency, starting the journey in Warwick Town Centre, traveling through my estate, then to Leamington Town Centre and onto Warwick. That is the economic links which would be broken.

Religious links. I live in Warwick and I attend St Peter's Catholic church in Leamington. The Warwick Catholic Deanery unites the Catholic churches across our two towns. The gurdwara and the mosque serve the Sikh and Ahmadiya Muslim communities respectively of both towns. Those are the religious links which would be broken.

Educational links. My four children attended primary and secondary schools in both Warwick and Leamington, St Mary's Catholic Primary, Brookhurst Primary, and Trinity and Myton Secondary Schools. I believe this is true for many residents. Under the new boundaries, many children will be crossing constituency boundaries to attend school or college. For further education, Warwickshire College serves the young people for both towns.

Social and community links. My social activities take place in both Leamington and Warwick. I run a heritage festival in Leamington and I volunteer in both Warwick and Leamington as the Chair of Warwick Children Centre's Advisory Board and as a friend of the Leamington Pump Room Gardens. I believe this is true for most residents, that they would have activities in clubs and societies across the two towns.

The third point is that I feel Warwick, in particular, is badly served under the new boundaries. The new boundaries would not only split up our two towns but they would further divide our historic town of Warwick. A fifth of Warwick has been put in with Leamington, meaning that Warwick would be represented by two MPs and we are only a small town. That fifth also includes half of our grade 1 listed Warwick Castle Park, which the two MPs would then be required to defend and I think that could be actually be a problem.

Four-fifths of Warwick will be joined with Stratford into a much larger geographical constituency. We will, therefore, lose the benefit of having the familiarity of an MP serving a much more compact geographical constituency. That is also true for Leamington as well, but it is a specific point about Warwick.

Fourth - and this is my final point but also the main point I wish to make - our towns will lose a unified political voice. With residents living and working or being educated in two constituencies, if these changes came in, issues will inevitably arise whereby residents would have to be represented by two different MPs and I really think that would be to the detriment of residents.

For all these reasons, Warwick and Leamington as a community of common interest need to retain the single unified political voice in Parliament that we have had since 1885. That is my statement.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Can I just ask a point of clarification?

CLLR ST JOHN: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You mentioned the park there, was that St Nicholas Park?

CLLR ST JOHN: No, it is the Warwick Castle Park. It is not Warwick Castle. Warwick Castle Park is a very large area of Warwick. It is owned independently of Warwick Castle, but the boundary runs right through the Warwick Castle Park and it is a grade 1 listed park which we need to support. There is a Trust, actually, which looks after it. There is a concern about development that might happen within that park.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am looking at my map here, it is here, and what you are saying is that it goes across the border that is in these Initial Proposals?

CLLR ST JOHN: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, I can see, yes, so that would be an issue. I think that was very, very useful. A lot of what you said makes a lot of

common-sense and that is important. A lot of people would say to you: Well, people do cross parliamentary constituencies to go shopping and that that is a normal thing. So how important is that and what difference really would that make, the fact that there were two MPs instead of one?

CLLR ST JOHN: I think the main concern is that if we have got two MPs and we are living and working in different constituencies, if issues arise then we would need to actually be represented by two MPs. I think that would be very detrimental for residents. If there was an issue, for example, with a school that a child is going to be in one constituency but lived in another one, as I say, then that family would need to be represented by two MPs to try and resolve the problem.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any points of clarification needed from the floor? (No response). Really useful, and we love hearing from local residents and getting a real picture of how these proposals could affect you. It is important to us and can have influence, so thank you.

CLLR ST JOHN: Okay, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is Dave Sternberg, please. A reminder of your name and address, please.

MR STERNBERG: My name is David Sternberg. I live at 10 Woodcote Road, Warwick, which is right in the middle of Warwick really, just by the railway station. I am speaking in a totally personal capacity, though, not having heard what the councillor was going to say, I may repeat one or two of the points she made. They rang very true for me as a resident of Warwick. Forgive me if I slightly repeat, though I might say things in a slightly different way.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Repetition is not a problem.

MR STERNBERG: To me, Warwick and Leamington are twin towns. People really do not know when, on the borders, whether they are in one or the other. Often, when we have visitors they like to know when they are actually in Leamington and you have to tell them, "When you cross that little river that is when you are going into Leamington. When you come across that roundabout, you are back in Warwick."

We are served politically at the district level by a single council. It is called Warwick District Council, but it covers Warwick and Leamington. Of course, it is the county council which goes much wider, but for many of us on the political front lots of day-to-day life and decisions are made for Warwick and Leamington.

It seems right and proper that those matters that overlap with the responsibilities of a Member of Parliament, there really should be a fairly close compliance with the

boundaries because some things do escalate up and it is very useful. We have had Labour and Conservative MPs in the recent past and it seems to have been a very happy arrangement, whatever your political feelings are, to have an MP that can take the issues of the two towns together.

I wanted to say some things, besides the political, as a resident. Like the councillor, I too spend quite a bit of time in both towns doing things that are part of our sort of cultural and social life. One thing that I have been very involved with all my life is the so-called voluntary sector. That is organisations that are not direct run by the state, usually charities, not-for-profit, who serve our communities. They are invaluable. I think everyone recognises it.

The way we organise around here is very much across the two towns. Our voluntary services co-ordinating councillors across the two towns. Our CAB serves across the two towns. The advice networks, the money advice networks, work across the two towns. Lots of the support services to particular groups of our communities that may be disadvantaged in some way or have a special need, again, we just automatically think in terms of them being Warwick and Leamington.

It is also true culturally. This area is incredibly strong on music and the visual arts and, again, lots of it organised and managed by local not-for-profit organisations with almost no distinction between Warwick and Leamington. The venues, it could be a church in Warwick, it can be places like this and the Spa Centre and lots of smaller venues. Again, a very rich cultural life.

I do not want to say anything against Stratford, which is what Warwick would be in with in the proposals, but whilst Stratford also is a very rich cultural town I do not feel any particular historical or present affinity on that kind of level. Of course, many of us go to the theatre there, as people do from all over the country - just being in Warwick is very convenient - but it is not a sort of a living natural tie, I feel, certainly in the little world that I live in.

I would be very sorry to see these voluntary organisations, and especially the ones that help people who are disadvantaged, somehow losing some of their power and influence by being divided across constituencies where it is really valuable to have a local authority and a Member of Parliament all operating very much in the same area.

Just to go back to a bit of the political stuff. Some of the services we have come from the District Council, things like housing, some of the waste management, local traffic plans, and particularly the local plan which is quite contentious locally from all sides of the political spectrum about the big increases in housing that are needed in this area and where they are going to go. It is very much something that needs to be planned between Warwick and Leamington. It is something we do need to have a strong relationship together and with our local MP to make sure we get the best of what is

possible.

The councillor mentioned religious ties, her own religion and some of the others. I too am very much aware that Sikh friends in Warwick very much look towards the communities in Leamington as being a natural cultural and religious focus. Even where the big gurdwara is, it is sort of in a sort of land which some people would say was Warwick and some people would say was Leamington. I actually do not know exactly what political area it is in.

It is certainly true for the Jewish community, a small but significant Jewish community, probably stronger in Leamington, but a natural and a very long-term relationship across the two towns on religious stuff. Muslims too. Again, breaking that up I do not see the ties with Stratford for Warwick. Well, they just are not there as they are with between Warwick and Leamington.

Lastly, you asked a question about infrastructure and the councillor mentioned a bus that goes right from her house right through to Leamington, a fantastic bus that runs very regularly and is well-used. I am just a bit nearer into town. There is another bus route, the X17, again one of the most dependable bus routes in the area, regular.

The reason it is so significant a bus route is it is the bus from Leamington to the main hospital of the area. It goes past the railway station and comes through into Leamington, just across the way here and then on into Coventry. It is a great route. It is used a lot. Whilst there is a bus route to Stratford, it is nothing like the same thing. There is a huge gap between Warwick and Stratford on the roads. It is a nice journey, but it is a bit like the Coventry people were saying: It is the difference between sort of town and rural scenery.

I mentioned the hospital; that is something that we share in common. In these straitened times when the NHS seems to be under duress, if not stress or threat of cuts, the idea of us being able to support the hospital in Warwick and Leamington and knowing that our District Council and our local MP all join together for the concerns of us all as citizens is something that we should treasure and try and continue.

Again, as the councillor mentioned, for Warwick very much, in old parlance, the College of FE is Warwickshire College which has major components just across from us in Leamington and in the Trident Centre, which is again right on the borders of Warwick and Leamington if you start getting technical. You would not be able to see it just by walking down the street. It all looks like it is part of the same town.

These sorts of basic infrastructure things, the education of our children, the further education of our children, our transport link, our use of the Health Service, these are all really important things that tie very naturally together. I do not think it is any coincidence that we have gone - what is it - 120 or 130 years as one constituency. It is

such a natural, social, cultural and political match.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. One little question from me, if I can. Warwick in these Initial Proposals is no longer linked to Royal Leamington Spa but it is linked to Stratford-on-Avon. Very roughly, how long would it take to drive from, say, the centre of Warwick to the centre of Leamington compared to the centre of Warwick to the centre of Stratford?

MR STERNBERG: Well, from my house to the centre of Stratford, to the theatre, is about 25 minutes. I do not actually drive very often into Leamington. I use the fantastic bus service, and there is also a train line which is incredibly cheap and quick as well. I think on an open road it would take me about seven minutes to get from my house, say, to here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any other points of clarification from the floor? (No response). In which case, thank you very much for your time, thank you. Could we have Richard Hobbs, please?

CLLR HOBBS (Stratford-on-Avon): Good afternoon. My name is Richard Hobbs and I have lived in the village of Bearley since 1956. I attended Stratford Grammar School from 1956 to 1963. I am a member of the Old Edwardians. We used to be "Old Boys", but now we have got girls as well.

I frequently do voluntary work at the Grammar School. I have spoken to the Headmaster, Ben Carr, and to members of the school governors and told them that I am putting a representation here and they agree with the points I am about to make. At the moment, a large proportion of the students live in the Stratford-upon-Avon constituency - not all of them, but most of them.

Under the new proposals, all the students living south of Stratford-upon-Avon will be pushed into the Warwickshire and Evesham constituency. The Stratford MP, Nadhim Zahawi, is a great promoter of Shakespeare, who, incidentally, is an old boy of the school and of Stratford-upon-Avon, which is the centre of his constituency.

This is excellent for tourism. You read in the Stratford Herald quite often that they have a tourism strategy and Stratford is one of the top four places in the country for tourism, so tourism is very important. By splitting up the Stratford constituency, the school will have difficulty to identify themselves with one single MP. Who will they invite to speak to students interested in political awareness?

I am often aware that students are asked who their MP is when going for an interview at university to judge their knowledge of local issues. I am aware of this because I regularly do mock interviews for sixth form students to prepare them for interviews at their chosen universities. In fact, I should be doing it today but I have got somebody to

sub for me so I could come here.

I am fully aware that you will be unable to keep the catchment area of the Grammar School and District Council boundary all in one constituency because it is too large and the numbers will not fit, but I think if you can reduce it and make the whole as much as you can I think it fits in much better with Stratford from the school's point of view and from the tourism point of view.

I also, as an aside, notice - and it has been said already, which is unfortunate but it is bound to be said - that you propose to split Warwick and Leamington and join Stratford and Warwick. Stratford and Warwick are separated by seven miles of open countryside and Warwick and Leamington are really joined at the hip. Most residents in the Warwick and Leamington area would not know where the boundary between the two towns are.

Even in your proposals, I notice, you do not follow the boundary to its true extent of Warwick and Leamington. Warwick Boys' School is proposed to be in the Kenilworth and Leamington School. They call themselves Warwick Boys' School in Leamington constituency; whereas its sister school, Kings High School for Girls, or Warwick Girls School, is proposed to be in the Kenilworth and Leamington --- sorry, Warwick Boys in the Leamington constituency, whereas Kings High School for Girls, which shares facilities with the Boys' School, is proposed to be in the Warwick and Stratford constituency.

You have even got two schools which work together in two different constituencies, and I think they find that more difficult. We do have sort of a merging of the two grammar schools in Stratford because they want boys and girls to mix more. I think the same thing is happening with the two Warwick schools. Do bear in mind I am not speaking on behalf of their schools.

To keep within the numbers it is proposed to cross county boundaries. I understand that this has to be done, but you want to go to the west. I think it makes more sense to cross the county boundary to the north-east where the county boundary is probably more blurred. Coventry Airport, actually, is in Warwickshire. Warwick University is actually split between the Warwick District area and the West Midlands. Therefore, there is a blur between the two areas.

I am aware of the complexity and the repercussions of altering one constituency to another as it has a knock-on effect on the whole region and I realise that you are only looking at regional boundaries that you will not cross. I do not have the capacity to submit a counter-proposal, which is quite obvious, but I am aware that there is a counter-proposal being put to you at some time or other and I do not know whether you have seen it yet.

This actually takes in some of the points that I have said or probably most of the points that I have made. It keeps Stratford-upon-Avon with Wellesbourne and Kineton, which is also considered part of the Stratford community, and meets the requirements of the numbers that you are tied to and I think it meets various other requirements that you have got. I would like to thank you very much indeed for the opportunity to speak to you and I can give you a written copy of my submission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That would be very useful, thank you very much. We actually have a number of counter-proposals which complicates things further for us. Thank you for the tip off about universities. My son is in the process of applying and so I will pass that on to him! Do we have any questions or comments from the floor? (No response). Thank you very much. Very useful information, as ever, and we are really grateful for your time. Thank you.

CLLR HOBBS: Shall I leave that there?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, please, definitely.

CLLR HOBBS: I have got it electronically if you want it as well.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I would like that even better. If maybe we could discuss that afterwards and I will give you an email. Our next speaker is Jim O'Boyle, please. Quick reminder, we need your name and address, please.

CLLR O'BOYLE (Coventry): Hello, good afternoon. I am Cllr Jim O'Boyle. I represent a ward in the middle of Coventry in Coventry South constituency and also live within Coventry South constituency in Westwood ward.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And your address?

CLLR O'BOYLE: 39 Fir Tree Avenue. Thank you. I am here to speak in favour of Jim Cunningham and Geoffrey Robinson's proposals that were presented to you earlier today; recognising as well, of course, that I do not envy the task that you have got either today or trying to get these proposals through because, no matter what you do, you rob Peter to pay Paul, whichever way you do it.

What Geoffrey and Jim have tried to do is recognise boundaries, try and recognise characteristics, trying to recognise all of the complementary issues that come up in all the different types of proposals you have to consider. We believe that these are very complementary to a number of the proposals that you have seen, not least of all the Labour Party's proposals regionally.

The logic to Geoffrey and Jim's proposals are very straightforward, in that Coventry is very much a built-up conurbation. It has higher than regional and national

unemployment averages, and I will come back to that in a minute as to why it is important. It has a distinct identity which is clearly industrial in its characteristic. Crucially, it is very, very different from areas surrounding Coventry, specifically and particularly to the south and west of Coventry's current boundaries.

The thought process on Geoffrey and Jim's proposal was that we all recognise that this is a numbers game here. As I said, no matter what you do, you end up having to juggle different parts of constituencies and ward boundaries around, and under no circumstances did any of us want to lose any of Coventry from outside of the boundaries.

When looking at the characteristics, it seemed to us that, whilst we do not want to lose Wainbody, its characteristic is far closer to other parts south of the city in Kenilworth etc. than it is to the industrial make-up of Coventry. It is far more rural than the vast majority of Coventry.

Just to make the point as well because you were talking about universities, of course, Wainbody also has Warwick University within its boundaries. I think the clue is often in its name. We often hear about parents of students looking to send their children to Warwick University busily scurrying around Warwick Town trying find where the university is. Little do they know, it is just on the outskirts of Coventry.

As Warwick University expands, it is expanding more and more into actually Warwickshire as opposed to Coventry, just because of the build-up of space that is not available. Some of Wainbody ward was actually in old Warwick District a number of years ago, right up until the 1970s.

I understand that the library that currently sits within the Finham area of Wainbody ward was actually built in the old days before it came into the Coventry conurbation, so it was built by an old council not by Coventry City Council. I know that is an issue because that has come up when libraries have been consulted recently with regard to the service within Coventry area.

It is worth saying as well that a number of families often move to areas of Finham and Stivichall in order to get their children into one of the better schools in the city, but because it is oversubscribed you often find that children end up going to schools outside of Coventry and often into Kenilworth School and places like that.

That is quite an important point. It is only down the road. It is very very close. Westwood ward is very different in its make-up. It is built up. It has industrial estates on Torrington Avenue and also Charter Industrial Estate as well. The housing there is of a similar stock to the rest of Coventry in the north of Coventry, unlike Finham and Charter, Finham and Stivichall.

Compare that to Wainbody, it does not have any real what you would recognise as industrial areas as such. That is the logic as to why, when they have come up with the idea of the proposals that they have, that linking Bedworth, which is north of Coventry or as some people would actually call it North Coventry, some of the wards they propose are much closer in characteristic to the north of Coventry than Coventry as a whole as I have described. It is very built up. It is very industrial in its nature.

It is worth saying as well, and this is why I mentioned unemployment earlier, it has higher unemployment than the rest of the North Warwickshire constituency as it stands today. You can see the close connection there. It is very much a travel-to-work area in Bedworth from Coventry and from Coventry to Bedworth as well, because often there is no real distinction between the two and I understand that people recognise that.

It also has the famous Ricoh Arena on its doorstep, with lots of Coventry City fans I am sure in Bedworth looking to appreciate the great sporting success that is Coventry City and also Wasps who, of course, play there as well. They are my main point points I wanted to get over today in support of Geoffrey Robinson and Jim Cunningham's proposals, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That is very useful to follow what you are saying about specific wards there and to see what our plans are, or the initial plans, and just to say we are open minded on all these things. Any clarification? Again, we just need your name first, please.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Yes, my name is John Blundell. As I said, I am the leader of the Conservative Group in Coventry. I represent and am a resident actually in Wainbody ward as Cllr O'Boyle knows. My understanding then is, under the proposals that you are proposing, Wainbody would become an orphan ward which would be joined to Kenilworth and Meriden and in order to maintain the numbers you would have to take in some of the wards in North Warwickshire? So Coventry, at that point, would not only extend into the boundary of Meriden in the West Midlands but would also extend north into Warwickshire, is that my understanding of your proposals?

CLLR O'BOYLE: No, it would not extend into Meriden. You are quite right about the Kenilworth ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think that is what the Initial Proposals on the ground at the moment suggest.

CLLR O'BOYLE: That is what the Initial Proposals from the Boundary Commission propose, that Coventry extend into Meriden into Knowle, but the proposals that have been put forward today do not do that.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Well, where would Wainbody ward go then, because that is actually

in the City of Coventry because I am a Coventry City councillor?

CLLR O'BOYLE: I understand that and it goes into what would be called, I think it is the Kenilworth constituency.

CLLR BLUNDELL: So, sorry, Kenilworth then would not be linked with Meriden under your proposals?

CLLR O'BOYLE: Yes.

CLLR BLUNDELL: It would or it would not, sorry?

CLLR O'BOYLE: Yes.

CLLR BLUNDELL: It would not?

CLLR O'BOYLE: That is right, yes, it would be within Kenilworth.

CLLR BLUNDELL: So Wainbody ward would move into Kenilworth, but Kenilworth would have to have another ---

CLLR O'BOYLE: Well, Kenilworth moves into Wainbody ward, whichever way you look at it. The problem is with all of this, no matter whichever way you do it, the problem was getting the numbers together and it fits with all of the numbers and it is correct in terms of the numbers. The proposals that have been put forward, I am not completely au fait with every single boundary within it, but what I do know is that if we had to lose one because of the characteristics, now that I have tried to explain, it far suits that area of Warwickshire than another area, hence why those proposals.

CLLR BLUNDELL: Well, being a proud Coventrian, I would hate to feel that I was going to be moved into another part of the county.

CLLR O'BOYLE: Well, being a proud Coventrian, you will know that you will not be because this is about parliamentary constituencies. They are not moving boundaries around local authority area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. There was one other question.

LORD HAYWARD: Lord Hayward, and actually it is a question more for you, Ms Gilmore. That is, I asked the question just now about having copies of the proposals and we were told that we would get them. I have asked for clarification and I am told that you have been handed them. Would it be possible for us to have a quick glance at them at this point, because we are getting confused because we do not know which wards are being proposed to go with which areas?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right. I do not even have them on my table at the moment, so we can have a ---

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (inaudible).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry, are there any questions for clarification?

CLLR BLUNDELL: No, that was why it was for clarification.

CLLR O'BOYLE: Just reading this, just for clarification, Abbey, Park Hill, St John's, Arden, Wainbody, Meriden, Bickenhill, Silhill, Elmdon, Knowle. That is what is in the proposal.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think it is quite useful for them to have it because if, locally, before we get the next set of submissions, there is more consensus, our job becomes easier as long as it is a reflection of what people want, so I am happy for that to happen. Are there any further questions? (No response). Thank you very much indeed. Right, could I have Adam Farrell, please? Adam, just a reminder, we need your name and your address. Just before you start, gentlemen, in the front on the left there, we need a little bit of quiet and so if you are having a look at that it would be useful, Thank you.

CLLR FARRELL (Coleshill): Thank you. My name is Adam Farrell. I live at 26 Park Court, Coleshill, B46 1AS. I am speaking today as a district councillor in North Warwickshire, representing Coleshill North and also as leader of North Warwickshire Borough Labour Group and as a constituency officer at North Warwickshire and Bedworth Constituency Labour Party.

The key issue for our constituency is that in any proposal Bedworth remains united. It is a town with a proud history and really close community links. Prior to 1974 it had its own district council and residents are still very upset that the recognition Bedworth got through that no longer exists. Bedworth remaining united is a key priority for our constituency, because to split Bedworth into different constituencies would be hugely detrimental.

Many of the Bedworth wards run right into the centre of Bedworth and to take one part of Bedworth and put it into a different constituency would mean taking part of the centre of Bedworth and putting that into a different constituency. I am open to various different proposals for North Warwickshire, as long as Bedworth remains a complete town.

The reason to being open to such ideas is that North Warwickshire constituency at the moment is effectively two communities: The town of Bedworth which is a built-up

conurbation, and the rural borough of North Warwickshire, which is made up of over 30 different parishes represented by 30 different parish councils.

In North Warwickshire, the key component to what I think will be a cohesive constituency with strong community links is one that maintains the market towns, the only three market towns we have in North Warwickshire, of Coleshill, Polesworth and Atherstone in one constituency.

Now I said earlier that I represent the Borough Council ward of Coleshill North, and I think it is important to highlight why I am today supporting the proposals from Jim Cunningham MP and Geoffrey Robinson MP. Coleshill North is on the boundary of North Warwickshire and shares its borders with Solihull District wards.

I think it is important to highlight the extensive geographical and community links that the south of North Warwickshire shares with the north of Solihull. The current boundary splits wards like Coleshill North, Coleshill South and Water Orton from the North Solihull wards of Castle Bromwich, Kingshurst, Smith's Wood and Chelmsey Wood, but that does not necessarily reflect the strong local ties that exist on the ground, including the patterns of inward and outward travel to work and for recreation.

In fact, at one point the wards of North Warwickshire and the wards of North Solihull were part of one district council, named Meriden Rural District Council. I think it is important to note that the local secondary school in Coleshill only exists in its current form and is only sustainable because of the hundreds of pupils we take from North Solihull. Without the students from North Solihull traveling across what is currently a constituency boundary, Coleshill School would not have enough students to be economically viable.

It is also important to note that the bus services we have in the south of North Warwickshire and a large part of North Warwickshire are paid for actually by the West Midlands and are all linking to Solihull. We have the number 70, which is a West Midlands bus service. It is the only regular bus service that serves a large part of North Warwickshire and goes to Solihull. In fact, it was recently improved and, instead of only going to Birmingham, it now also goes to Solihull because the transport authority recognised that there was close links between North Warwickshire and the north of Solihull.

There was a question earlier I think around the roads that link North Warwickshire wards and the wards of Solihull. Coleshill Heath Road, it is Coleshill but it is part of the Solihull borough and is one of the link roads from North Warwickshire into Solihull. Packington Lane is another one that links North Warwickshire to the borough of Solihull; as does Birmingham Road which, as I have mentioned earlier, actually live on, links North Warwickshire to North Solihull.

A couple of other points: Chelmsey Wood Cemetery, owned and operated by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, is in the parish of Coleshill. It is in North Warwickshire, a cemetery owned and operated by Solihull that is in North Warwickshire. Water Orton ward has the Water Orton Road that goes between Water Orton and Castle Bromwich, a North Warwickshire ward and a North Solihull ward. In fact, Castle Bromwich's secondary school is located on Water Orton Road, and I hope that shows there are some already close links between North Solihull and North Warwickshire.

Water Orton does not have a secondary school. It is a large village of around 1,600 houses. It does not have a secondary school. Its pupils go to Park Hall School on Water Orton Road in the North Solihull ward of Castle Bromwich. Further education provision for students in North Warwickshire is mainly provided by North Solihull and Birmingham.

In the villages of Coleshill, Water Orton, Shustoke, Maxstoke, Packington, Nether Whitacre, Over Whitacre, Whitacre Heath, Furnace End, all their students will go to further education colleges in North Solihull, because in North Warwickshire we do not have a further education college.

I am supportive of any proposals that remove Bedworth as a whole from North Warwickshire, but for me the logical swap of electors into the North Warwickshire constituency would be from North Solihull because of the close geographical links that we have.

I do regret that the strict electoral quota limits make it a necessity for North Warwickshire as a whole not to be joined with the four wards from North Solihull. It does mean that the wards of Newtown Regis would have to move to Tamworth and the ward of Curdworth would have to move to Sutton Coldfield, but I do feel again that there are links with Newtown Regis in terms of geography and demographics. It is a rural ward of North Warwickshire and links well to the rural wards on the outskirts of Tamworth. Many years ago, it was actually part of the Tamworth Council area.

Curdworth runs seamlessly into Sutton Coldfield. It shares very similar demographics with the wards within Sutton Coldfield and strong demographic links to the residents of that town. On balance, given that Coventry cannot sustain three MPs, and I believe that the closest links to Coventry are with Bedworth, I feel that North Solihull would be the closest link to North Warwickshire for us to make up the electoral numbers and I support the proposal from Jim Cunningham and Geoffrey Robinson. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any points of clarification on that particular area of those plans? (No response). I was following that very carefully because, obviously, it is quite complicated and we have got the wards on the map in front of me directly here. Thank you very much indeed. We really appreciate your time on that and we will take it into consideration. Can we have

Cllr Sleigh, please?

CLLR SLEIGH (Solihull): Thank you. I am Cllr Bob Sleigh, leader of Solihull Council. Before I open, can I make you aware of the resolution that was passed by Council recently on 5 October with regard to these particular matters? The motion reads:

"This Council opposes the initial parliamentary constituency review proposals published by the Boundary Commission so far as they apply to Solihull Metropolitan Borough. It notes the Commission has acknowledged that, numerically, the review could retain two constituencies within the borough and calls on the Boundary Commission to amend its proposal to respect the integrity of Solihull as a distinct community."

In essence, I am here to speak in support of that motion that was passed by the Council. Can I, first of all, thank you for giving me the time to put the case on behalf of Solihull in its response to the Boundary Commission for England's Review of Parliamentary Constituencies.

The Initial Proposals of the Boundary Commission for England Review presents a significant change to the parliamentary constituencies for the borough of Solihull with a move from currently having two constituencies wholly contained within the borough to, in future, having part of three constituencies crossing five local authority boundaries. Actually, there is a sub-division with Warwickshire and Stratford-upon-Avon.

As leader of Solihull Metropolitan Council, I believe that these proposals will undermine the sense of community and belonging that the existing position of two constituencies, wholly contained within the borough, sustains, and lead to less effective representation for the people of Solihull.

Having three cross-boundary constituencies would have the adverse consequence of the loss of the close working relationships of Solihull councillors and Members of Parliament who tend to work together on issues within the geographical confines of the borough. The public will be less well-served from the severing of these working relationships.

Further, a Solihull Borough electorate would be served by three MPs rather than the current two. Whether or not they are from the same political party, there is likely to be a less coherent voice in Parliament representing the interests of the borough. The Boundary Commission for England 2018 Review is required to take certain factors into consideration in its decision-making such as:

"Special geographical considerations, including in particular the size; shape and accessibility of the constituency; local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015; boundaries of existing constituencies, and any local ties that would

be broken by changes in the constituencies."

The proposals affecting Solihull Borough demonstrate that these guide points appear to have been largely secondary and that the number of electors has been the overriding conversation. This appears to be at the expense of any close alignment between parliamentary and local boundaries and to the detriment of any sense of community.

In general terms, the proposals are detrimental to the Solihull community, and the fragmentation between three constituencies can be seen as a threat to the future sustainability of the borough in the event of future local government boundary reviews.

As leader of Solihull Council, I am strongly of the view that Members of Parliament and the boundaries of their constituencies play a part in shaping the place in which we live and that they help communities develop a sense of place that is of great benefit to a local area and its residents. These newly proposed constituencies are of a size and shape that undermine such a sense of place. I note in paragraph 47 of the Initial Proposals that the Boundary Commission states:

"It should be possible to create the required number of constituencies for the West Midlands without creating any cross-boundary constituencies."

Further, in paragraph 49, the Commission acknowledges that it is possible to create two constituencies wholly within the borough of Solihull, which we think is a fundamental point. I, and I believe Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, therefore, object to the proposals for the West Midlands region in so far as they relate to the borough of Solihull.

On some of the detailed proposals, I strongly oppose the inclusion of the Knowle and Meriden wards in the proposed Coventry West and Meriden constituency because the proposed change would break historic ties. I believe that it makes no sense to take two wards out of this part of the borough of Solihull, particularly as a consequence of doing so would place the Knowle and Meriden wards into a constituency where there is no community of interest and no common infrastructure. This may also impact negatively on voter turnout if the electorate in Knowle and Meriden feel that an MP representing only two wards of the Solihull Borough would have less affinity with them.

I strongly object to the proposal to place the Olton ward in the proposed Shirley and Solihull South constituency and the Elmdon and Lyndon wards in a Chelmsley Wood and North Solihull constituency, as there are strong historic community ties between these three wards. The Elmdon and Lyndon wards would be placed in a new constituency where they have no natural affinity.

In the context of the administration of elections, there are a number of concerns about the new proposals. Currently, having two constituencies which are contained within the

borough boundary means that even when there are combined local and parliamentary elections, they are relatively straightforward to operate.

If there are different boundaries for local and parliamentary elections, not only does it have the potential to cause confusion to the electorate, it would require strong project management and close working and co-operation with adjoining boroughs, whoever is designated as the returning officer. Whilst these issues can be managed, it would make the conduct of elections much more complex with increased risk and associated costs. I believe this added complexity is unnecessary given the Boundary Commission's statements in paragraphs 47 and 49 of the proposals document. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Are there any points of clarification needed on that? (No response). As you pointed out, numbers are going to be very difficult in this area.

CLLR SLEIGH: Well, in Solihull there is no difficulty. I think we are aware of that. In fact, if you look at the proposals, in essence, we can move two wards and the numbers stack.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

CLLR SLEIGH: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is Adrian Bailey in the room? No. Is there anybody else within the room who would like to speak? (No response). In that case, given that Mr Bailey has not come, we will adjourn for ten minutes to give him a chance to be here and then, if he does not show within ten minutes because his slot is not for another seven minutes, we will adjourn for lunch.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to formally adjourn this session now until 2.30. Thank you.

After the luncheon adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back. Our first speaker has not turned up. I know there is a Mr Ian Henderson here who said that he would be very happy to speak earlier, are you happy to speak now, Mr Henderson?

DR HENDERSON: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will need your name and your address.

If you could speak as closely as you can into the microphone there. It is a little bit mobile so you can move it.

DR HENDERSON (Labour Party): Thank you. My name is Ian Henderson and I am here to represent the views of Kenilworth and Southam Labour Party. A word on Kenilworth and Leamington, it was a constituency which was created about ten years ago in the revision of the Boundary Commission's setting out. The constituency was created in 2008.

The Boundary Commission now propose, of course, to abolish it and to distribute our constituent parts to a new Kenilworth and Southam, a new Rugby and Southam and a new Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon. We accept that there will have to be widespread changes arising from the Commission's task to reduce the number of parliamentary seats by 10 per cent and that Coventry and Warwickshire presents a challenge if the Commission is to have regard to all the factors published in the Guide.

We, nevertheless, present to you two counter-proposals which meet the Commission's criteria and which merit the Commission's attention. I will go to counter-proposal number 1 that is to restore Warwick and Leamington with additional wards to make up the quota and to restore Kenilworth and Southam with additional wards, Wainbody and Westwood ward in Coventry.

This is, in fact, the counter-proposal of the NEC of the Labour Party, which no doubt you have in front of you and which will appear online eventually. We in Kenilworth and Southam agree with this counter-proposal. It would have the benefit of making minimum change to the existing Warwick and Leamington and Kenilworth and Southam constituencies, thus meeting the Commission's criteria of minimum change.

It would also improve local ties in the revised Kenilworth and Southam, since the addition of Wainbody and Westwood wards currently in Coventry South constituency would bring the whole of Warwick University campus into one Parliamentary constituency. Currently, the campus is divided into two constituencies by Gibbet Hill Road.

The university is in the Russell Group of research oriented universities - I need hardly remind you - and is a major regional employer. Its research funding and its recruitment of international students benefits the local, regional and national economy and we think it would be sensible if it were to be served by one Member of Parliament. That is counter-proposal number 1, which is in line with what the official Labour NEC has proposed.

Counter-proposal 2 is to restore Warwick and Leamington with the addition of Stoneleigh and Cubbington ward; to accept the Commission's Initial Proposals for Rugby and Southam with the addition of one ward, Radford Semele; to create a new

constituency of Kenilworth and Meriden; and to create a new constituency of Coventry West and Bedworth.

You may recognise this counter-proposal as being identical with the counter-proposal of Jim Cunningham MP and Geoffrey Robinson MP, who no doubt have submitted their proposals to you. We commend this as a scheme which accepts some of the Commission's proposals for Rugby and Southam, reflects local ties, Coventry West and Bedworth, and respects existing boundaries, Warwick and Leamington.

A new Meriden and Kenilworth constituency would include Wainbody from Coventry and five Solihull wards. Meriden and Kenilworth as a constituency would consist of towns in the green belt to the south of the West Midlands conurbation, united, if you like, by the HS2 high speed rail link which is planned to run through this area and which will no doubt produce constituency work aplenty for the elected MP.

A further feature is the incorporation of Warwick University campus within one constituency, a point I have made before, making one MP responsible for this important regional employer. Although some of these proposals cross local authority boundaries, we think it is acceptable considering the need for larger constituencies.

In summary, we think that this counter-proposal number 2 does justice to local ties in Coventry, respects existing boundaries as far as possible, while accepting many of the Commission's proposals for Coventry and Warwickshire and it deserves your serious consideration.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You have put the two before us, but are you saying that you clearly favour the second counter-proposal?

DR HENDERSON: Well, we think that both proposals are worthy of your consideration but, on balance, I would go for the second one.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any questions from the floor on that? We will take this one question if you could.

MR MACKAY: My name is James Mackay. You spoke of the HS2 railway line. For clarification, it would, in fact, pass through three of the constituencies that you have proposed in that second proposal, would it not?

DR HENDERSON: Yes, indeed it would.

MR MACKAY: So three MPs would be sharing that work?

DR HENDERSON: Yes, that is true, just that the proposed new one would have the HS2 line, as it were, uniting it and providing plenty of constituency work for the MP

because in the next few years there will be lots of claims being made and objections being made to the work of the HS2 line.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further points of clarification? (No response). Thank you very much, Dr Henderson. That was very useful and very clear.

DR HENDERSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very useful. Our next listed speaker is Mr Shalbinder Malle from Leamington Spa. Just a reminder, Mr Malle, as you go up there, that we need your name and your address.

MR MALLE: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Shalbinder Singh Malle and my address is Malle Manor, Sandy Lane, Blackdown, Leamington Spa, CV32 6QS. I am representing the Leamington Sikh Gurdwara and the community centre.

As far as it is concerned, we started the temple back in 1964 and slowly over the years made progress. Now it is a beautiful temple that has been built up. We have spent £11 million on it. Also, we are in the progress to develop the community centre next to it. Its total size is three and a half acres.

Surprisingly, the gurdwara, or the Sikh temple, comes in under Warwick and the community centre comes in Leamington Spa. We do not want to see two MPs we have to deal with there. We would like to see it kept as Warwick and Leamington together. That is all my concern is. We did consult our congregation and the community and the majority of the voice is to keep it that way. Okay, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We have had a couple of people mentioning importance to the Sikh community of keeping them together. Having a different MP would there be times when that would affect you? For example, can you think of things where you would need an MP to intervene in a matter, a planning matter or something, I do not know, which would involve both sides of that border, both buildings?

MR MALLE: Well, I think you deal from time to time with different issues with the MPs, but it would be better dealing with one person rather than two people.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: One further question, which is can you just give us an idea of the type of events which would involve using both the Sikh temple and the community centre?

MR MALLE: Sorry, say that again?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you give an example of the type of

events which would involve using both the Sikh temple and the community centre?

MR MALLE: It is right next to each other and it is on the same site. Like I said, it is a three-and-a-half-acre total site. One end of the road is a community centre and the other end is the temple and between the boundary line is Leamington and Warwick.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And people using it would be using the temple and the community centre sometimes at the same time?

MR MALLE: Yes, they do.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: For example, for what, for a wedding or for classes or?

MR MALLE: Well, what we try to do here is the temple is the religious side and all the other community things are happening in the community centre.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I understand, thank you very much. Are there any questions that anyone wants to raise? Yes, we have one. If you can ask it over here.

MR MACKAY: It is a point of clarification.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is a point of clarification. That is great. We will just get the mic to you and we need your name again each time.

MR MACKAY: My name is still Mackay. I hope it helps both you and the representation of Shalbinder Malle, the community centre and the gurdwara are, indeed, on opposite sides of the existing boundary between a Warwick ward and a Leamington ward, an ancient boundary between Warwick and Leamington. The proposal, as it now stands, would remove that boundary altogether and both of the buildings to which reference has been made would be within the same constituency. I thought it was helpful to say that, perhaps to reassure those making this representation but also so as not to give any confusion for yourselves, Madam.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is very useful. So both buildings will be in the same constituency if we did this. The question then is, were Leamington and Warwick to be split as per these proposals, would that have an effect on the Sikh community? In other words, do you have people from the community on both sides, living in Leamington, living in Warwick, doing things together?

MR MALLE: As long as Leamington and Warwick's boundary, as long as it stays together that is fine but if it is split into two it does make a difference.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It would make it more difficult. Thank you very much. Further questions, no clarification? (No response). Thank you very much indeed.

MR MALLE: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. Thank you for coming in. It is important we hear from you. Could I now call Mr David Brittin, please? Just a reminder, we need your name and address please, Mr Brittin.

MR BRITTIN: Yes, my name is David Brittin and I live at 27 Hansell Drive, Dorridge B93 8RQ. I am wanting to speak in favour of the submission which has already been made by the Labour Party and particularly with regard to the Solihull area. I have lived in Solihull for 35 years and have lived in Dorridge for 14 years.

The proposals from the Commission, the Initial Proposals, split Dorridge from Knowle and this I think is a matter of great local concern because Knowle and Dorridge are what I would call a salt and pepper combination. The two things basically go together: Fish and chips, salt and pepper, Knowle and Dorridge.

If one were to travel from Knowle to Dorridge, not knowing the area, it would probably be impossible to tell where one ended and one began. The two communities. Knowle is a very old established community, Dorridge much more sort of from the Victorian era. The two have grown.

Today, they actually sort of physically merge and many organisations actually cover both communities regarding it as one. I think people locally, although there is probably some degree of local feeling whether you live in Knowle or whether you live in Dorridge, do feel that it is just one place. It is actually separated from Solihull, with which it has close links, by a small strip of green belt through which the M42 runs.

The proposal that Knowle should be linked with areas to the east, particularly sort of Coventry, does not really have much local favour. There are few sort of links or ties with Coventry. The link is really with Solihull. We do appreciate I think that the Commission cannot look at the borough of Solihull in isolation and has got to, obviously, look at the wider picture, and I am sure it is a desperately difficult job to come up with a fair sort of solution.

The proposal by the Labour Party that these wards would together with the ward of Blythe which is more suburban and slightly north to the Knowle of Dorridge with Stratford I would say make the best of a very sort of difficult job.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can I interrupt you there, very rudely? Would it be possible there is a marker in front of you and if you press the top the round

button, you will be able to point these out to us and we might even zoom in and put downward names.

MR BRITTIN: Sure. That is Knowle ward there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right.

MR BRITTIN: That is Dorridge and Hockley Heath ward, which extends slightly ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry, which one is Knowle ward?

MR BRITTIN: Knowle is there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh, yes, I can see, yes. Yes, I see very clearly.

MR BRITTIN: And there is Dorridge and Hockley Heath.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR BRITTIN: Blythe is here, the other side of the M42 motorway. As for the sort of the rest of Solihull, the Labour Party's proposals do keep a Solihull constituency, albeit with the addition of one part of Birmingham and a Meriden constituency which does cross local authority boundaries, but the areas with which it wishes to incorporate, the Solihull base of the proposed Meriden constituency under the sort of Labour submission would include parts of Birmingham or which have a sort of physical link and parts of North Warwickshire, notably Water Orton and Coleshill, which are fairly close to northern Solihull. Well, there is no ideal solution but it is probably as near as we can get to one and, without repeating myself, I think that probably sort of concludes my submission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No that is very, very clear, thank you very much indeed. Do we have any questions or points of clarification on that? (No response). Really useful, thank you very much and thank you for taking us through it on there.

MR BRITTIN: Thanks.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker then is Sharon Stirling. Ms Stirling, Could you make sure you give us your name, your address and speak into the microphone as much as you can?

MRS STIRLING (Conservative Party): Well, my name is Sharon Stirling and I am here representing Mid Worcestershire Conservative Association. I am the Chair. The address is Severn House, Prescott Drive, Warndon Business Park, Worcester, WR4

9NE.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MRS STIRLING: Thank you. You will have to forgive me, this is my first time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You are fine, take your time.

MRS STIRLING: Today, I am addressing you as Chair of Mid Worcestershire Conservative Association and as a resident of the current Mid Worcestershire constituency. Rural Central and South Worcestershire to the east of the River Severn is a natural geographical area, but is also a demographic and employment area as well.

The area focuses on the two market towns, Pershore and Evesham and the more suburban centre of Droitwich for shopping, education and employment. People work in these three towns but with considerable two-way commuting into the county town of Worcester and one-way commuting into Birmingham.

In 1974 the new area of Wychavon Council was formed from amalgamating three proud local municipal areas. Unlike in so many areas, this artificial creation has succeeded and is recognised as a successful shire district. This is undoubtedly a reflection on the social, economic and geographical cohesion of the boundaries of Wychavon.

Turning now to the current proposals for the Evesham South Warwickshire County constituency, my comments will refer to variations from the current boundaries of Mid Worcestershire constituency.

Number one. The proposal shows an additional 18,700 electors from seven wards in Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire. This, I find, unacceptable as it breaches the Worcestershire/Warwickshire county boundary. This boundary was last reviewed by the Provisional Order Confirmation Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire Act 1931, when enclaves of Worcestershire in South Warwickshire, together with Shipston, were absorbed into Warwickshire.

There is no connection geographically and little socially between the wards in Warwickshire and the rest of the proposed constituency in Worcestershire. The lack of any relationship becomes clear as you cross the River Avon, then further on the River Stour, followed by the Fosse Way, the A429 and, finally, the M40 motorway.

Number two. The proposal to take in 14,068 electors from five wards in Malvern and Ledbury County constituency is welcomed. All five are part of Wychavon and, indeed, Wychavon has its headquarters in Pershore. The parliamentary counts for Mid Worcestershire have always taken place in Pershore, although it has been located up to now in West Worcestershire.

Proposal number three. The proposal to transfer 4,290 electors from Norton and Whittington, together with Drakes Broughton, to the Worcester borough constituency is strongly opposed. These two wards are part of rural Worcestershire.

The historic village of Drakes Broughton, two miles from Pershore, expanded in the 1960s to 1980s as a Pershore overflow suburb. The residents of Norton and Drakes Broughton's children attend schools in the first, middle and upper school pyramid based around Pershore. While some electors live close to the Worcester boundary, over 60 per cent live to the east of the M5 motorway.

On a personal note, I live in that part of the constituency and I would consider where I live to be a rural location not aligned to Worcester, but more aligned to Pershore where I would shop locally and where I use the facilities there. As an alternative for the Worcester City constituency, I would propose that the two Malvern Hills wards in the new Malvern and Ledbury County constituency, Kempsey and Ripple, containing 4,487 electors, are transferred into Worcester Borough constituency. They are connected to the city by the north-south A38 and are bounded to the west by the River Severn.

Number four. The proposal to include all the 20,110 electors in the five Droitwich wards plus Dodderhill ward into Bromsgrove is acceptable.

Number five. The proposal to transfer 2,152 electors from Hartlebury to the Wyre Forest County constituency is strongly opposed. This area, although close to Kidderminster, is an integral part of rural Worcestershire rather than the Wyre Forest.

Number six. The proposal to transfer 1,946 electors from Ombersley to the Malvern and Ledbury County constituency is strongly opposed. This area is a rural part of central Worcestershire to the east of the River Severn.

Number seven. The proposal to transfer 4,230 electors from Lovett and North Claines to the Bromsgrove and Droitwich County constituency is strongly opposed. This area is a rural part of Central Worcestershire and, without its inclusion, a revised Mid Worcestershire County constituency would not be possible as Ombersley and Hartlebury would be detached.

These are my specific comments on the proposals which I have tabulated. They would result in a revised Mid Worcestershire constituency of 71,954 electors. I will conclude with several practical comments on the size of the Evesham County constituency.

On the AA Route Finder, from Strensham in the west to Farnborough in the east, not quite on the edge of the quickest time to drive, is one hour and 20 minutes. From Farnborough to Evesham is 50 minutes. There are no east-west trunk roads and no rail connections with travelling to Birmingham, and east-west buses are poor. It takes one

hour and 30 minutes to travel from Shipston-on-Stour by bus.

This is not practical for organising grass-root political events. The Member of Parliament would have to deal with two county councils, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, two district councils Stratford-on-Avon and Wychavon, together with several town councils, including Evesham, Pershore and Shipston-on-Stour. The proposed constituency boundaries include Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, so this will increase the workload of the MP, detracting from the existing focus the MP has on Wychavon. That is the end, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. There was a lot in there.

MRS STIRLING: Yes, sorry.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I do not know if there is any way of getting hold of a copy of your ---

MRS STIRLING: Yes, I have left a copy with the tabulations as well at the front desk.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much.

MRS STIRLING: Would you like me to get it now for you or?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, not at all. I will make sure I get that, and I think somebody else did the same. Are there any points of clarification? If we could take that from Mr Riley at the back there.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley. You have made the point that Drakes Broughton and Norton are very much orientated towards Pershore, but you have then suggested that Kempsey and Ripple are orientated towards Worcester. I really cannot see that and wonder what links there are, for instance, between Ripple, which is considerably further away from Worcester than either Drakes Broughton or Norton? What links that has with Worcester, there are not any, are there?

MRS STIRLING: Well, it was agreed that Kempsey on the A38 was actually more or less attached to Worcester itself as opposed to Drakes Broughton, which is a village which stands on its own. Ripple, along the A38 corridor, would also fit nicely in with the Worcester boundary.

MR RILEY: But if you look on the map, Norton is considerably closer to Worcester than Kempsey is. Your argument does not add up.

MRS STIRLING: Well, it is just that Norton is also in a rural location. Norton and

Whittington as well, which is obviously split with the M5, is more aligned. We have all as villages worked together in the past within the constituency and, therefore, we feel closer aligned to Mid Worcestershire as it currently stands.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: On Kempsey, there is an issue, is there not, as it would become a very long and thin sort of section coming out of Worcester.

MRS STIRLING: Yes, I do realise that. We did look at that. It has been discussed and everyone was in favour of it to look in that shape. Obviously, Mid Worcestershire, as it currently stands, is a long and thin constituency, but obviously, with incorporating Warwickshire it made it a very wide constituency, as I said, with no trunk roads as well and also bringing, from my point of view, Drakes Broughton into the constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have got one further question here, or a point of clarification I should say.

MR MURRAY: David Murray, West Midlands Liberal Democrats. Did you consider when you brought Drakes Broughton back into Evesham of actually putting Lovett and North Claines and Ombersley attached to Worcester, because then that makes the Evesham constituency a better shape without those three odd wards the other side of Droitwich.

If Droitwich was not going into Bromsgrove, then there might be an argument for having that link in the Evesham constituency. I wondered if you had actually considered leaving Hartlebury with Wyre Forest and putting Lovett and North Claines and Ombersley in with Worcester instead of additions to the south of Worcester?

MRS STIRLING: Well, we did look at that but we felt that this was, from our own perspective, a better fit to keep Hartlebury because obviously we did not want to detach Hartlebury, and Hartlebury has been part of the constituency for a period of time. The fit was to try and retain the constituency as it was, but bringing what we consider to be closer to Worcester more in line with Worcester.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Further questions? (No response). Okay, that is really useful. Thank you very much and I will make sure I get hold of that copy, thank you. Our next speaker is Linda Robinson, thank you. Could you give us your name and your address, and speak as closely into the microphone as you can, please?

CLLR LINDA ROBINSON (Wychavon): I am Cllr Linda Robinson. I am currently the leader of Wychavon District Council and my intention is to speak to you from our local authority perspective. I will leave a copy of everything I am saying for you afterwards so that you do not need to take copious notes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, that is so helpful. If you could

just give us your address, please?

CLLR LINDA ROBINSON: Thank you. Windmill Hill Farm, Stoulton, Worcestershire. Wychavon, which is the district council that I am currently leader for, is a large rural district with over 90 parishes and covers over 240 square miles. There are long-established and different communities within our district.

The area is currently experiencing significant growth through the recently adopted South Worcestershire Development Plan. That growth is centred on the major towns and around the city of Worcester and is expected to continue for several more years.

At present, there are three parliamentary constituencies covering our district council's area. The whole of Mid Worcestershire constituency falls within the district, while a significant part of the West Worcestershire constituency also falls in the district, including the town of Pershore.

Finally, a smaller but significant part of the Redditch constituency, eight parishes in all, also falls within Wychavon. The fact that we have three constituencies does cause some logistical problems when managing the electoral process.

The Initial Proposals by the Boundary Commission would actually mean that five of the six proposed parliamentary constituencies within the county would have part of their area within the Wychavon District boundary. It is difficult to think of any rural district that would have so many parliamentary constituencies.

As you can imagine, this would need to be managed very well from an election management point of view, as it would be unprecedented for our election team to have oversight or partial oversight of this number of constituencies.

One important factor is that currently all of the Mid Worcestershire constituency falls within our district. Under the new proposals, there would be no single constituency falling within our local authority area and we would overlap with other local authorities on all five proposed constituencies.

It is also noteworthy that the proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency would cross the county boundary. The inclusion of just one parish, Ombersley, within the proposed Malvern and Ledbury constituency will undoubtedly draw some attention. It is on the east side of the Severn and has a definite and longstanding affinity with Droitwich. I suspect you will be concerned that the constituencies reflect natural communities wherever possible. The new Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency is somewhat difficult to comprehend in this respect.

As you are aware, there is also a proposal to include the Hartlebury parish within the new Wyre Forest constituency. This has not gone down well with residents, particularly

as Wyre Forest District Council have resolved publicly that, should the parliamentary boundary change go ahead, that it would mean a subsequent change to the local authority boundaries.

As you know, this is highly controversial and we believe would be opposed strongly by the local community. Our clear understanding is that a parliamentary review does not prompt a local authority boundary review. If it does, or if that were the case, we would be very concerned at the whole of Droitwich being proposed to merge into Bromsgrove. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Again, a lot there and we will take it on board and make sure we read again what you have just said.

CLLR LINDA ROBINSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Because there is quite a bit going on there. Do we have any questions or points of clarification on that particular presentation? (No response). Nor do I, so thank you very much indeed.

CLLR LINDA ROBINSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: As I say, it would be great to have a copy of that. We are just going to take a five-minute pause now because our next speaker is due in about ten minutes. Hopefully, they will come soon. A five-minute break we will take right now. Thank you.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have just taken a five-minute adjournment because we got ahead of ourselves time-wise. Our next speaker, thank you very much, is Dave Rawcliffe, I think, from Leamington Spa. We would love you to give us your name and your address, please, and speak as closely as you can into the microphone there.

MR RAWCLIFFE: I am Dave Rawcliffe and I live at 33 St Mary's Road, Leamington CV31 1JP. I am also the prospective county councillor for Whitnash, the Labour candidate. I am very much in favour of Warwick and Leamington remaining the same constituency, as I think we are very much one and the same community.

Indeed, around Whitnash it is often very difficult to tell whether you are in Warwick or Leamington - part of both, part of either. Though I live in Leamington, my partner lives in Warwick and I am a Quaker and my meeting is based in Warwick. Indeed, I was volunteering in the Quaker cafe there only this lunchtime.

I am a very frequent traveller between Leamington and Warwick and I have to say, no matter which route I take, I never go past a field. I am always going past houses. I feel very much as part of Warwick, just in the way as I feel about Leamington.

I hardly ever visit Stratford or Kenilworth. There is simply nothing to take me there. I think splitting our community across two constituencies would weaken the accountability of our MP and deprive us of our own clear voice in Parliament. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do not get away. You are not going to get away that quickly! Thank you very much indeed. We have heard a lot about the Warwick/Leamington issue, do you know where the border is when you cross it?

MR RAWCLIFFE: Sorry?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you know where the border is where Warwick turns into Leamington?

MR RAWCLIFFE: I have looked at very closely at the maps. What I know is when I talk to people they are not clear where that border lies, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: But, physically, do you think most people do?

MR RAWCLIFFE: Physically I think most people do not. It is very unclear whether Warwick Gates is in Leamington or Warwick and all these sorts of things. The Apollo Way is actually I think in Warwick but people think of it as in Leamington. People geographically are not clear, especially south of the two towns.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think it is quite important one of the things you said there, which is you hardly ever visit Stratford and the other places, that the greater affinity what you are saying is between these two towns.

MR RAWCLIFFE: Yes, absolutely true. I have not visited Stratford this year and I think Kenilworth was about nine months ago. Warwick was this morning.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any questions, points of clarification to add to that submission? (No response). In which case, thank you very much indeed. It is really important that you came and it is good for us to hear from local people, thank you.

MR RAWCLIFFE: Pleasure.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: At the moment, our next two speakers have not turned up. Our next one I think is due at 3.30 and then 3.50. If there is

anyone who wants to speak in the audience at the moment there is a space, otherwise we will adjourn for ten minutes.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We would like, if possible, your name and your address, please and could you speak into the microphone which is in front of you. There is a pointer if you want to point at anything on the map or if you want us to zoom in closer or anything, let us know. So your name and address, please.

CLLR ATKINSON (Stratford-on-Avon): George Atkinson, Hartsease Cottage, Stratford Road, Wooten Wawen B95 6AR. I actually represent a ward of Stratford District Council by the name of Tanworth-in-Arden. We have been very much part of Warwickshire since time immemorial and the proposal to transfer us to Solihull and Knowle, I think, is something which goes very much against the grain of residents, basically, because there is no empathy there whatsoever.

Tanworth is very much a rural environment. Solihull is a metropolitan borough. They just have no cultural, social or other links at all and it would be totally out of keeping. It has been an element of Warwickshire for centuries and very much looked upon that way. A few years ago, I was involved in trying to remove from the postal address the indication of Solihull West Midlands with the Post Office. I had an element of success but not entirely.

Certainly, places like Ullenhall and Henley, that was removed, but we have got the situation still with Tanworth-in-Arden and Earlswood. Of course, that is no indication of the cultural ambitions, relationship and associations which residents have with Solihull.

I am not bemoaning Solihull. It has got its own characteristics but, looking at the proposals, it is totally alien for two and a half thousand people. My opinion is that they remain in Warwickshire. That is their true identity. In fact, for 2000, Earlswood, which is an element of this ward, produced tea towels and the title was Earlswood, Warwickshire. It is there, it is part of their blood and it would be unfortunate if not, you know, destroy an old empathy they have with the rural environment of Warwickshire.

There are only 2,500 residents there and, looking at Warwickshire in total, having it split at that end as well as other ends, because I believe part of the recommendation is to take areas into Evesham, which again is part of Worcestershire, is totally alien in so many relationship factors.

I passionately believe that identity is very important in local situations. It is something which I have tended to preach since 2002 when England again lost out in the World Cup, but the spectators were there singing Land of Hope and Glory and God Save the Queen. That is their identity and that is a little illustration of what we have here in

Tanworth-in-Arden and Earlswood.

The figures, I think, can easily be managed in relation to Warwickshire as an identifiable county. The history there goes back centuries and I think it would be very unfortunate to break that up. Certainly, I cannot emphasise the point that, as far as Tanworth is concerned, or the Tanworth which I represent, then this proposal is totally alien to the culture and certainly would be looked upon with a lot of disfavour.

I think, as I have said, Warwickshire has got its own identity. It can be relied upon in that way and also, with the rearrangement of the parliamentary boundaries which we all accept is necessary, keep Warwickshire as its own entity. The Solihull proposal, the Evesham proposal, they just do not match in any way with what the residents look upon as their places of recognition. I think that really gets the message across.

There are other factors. The figures can be quite easily balanced out. 2,500 is not a critical factor, but I do assure you there is no relationship whatsoever between Tanworth-in-Arden ward and the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. So your argument is very much emotional rather than practical, would you say?

CLLR ATKINSON: I do not know. Well, it is, but that is important in life without any doubt.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely.

CLLR ATKINSON: The fact that England was, again, out of the World Cup in 2002 yet people wanted that identity with Land of Hope and Glory. It is the same here. In practical terms, to have Warwickshire split up on the proposal made is not emotional. The arithmetic is not correct as far as I am concerned.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any questions or points of clarification from the floor? There is one here.

MR MURRAY: David Murray from the West Midlands Liberal Democrats. Do the people in your area in Tanworth share your view about this and, if so, will all these 2,500 people be writing into the Boundary Commission objecting to them being included in Solihull?

CLLR ATKINSON: I can assure you that, with my relationship with the parish council, the residents' associations for both Tanworth and Earlswood, the proposal is not welcome. Whether you will get a 100 per cent turnout is debatable, but we do get that in any election? We do not, and if you look at the turnout in some council elections it can be as low as 15 per cent, 12 per cent, 20 per cent if you are lucky. You will not get

100 per cent and I think it is a bit unreasonable to anticipate that. Certainly, of the three organisations I have mentioned as well as the residents I have spoken to, the desire is to remain an element of Warwickshire.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I am not sure if that was quite clarification or more lobbying, but thank you very much. Anything else? Any other questions? (No response). Thank you so much. Fascinating, and certainly we will be taking it into account, as we will everything. Again, our next speaker is not here so we are now going to take a 15 minute adjournment. Thank you. We will take that full 15 minutes.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. We are now going to reconvene. Our final speaker in this session is Bob Crowther. Mr Crowther, if you would give us your name and address and if you could speak directly into the microphone, which you can fiddle with, yes. We will have a map up if you want anything different or, you want to point at it, you have a pointer thing in front of you. Your name and address, please?

MR CROWTHER: I am Bob, or formerly Robert, Crowther of 10 Clarendon Street, Leamington Spa. I have lived in Leamington Spa since 1968. My career was as a teacher locally in a local primary school mainly and I also was a Warwick District Councillor from 1991 until 2011 - so that is 20 years - representing Clarendon ward in the centre of Leamington in a slightly different configuration to what the ward is now. I was leader of Warwick District Council from 2002 to 2007.

My chief occupation, if you like, unpaid occupation, is I am chair of governors of a local secondary school in Leamington. My purpose for coming to speak to you is to urge that the association of Warwick and Leamington in the same constituency should be maintained, rather than the proposal which is to split them between two constituencies.

The fundamental argument I have is that the people of Warwick and Leamington, effectively, form one community rather than two separate communities of two separate towns. Many people when they refer to where they live actually refer to the wrong town from where formally they live. Many businesses identify themselves as in one of the towns, whereas, in fact, formally they are in the other. That is just an illustration of the way people think about the area.

As a councillor, I was very much involved with planning policy as a responsibility of the District Council over a couple of cycles of local plans and things like that. One thing that was notable about the area was the high proportion of people who both lived and worked within that area. I do not know what the statistics are now, but I think that they still hold up that this area is far more a live and work in area than a commuter area.

We have quite a degree of useful bus routes between the two towns involving routes which encompass the two towns. One of the downsides, I guess, of the movement within the area is that there are, basically, two routes between the sort of central areas of each town which get very congested, but that is people moving within rather than through the area.

As a teacher and a school governor, I am very aware of the schools in the area and the way they operate and we are lucky to have a sort of community of schools, particularly within the two towns, who are very co-operative and supportive of each other and work together very effectively.

The people of the two towns have a real choice of where they send their children to, because the distances are not all that great. The distance between the two town centres is only about two miles. There are a very large number of children who live in one town and they walk or cycle to school in the other town, crossing a boundary that people are not all that aware of. Very keen people know the boundaries, but to most people it is not a matter of importance to them.

Another part of the educational provision is Warwickshire College based in Leamington, its main campus. It has another campus called the Trident Centre which I think most people think of as being in Leamington or in Whitnash but it is, in fact, in Warwick. There we are, it is one of those things. It clearly serves the whole of the community and people do not have any feeling that they are going from one place to another to use it.

When we think about health provision, the health provision is arranged for the whole of the two towns and there is no need to think separately for provision here and there. The main hospital is Warwick Hospital. There is St Michael's Hospital in Warwick. There is the anomaly of, I am not sure whether it has not changed its name but it certainly was called the Royal Leamington Spa Hospital which moved to a location in Heathcote, which is in Warwick, but those serve the whole of the community of the area.

It is not significant to people that they should be in one place or the other. Similarly, the police are based at the community Justice Centre in Leamington and that serves the whole area. The fire service is based in Leamington in the whole area since the Warwick Fire Station closed a few years ago.

In terms of community activities or community organisations, many of them are based in one town or the other and serve in the whole area. I would give the instance of the Sikh temple. We have a very vibrant Sikh community which is spread across the whole area and their temple, I think, again, is technically in Warwick although it is in a place that a lot of people think of as being in Leamington. The Hindu temple, similarly, serves the whole area. A slightly different example, the Irish club, there is one active Irish club which attracts the whole community there.

In terms of town centre activities, the two main town centres are each quite effective and vibrant centres considering the pressures on retailing these days, but they have their own strengths. People in Leamington will go to Warwick for particular things, with fine dining and sort of presents and things like that readily available there. Leamington Town Centre has perhaps more of the multiples and it has, let us say, a rumbustious night life which gives it a bit of a distinction but it is attractive for people across the area.

Just in general terms, in my experience as being a local representative on Warwick District Council it was very clear to me that people identified the Warwick/Leamington area as a single entity, if you like, whereas the major other part of the district, Kenilworth, was seen as separate and it valued its distinction and its separateness from Warwick and Leamington.

There is always a little bit of argy-bargy in local politics, but that was a continuing feeling that people might think in Kenilworth that they were not getting their fair deal because these people in Warwick and Leamington had, in their view, a better deal and, to some extent, there was vice versa as well. It was just an illustration of the way people feel about the situation.

These are illustrations of how I am convinced that the people of the area feel very much that they are one community and that the infrastructure and the provision reflects that. I feel very strongly that, for the good of the community and for the effectiveness of representation, it is an enormous advantage if our community has a single MP concentrated on our interests and representing our interests and understanding us and not having to compromise those by perhaps competing concerns.

I feel that the core of Warwick and Leamington presents a quite considerable number of voters and the addition of some additional areas which are very closely aligned to Warwick and Leamington, the very closely proximate villages, would easily reach the numbers that meet the guidelines for the size of the constituency.

I am really appealing that we are considered, so that there is a continuation of the long-established association of Warwick and Leamington within one constituency - that should not be ended - recognising there is always going to be a difficulty jiggering the numbers around a wider area.

I feel that the solution that has been come up with this time has given us the rough end of the stick and I would like to see further consideration to keep Warwick and Leamington together. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, councillor. Is there anyone in the room who would like to ask any specific questions or need points of clarification? (No response). That has been very useful to give us a real flavour of life here and the things that matter between the two towns and, obviously, we will give you

a lot of consideration. Thank you very much for your time and for coming in today.

MR CROWTHER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I am just going to have a quick look at the timetable now and see where we are at. Our next speaker is due in at 4.50 and we have got quite a few coming in in the final session, between 4.50 and 7.40, ten or 15 people. There will be a couple of gaps and there certainly are some spaces. What I am going to do now then is adjourn for 30 to 40 minutes and if we come back here at quarter to 5, 16.45. Thank you very much.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are reconvening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for coming back. Our first speaker is, in fact, Sue Butcher, thank you. Mrs Butcher, if you could give us your name and address, first of all, please, and speak closely to the microphone, thank you.

MRS BUTCHER: Okay. I am Sue Butcher, 49 West Street, Warwick, CV34 6AB. I am actually here as Chairman of Warwick Chamber of Trade and speaking on behalf of Warwick Chamber of Trade. The Chamber objects to the proposal to align Warwick and Stratford and feels that the present constituency of Warwick and Leamington should remain.

A major issue for Warwick is that the town will be split between two separate constituencies and we will, therefore, be communicating with two separate MPs. The Boundary Commission website states the legal requirement to keep the numbers of electors in each constituency broadly equal whilst also taking into account factors such as local community ties. It also states, "We seek to recommend constituency boundaries that reflect local areas as much as possible."

Splitting a small town like Warwick seems to be at odds with these aims and threatens any cohesive approach and may be detrimental to our local economy. Warwick and Leamington form a continuous urban area and the local economies and communities are interconnected.

We work closely with Leamington Chamber of Trade on many issues. The local authority structure is aligned to the current constituency arrangements and this allows for great collaboration between councillors, officers, our MP and local business organisations.

I would urge you to reconsider this proposal, which seems only to look at evening out the numbers rather than the cohesiveness of our community in Warwick. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Before you go, sorry, just one question. I really appreciate you coming and giving us a viewpoint from the Chamber of Commerce, which is quite important. How important, is it, do you think, to a Chamber of Commerce and to commerce in general to have that one voice rather than two and, also, how much co-operation and how much contact is there between commerce and commercial ventures in the two towns?

MRS BUTCHER: There is a lot of interaction. The towns, basically, are joined together. We are one big urban area and I think it is very important to have one person speaking on our behalf. As I say, the two chambers, we work closely together, we put on joint events and things that are common to, I think, areas of concern across the two towns.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. It is very important that we heard your voice. Does anyone have any points of clarification they need or anything to ask? (No response). In that case, we will move on to our next speaker, but we are very grateful for your input and we will certainly be looking at it carefully. Our next speaker is Mr Christopher Saint. Again, Mr Saint, if you could give us your name and address and speak closely into the microphone, thank you.

CLLR SAINT (Shipston-on-Stour): Yes, I am Christopher Saint, usually known as Chris. I live at Jasmine cottage in Tredington near Shipston-on-Stour CV36 4NJ. I speak here myself not only as a resident of that part of the world, which is proposed under the Boundary Commission proposals to be exorcised from the rest of Warwickshire and be moved in with parts of other counties where there has been boundary changes in the past into what we consider to be an unnatural blend, because I agree with the previous speaker that Leamington and Warwick are a key place and, at the moment, my neighbours in Warwick District Council can handle the affairs such they need to support the chamber by one MP.

Under the proposals that have come before us today, we, or me in my role as leader of Stratford District Council, would have to relate to four MPs. I am not saying that would be impossible, but it is certainly undesirable, it is messy and I think we have or can put forward solutions that can give you that balance of numbers between the constituencies of the future and produce a lot more harmony between communities that have stayed together.

At the present time, the district is big enough to warrant two MPs, which it has, and we expect that any proposals that come to our liking would repeat that. Which two is open to question, but it is the question of the fact that there are two that is important.

I also, think representing the good burgesses of Stratford-upon-Avon, that they feel uncomfortable about being part of Warwick detached from Leamington, for the simple reason that although they are two towns of similar size there is a hell of a lot of countryside in between which divides them. There is no coherence or cogency between

those two towns.

The reason I assume they are the same size is because I happen to know that they have the same number of county councillors, three in each case. However, the main issue, therefore, becomes that most of the people that I speak to in the area where I live are aghast at the thought of having to be part of an Evesham constituency in Worcestershire.

Although county boundaries do have overlaps of interest, in the Shipston area which I represent those links are more with Chipping Norton, certainly not Evesham. They do not regard it as an alien place, but it is somewhere where I do not find that we would have, as a community, some synergy with our MP, whoever that might be.

Consequently, I would support a move that puts all of South Warwickshire into one constituency - let us call it Stratford-upon-Avon or Stratford-on-Avon, for the sake of argument - that reunites Warwick and Leamington. We also cover the Southam area currently linked with Kenilworth and, although communities are not too happy with that split, perhaps that is inevitable.

The main thrust there, of course, is that what do we do if we bring part of your proposals for Evesham into Stratford constituency? We have got quite a lot of people there that would render the constituency over size. How do we deal with that? Well, we think, or I think there is a better arrangement between Kenilworth and South Coventry, rather than the proposals that have been put forward to link bits of Coventry with rural Warwick District rather than the town of Kenilworth.

I think, again, in terms of community cohesiveness that would be a better arrangement. Although I have not got a list of precise recommendations today, my message to you is: Can I please have, after the General Election, just two MPs to deal with and not four? And can our communities live together in areas are they have greater synergies than would appear to exist from the proposals?

I am pleased you have come today to allow us to talk to you, because we can bring that local reflection on what could be regarded as a desktop exercise.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That is exactly why we are here, because this is a chance for local communities to influence, and I can assure you they really do. They have in every other Boundary Commission. There is no reason to see why, once we have put in that community element, it should not influence what we have as these Initial Proposals here. It is very much the people speaking and changing the direction of things. Are there any questions here? (No response). We have had quite a few people talk about this area and similar counter-proposals, so I think I am pretty clear about what you are saying. Thank you very much for your time.

CLLR SAINT: Well, I am glad I have reinforced the point then.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely. The more the merrier and you have brought a new dimension as well. May I call now Maxine Howe and, again, name and address, please, thank you.

MS HOWE: Good afternoon. My name is Maxine Howe. My address is 1A Portland Street, Leamington Spa CV32 5EZ. I am here today as Chair of the Royal Leamington Spa Chamber of Trade. I might actually want to put right that Sue Butcher is from the Chamber of Trade, rather than the chamber of commerce. They are separate entities.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for correcting me on that.

MS HOWE: It is okay, no problem. The Leamington Chamber opposes the boundary changes for Leamington and Warwick for the following four reasons. One, efficiency. The local authority structure, Warwick District Council is aligned to the current constituency arrangements. This allows for efficient collaboration between councillors, officers and MPs, but also local organisations such as the two Chambers of Trade from those towns.

Reason number two, understanding and knowledge. As Chair for the Chamber of Trade in Leamington, I can state that our organisation works closely with the Warwick Chamber, as well, in fact, with the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce. We hold joint events and meetings for our collective members that are supported and attended by our local MP. He understands the way that Leamington and Warwick complement each other and he has worked to develop the communication of each town's DNA.

Reason number three, Common issues. Warwick and Leamington are not only two conjoined towns, but they also share many common issues affecting businesses in both towns that are covered by the same local authority, Warwick District Council. It makes sense for the Chambers that represent each town to be able to rally support from the same MP on the same issues. Issues such as parking, the local plan, infrastructure, air quality, out-of-town retail developments and, in fact, the Warwick District Council headquarters.

Reason number four, geographical position and logistical common-sense. The towns of Warwick and Leamington are actually geographically connected and will be more so once, or if, the current format of the local plan is implemented. Our current MP can cross from one town to the other literally by walking across a bridge.

With the boundary plans to combine Warwick with Stratford-upon-Avon, that MP would face a 40-minute drive across the M40 to cover his or her constituency. The

Leamington and Kenilworth MP would encounter a 20-minute drive. I would, therefore, refer back to my point number one of efficiency. Thank you. That is all I have to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much and for your clarification. It is really important to hear from groups like you. Do we have any questions or points of clarification? (No response). Again, very clear, your message, and important that we get that clear as well. Thank you.

MS HOWE: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker, please, is Brian Tustain. Again, Mr Tustain, if we could have your name and your address, please.

MR TUSTAIN: Yes, good afternoon. Brian Tustain. My address is Gentleman's Lane House in Ullenhall. That is probably the best address in Warwickshire. I live approximately two miles from Tanworth-in-Arden. I am here today as a resident of Ullenhall and of nearby Tanworth-in-Arden. I ought to mention that our village in Ullenhall actually has no centre anymore - we have no shops and no pub. Therefore, we tend to migrate to Tanworth and, hence, my knowledge of the people and that particular area.

My objection to your proposal is over the new constituency proposed for Warwick and Stratford, as much I have been listening to for the last 15 minutes. Your proposal splits and moves the village nearby to where I live, Tanworth-in-Arden into a new seat of Solihull and Shirley.

Tanworth-in-Arden is much closer to Stratford-upon-Avon and to the villages south such as Henley, Wotton Wawen and not Solihull. There is a direct train link to Tanworth from Danzey to Stratford-on-Avon and, therefore, such items as shopping and community matters tend to link to Stratford and not Shirley and Solihull.

I move now to talk about, if I may, Stratford-upon-Avon, which as we all know is a historic town, an area of one of the leading tourist destinations in the United Kingdom. Surely, it deserves to have its own constituency name and status and not be linked with the town of Warwick?

Splitting Warwick and Leamington is a disastrous proposal in my opinion. The geography, and the road and rail links with each other naturally, with the Chiltern railway line linking both towns and, as I have just heard, a bridge and many other things and the Emscote Road directly runs between the two towns. Schools, shops, businesses, communities links with each other, and I urge you to reconsider your proposal concerning Warwick and Leamington.

Your proposal splits, as we have also heard just a minute ago, Stratford District Council

into four different constituencies, which itself, as the leader of the Council just pointed out, is a workable horror story meaning it deals with four separate MPs during its business.

Your proposal also creates a new seat called Evesham and South Warwickshire which would link the two centres of Worcestershire and Warwickshire which actually has little or no community commonality or links of any sort between them. Market towns such as Alcester and Shipston have good connections with Stratford-upon-Avon where residents shop, go to school and do their business and absolutely none at all with Evesham and Worcestershire.

The joining of Leamington with Kenilworth is, though, an interesting panel but one which is flawed. Leamington and Kenilworth are very different towns and, again, with little or no communality. The A46 dissects the two towns which has few transport links between the two towns.

The creation again of Warwick and Leamington, as we have just heard, makes complete sense. In summary, Stratford-upon-Avon, in my opinion, should remain Stratford; Tanworth-in-Arden should remain in Stratford-upon-Avon and not in Shirley and Solihull.

Your objective to increase the electorate to equal numbers within a margin of 5 per cent could be worked out by taking Stratford-on-Avon as is and adding Wellesbourne, Kineton and the existing towns of Alcester, Bidford and Shipston. Warwick could, therefore, reform with Leamington and a more natural bringing together of Kenilworth with Coventry South would be a much better suggestion. I think that is everything I would want to say, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. A lot in there but I think I have got it down. That is great, any questions? We have one, a point of clarification.

CLLR SAINT: Yes, Chris Saint, who spoke earlier. I was interested about Mr Tustain's comment about Tanworth-in-Arden because that is, again, in my district. I wonder whether we should clarify with Mr Tustain the very rural nature of Tanworth-in-Arden, where you go for a beer, and the more urban area of Solihull.

MR TUSTAIN: Countryside and city, need I say more? The word "in-Arden" probably says it all. It is a very quaint place. If you have never been there, please come and visit us. The Bell Pub and its Post Office are very quaint. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions or clarification? (No response). Thank you very much indeed for your time. Really interesting, thank you. Just a reminder, if you do want to you can point to the map and we can bring up specific wards and ward names and all sorts of things on this map here and there is a pointer

over there.

A reminder, also, that written submissions need to be in by December 5 and that all the submissions, written and oral, that we are hearing today, and written that come in by then, will be looked at and analysed by myself and by my fellow commissioner, David Latham, who is sitting here. Our next person up is Jayne Topham, please. If you could again give name and address, and a reminder you are being filmed. Thank you very much.

MRS TOPHAM: Good afternoon. I am Jayne Topham. I am the Town Clerk for Warwick representing Warwick Town Council based at the Court House in Jury Street, Warwick. As Town Clerk of Warwick, I have been asked by my Council to address the Commission regarding the new parliamentary boundaries as they are being proposed.

The Town Council and the residents of Warwick have been shocked and disappointed to learn that these proposals will not only put us in a new constituency, with a town which we see often as our economic and historic enemy, but even more critically that our town will be split into two constituencies.

To create a situation where our community is split between parliamentary constituencies and, therefore, represented by two MPs seems to be going against the criteria that the Boundary Commission states they are trying to achieve in knowing communities should be maintained.

To imagine a parliamentary constituency where half of the historic park of Warwick Castle becomes split from the actual Castle and that Warwick School is in the Leamington constituency, one of the oldest schools in the country, being established in 914, and that the original historic entrance of the town at Bridge End will also be in Leamington constituency, it seems a complete breakdown of any sense of history or community.

Of the other residential areas which would be severed from our town, residents moved into these homes to be part of Warwick and are fiercely proud of their CV34 addresses and the identification that means you live in Warwick and not Leamington. Whilst I appreciate that their postal addresses will not alter, their sense of belonging to the county town will be seriously undermined. How can they expect an MP to represent them when their identity is not even reflected in the name of their proposed constituency?

It would also make the position of the MP representing Stratford and Warwick difficult too as he or she will not fully represent the town and, therefore, the constituency they have been elected to represent. The Town Council firmly believes that this hiving off of a large section of Warwick just to justify numbers will lead to administrative confusion and that the electorate will feel disenfranchised.

To use the River Avon as the rationale for placing all the town of Warwick South into Leamington constituency, having ignored such a feature in the past, seems a very retrograde position. It would also seem contrary to the advice that I understand which is currently being given to local authorities when addressing their local boundaries, of using main roads wherever possible.

If the A46 were used as the southern border for Warwick and Stratford constituency, then the whole established town of Warwick would be included in the new constituency and remain within the parameters of electoral numbers required. The town of Warwick and its residents would, therefore, support the action of any of the groups here today to maintain the Warwick and Leamington constituency, as has been the case since 1885, as this is a natural alignment that the electorate is used to and is comfortable with.

The two towns have a natural affinity both with the very close proximity shared, senior council administration, joint transport connectivity and demographic similarities. With the proposed new constituency of Warwick and Stratford, none of these similarities exist. In fact, being the county town of Warwickshire is the only thing that the towns would both share.

If we remain a single constituency with Leamington, this would ensure that we do not alienate our electorates who are already tired of continual ward divisions and, now, constituency boundary changes which will by 2020 have involved four reviews and changes - all very confusing at a time when many electors are already feeling that democracy does not work for them.

However, if the Commission feels that their proposal to create a new constituency of Warwick and Stratford would bring off a fairer delivery of parliamentary constituencies across the whole of the UK, then I must make one lasting plea. On behalf of the Town Council and all of the residents of Warwick, we ask that the whole of Warwick stays part of Warwick in one parliamentary constituency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. If you would just stay there a second. I have got a couple of questions, but do we have any questions from the floor? (No response). You have given us some detail that we have not heard today.

MRS TOPHAM: Do you want to have this?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I would love a copy of that. That would be fantastic. That is a start. That is lovely. I presume you will also be submitting something in writing to the Boundary Commission?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes, we have, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Great, fantastic. The next thing is, just for my understanding and, feel free, there is a pointer if you want to point at it, what you are saying is that if things stay as they are you would still want a different boundary as far as Warwick goes, because parts of Warwick are now going into two different constituencies? It is not a straight split, is that what you are saying?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes, the whole town is being split into two and that is why it was felt that, if the A46 was used as a boundary, the numbers would remain the same rather than using the river.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So you are saying that, putting aside Leamington, part of Warwick is going into Leamington still and part is going ---

MRS TOPHAM: No, no, that is not the case.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (inaudible).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So that is what you are saying?

MRS TOPHAM: Sorry, I am not sure what you mean?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So part of Warwick goes into one side and part of Warwick goes into the other?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes. What we want to do is try and keep Warwick Town as a whole.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MRS TOPHAM: Not have it split in two and to keep those links with Leamington.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And to keep the links with Leamington.

MRS TOPHAM: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is one question. That is great. You spoke very, very quickly and so I just want to check I have got it. Now I have got this, it is probably going to be easier, but you were talking about the places that would be divided including the castle.

MRS TOPHAM: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The castle itself or is it the castle park?

MRS TOPHAM: It is the castle grounds.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The castle grounds would be divided. Okay. Thank you. And Warwick School?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes, it would actually move into the Leamington constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, okay.

MR TUSTAIN: Please, can I just make a point?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely, if we get a mic to you while I quickly ask one more question. I was not quite sure what you meant when you also begged that the name would be kept because, actually, whatever the proposals are Warwick is still going to be in there?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes, we want to keep Warwick as a whole, the whole town within one constituency. That is what we ask.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, I see what you are saying. A point of clarification. We need your name, first of all.

MR TUSTAIN: Sorry, Brian Tustain. You made the point very eloquently that your preference is Warwick and Leamington as a single constituency not necessarily Warwick as a whole on its own, can you just reconfirm that because I am finding you are talking about Warwick as if it is going to be split off into Stratford?

MRS TOPHAM: Well, we would like to keep Warwick on its own but we would, rather, have links with Leamington as historically have been. As Chris Saint was saying earlier, the links with Stratford are not the same. The proximity is far wider. It does not seem to make sense to us.

MR TUSTAIN: So splitting Warwick does not become an issue when it remains with Leamington?

MRS TOPHAM: We do not want to split Warwick Town.

MR TUSTAIN: Precisely.

MRS TOPHAM: Yes.

MR TUSTAIN: So it does not become an issue if it stays with Leamington?

MRS TOPHAM: No.

MR TUSTAIN: Right.

MRS TOPHAM: Absolutely.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think you are right to help me with that one. What we are talking here is you would rather stay with Leamington?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: But if that were not going to happen, as a second, you would rather it was whole?

MRS TOPHAM: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Not the other way around. It is not a case of: We would rather Warwick was whole, first, and then we would rather Warwick was joined with Leamington?

MRS TOPHAM: We would rather stay as we are.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Wouldn't we all! No, a lot of people have said something similar. Thank you very much. No further questions? (No response). Thank you. Again, please pass on our thanks to the Council. We are very pleased that you have come and submitted stuff to us. Thanks. Could we now please have Ben Wesson? We do not have Ben Wesson. All right. Stephanie Kerr, please, thank you. Again, if you could give us your name and address, please.

MS KERR: My name is Stephanie Kerr. I am speaking on behalf of the BID Leamington Board of Directors. The BID is the Business Improvement District that is in Leamington Spa.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just repeat that district for me, please?

MS KERR: It is called BID Leamington. BID is an acronym for Business Improvement District and I am the Director of that. It is a business led partnership which is responsible for enhancing the trading environment in Leamington's Town Centre.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. And your address, please?

MS KERR: Would you like my address or the address of the BID?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It can be either or. Normally, we take your

private address as a private citizen.

MS KERR: That is fine. That is 80 Leicester Street, Leamington Spa, CV32 4TB.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Fire away.

MS KERR: To give you a little bit of background on my role in the BID. As I mentioned, the BID is a business led partnership that was set up in the town centre in Leamington in 2008 and is funded by nearly 400 retail and leisure businesses in the heart of Leamington. We have a mandate to enhance the trading environment.

Within that role, we deliver an awful lot of events, promotions, business support services and also work on behalf of businesses to maintain the health of the sort of the wider town community but, also, importantly, where this comes into it, work with what we call our important neighbours, Warwick very much being one of them. I will just sort of, if it is okay with you, read what I have noted down here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely.

MS KERR: It is felt that the proposed changes, specifically the proposal to divide Leamington and Warwick, would not be in the best interests of both towns. The towns of Leamington, as you have probably heard today and many times before, are not geographically separate. They blend in together, both the housing and commercial areas. They have an awful lot in common both in terms of their challenges but, also, the sort of the character of the two areas.

With that in mind, we do work together quite closely supporting each other, events, business connections and the charities sort of overlap across the two areas. With that in mind, we have also had a lot of support. We have also benefited, if you like, from the support and co-operation we have had from district councillor officers, members, as well as our MP who all sort of bridge those two areas.

A number of the sort of the peculiarities, if you like, of the proposal as it stands at the moment is we have on the edge of town the Leamington Retail Park, which actually has a Warwick postcode, we are often reminded as part of Warwick, but it is also of huge concern to the BID area, if you like, because it represents our out of town retail composition.

That, obviously, falls inside Leamington in this proposal but, as was just mentioned, you have got the Warwick School, which is very much seen as being in Warwick, also falling inside the proposed new Leamington constituency. The boundary, really, that is sort of running through Warwick as was just described, that does not sort of map existing boundaries or the M40, we feel would also not really benefit the town of Warwick.

Given that the cohesion between both towns is really what has allowed both places to thrive in many ways, we feel that something that would detract from Warwick would also impact on Leamington. Certainly, in planning terms, we have got a lot of development going on around both towns and those developments do impact on both town centres, in traffic terms and in that sort of thing, in much the same way.

Equally, when we are relying on the support of our elected representatives to attract investment, in many ways those sorts of things do benefit both areas. What is also interesting, and it is a sort of anecdote I suppose, is that we have council representation on my board of directors and, until quite recently, our Warwick District Council representative was also at the same time the mayor of Warwick. We do like to look after each other, if you like.

I think, really, that about sums it up. I do acknowledge that you have got numbers to consider and populations to consider, but we sort of feel that we would like you to take another look at the relationship between Leamington and Warwick with a view of adjusting that boundary so that we can remain together.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Looking at the numbers, Warwick and Leamington at the moment have 67,000 or thereabouts population-wise and that is too small, is there an area that you think would be suitable to add to that to bring the numbers up by another around at least 4,000 or more? Do not worry if you do not have a view, that is fine. There is plenty of other people who will, I am sure. You do not have to answer that if not.

MS KERR: I have not properly looked at the surrounding areas in a great enough detail at this stage in terms of the numbers, and where they are sort of accumulated, to give you a particular sound view on that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: All right, thank you. We have a question or a point of clarification, I think, I am supposed to say.

MS HOWE: Hi, it is Maxine Howe from the Chamber of Trade again. Just in answer to your question about if Leamington was still to remain with Warwick, within the same boundary, and expand to keep the sort of levels of population that is needed, I do not know the answer to this but is Cubbington currently within the proposed area? Because, again, that is one village that actually does join, you know, it flows into Leamington?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Say it a bit louder, is?

MS HOWE: Cubbington.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Cubbington. So it is a ward that is not in

already?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It is just to the north.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just to the north. Okay, we are just having a quick look.

MS HOWE: Or controversially maybe. Warwick District Council covers the areas of Leamington, Kenilworth and Warwick, so from a logical and constituency point of view would it not make sense to align with the local authority?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you just repeat those again so I can write them down?

MS HOWE: Leamington, Kenilworth and Warwick are all covered by Warwick District Council at the moment.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, we can look at numbers.

MS KERR: Would it be helpful to you for us to have a closer look at the numbers tomorrow and get some ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We can do that, absolutely. It is just interesting to get another viewpoint.

MS KERR: Yes, sure.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Obviously, lots of people have different ideas but we can certainly look at those. Thank you very much. Any further questions? (No response). In which case, thank you very much for your time.

MS KERR: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Really useful.

MS KERR: Just to let you know, Ben is now here, the person that was meant to be before me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Can I call Ben Wesson, please, thank you?

MR WESSON: Thank you very much for providing me with an opportunity to speak at the hearing today. My name is Ben Wesson and my address is 16 Wasdale Close, Leamington Spa, CV32 6NF. I sit on the executive of Warwick and Leamington Labour

Party and I am also one of the founding members of 1885, which is the cross-party community group which has been set up to oppose the Boundary Commission's proposal to separate the Warwick and Leamington parliamentary constituency.

We set up 1885 because we believed that our shared culture, heritage, history, geography and identity make us stronger as one constituency. Let me, first, tell you about my local connection with the area.

I was born at the Warneford Hospital in Leamington. I have resided in the area all of my life. I attended local schools and participated in community activities that were spread across both Warwick and Leamington. My extended family are scattered across both towns, having first been evacuated in the War to the area. I have got family in both Warwick and Leamington.

I think it is absolutely disastrous that the Boundary Commission's proposals would seek to divide our community and align our two towns with areas that we have no affinity with. The towns of Warwick and Leamington form a community of common interest and should, in 1885 campaign's view, continue to be represented as such in the House of Commons.

In terms of parliamentary constituency boundaries, they have been recognised as one unit together forming the centre of a constituency since 1885. Since that time, successive boundary reviews have all correctly concluded that the two towns form an integrated heart of the constituency. Every aspect of life in Warwick and Leamington continues to confirm this view.

Community ties between Warwick and Leamington are very strong, including through faith groups, charities and other voluntary organisations, as I know has already been mentioned today. Such organisations work across both towns. In terms of cultural composition, I think this is a really key area.

The rich ethnic mix of community is equally reflected throughout the urban area. Sikh and Muslim faith communities are organised in a way that reflects the unity of our area. For instance, the gurdwara, which is technically located in Warwick, serves the whole Sikh community in Warwick and Leamington.

The Muslim community centre based here in Leamington also serves both towns. The Christian churches in Warwick and Leamington also work together with the Church of England, for example, having a Warwick and Leamington Deanery. The St Patrick's Irish Club, located in Leamington, serves the community again both in Warwick and Leamington.

The towns are geographically connected and share demographic similarities. The local economies of Warwick and Leamington are interconnected. To isolate each town in

separate constituencies, in our view, would be to the detriment of the local economy. The local authority structure is aligned to the current constituency arrangements and, as I know has already been discussed, public services are closely interlinked.

I want to focus briefly now on the implications for Warwick because, under the Commission's proposal, Warwick would go in with Stratford, but the Myton and Heathcote area in Warwick would go in with Leamington and Kenilworth. A knock-on impact of the Boundary Commission's recommendation in relation to Myton and Heathcote could potentially be that Warwick Town Council, which provides vital services within the local area, could be disbanded because, essentially, a huge part of that area in Warwick would no longer be in Warwick. It would have implications for the Town Council.

Clearly, as I said in my introduction, local families have strong roots within both towns. Children often being born at Warwick Hospital later go on to live in Leamington. There is a connected community and Warwick and Leamington in a sense are like conjoined twins.

I am deeply concerned that the Commission intends to sever the historic link between Warwick and Leamington and everything that has been built up over the past 30 years simply to meet a quota that is being dictated by central Government. There is not a single association between Leamington and Kenilworth or Warwick and Stratford that is stronger than those between Leamington and Warwick. I would urge the Commission to reconsider its plans in respect of the Warwick and Leamington constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions? (No response). Can you tell us when you set up your group and a tiny bit more about it?

MR WESSON: Yes, the group is a cross-party campaign group made up of Labour, Conservative and members of the community. We set up approximately two months ago and have a petition which we intend to submit to the Commission at a later date. So far, we have got 500 signatures on the petition, which we will be submitting, and we are encouraging people to make representations to the Commission objecting to the proposals in respect of Warwick and Leamington.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, an important reminder there that you need to get that in by 5 December.

MR WESSON: Fifth of December.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is quite soon, that is two or three weeks, because that is when the first consultation ends and that sort of information is always important to us. You are cross-party you are saying, have you formed a view -

and you may not have - on how we get our numbers up? Is there one particular area that ---

MR WESSON: Personally, as part of the campaign we have not had a discussion about the redrawing of boundaries because there is an agreement on keeping Warwick and Leamington together, but it was clear that different political parties had their own views in terms of alternative proposals.

I absolutely support the alternative proposal that has been put forward by the regional Labour Party in respect of the constituency, but other people that are part of the cross-party campaign would have a different view. What unites us is that we want to keep Warwick and Leamington together within the constituency arrangement.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That is really useful. Thanks for your time. Our next speaker, and I am going to mispronounce your name, and if I do please forgive me, is Martine Verweij.

MS VERWEIJ: Very close.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, you tell us what it is and give us your address, thank you very much.

MS VERWEIJ: Good evening. My name is Martine Verweij and, unlike Ben, I am not born here. I am foreign. I am from the Netherlands. I cannot give my family history of being here but I really enjoyed what you just said there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I need your address as well, by the way.

MS VERWEIJ: The address of the company that I am speaking on behalf is 4 Euston place.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, so you are speaking on behalf of a company?

MS VERWEIJ: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Which is?

MS VERWEIJ: Kids Run Free.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you spell for me?

MS VERWEIJ: Yes, kids, like children.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS VERWEIJ: Run Free.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh, okay, I have got it; kids run free.

MS VERWEIJ: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is quite echoey in here. I just need to check, are we happy with your address? Are we happy with that? (Agreed). Fine. That is okay.

MS VERWEIJ: Should I stand further away?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, stand nice and close. It is better.

MS VERWEIJ: Fine. Thank you very much for allowing me to express my opinion and worries. I am afraid I am going to repeat quite a fair bit that Ben has already said.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine.

MS VERWEIJ: I am sure you have heard a lot of that. First of all, I believe that the community ties from, having worked within the charity and seeing what we do within this constituency, the ties between Warwick and Leamington are incredibly strong. These include the faith groups, hence the examples been given; charities, including ours; and other voluntary organisations.

The towns, obviously, are geographically connected and that makes why they work together well. They also share demographic similarities. The local economies of Warwick and Leamington are interconnected. To split these two towns up would negatively affect the local economy of both towns of the businesses within.

There are plenty of businesses that work across both towns and, therefore, creating this split-up would mean that we are much more inefficient and we cannot benefit from the coherence that is there at the moment. The local authority is aligned over both towns. Once again, when we are working over both towns and we work and we organise events we work with the local authority, then we also work in one constituency.

Having that as a benefit, because it creates smaller and shorter communication lines, we are more efficient and we perform better. I can tell you, especially in a charity as in any other business, it is really important to be efficient because that is how you survive.

The public services are closely linked. I very much feel that the links between Stratford and Warwick and Leamington and Kenilworth are significantly weaker. We have really

not that much affinity with those towns. If we see the demand that we get to our charity, that very much is within this part.

We work with clubs within both areas. We work with clubs within Warwick and in Kenilworth. For example, we organise regular events but a recent event was a kind of Olympic event where we got the schools from both towns coming together and the children from all these schools benefiting from it, where we had the clubs over the two towns.

In order to organise that, we had the local MP on board who helped us to get in connection with the schools. We had the local council on board. That made that it worked and it was effective. To pull these two apart, would, especially us, seriously negatively affect us.

Finally, our work has been enhanced by working with one MP rather than two. To split up this constituency would severely damage our business because we would become very much less efficient and effective. That is it, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, they are really interesting points and again different points. Thank you very much, and it is good to hear the charity viewpoint as well on that. Do we have any questions, any points of clarification from the floor? (No response). I would just like to thank you, and just say we have had sort of half an hour or so of really good local speakers giving us a dimension on the whole issue. Thank you for your time.

MS VERWEIJ: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mr Thompson, we do have a gap now, would you be willing to speak? That is great. In that case, I will call Andrew Thompson. If you go up to the podium there. You can speak from there. Speak nice and close to the mic. There is a pointer and we have a map if you need to point anything out. We can also, interactively, bring up specific wards and that type of thing. If you could open by giving us your name and your address, thank you.

CLLR THOMPSON (Royal Leamington Spa): Okay. It is Andrew Thompson, Flat 1, 11 St Mary's Road, Leamington. I am also a councillor for both the district and for the town for Newbold ward.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: For which ward?

CLLR THOMPSON: For Newbold ward.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

CLLR THOMPSON: So it is in North East Leamington. I represent 4,600 people in that ward, which is one of the reasons why I am here today to sort of contend the proposals that the Boundary Commission have put forward that they are not in the best interests of residents that live within this area.

I think you may have already heard saying, and I imagine that you will continue to hear, that the people of Warwick and Leamington would prefer to have a Warwick and Leamington option where we are kept together and there is a whole variety of reasons for that.

There is potential for a proposal to keep Warwick and Leamington together and to take in a few of the other Warwick District Council wards. You can do that with Radford Semele or with Stoneleigh and Cubbington or with the Arden ward, but there are proposals that could work for that.

The importance of keeping Warwick and Leamington together is because, as a unit, we have a strong community. It is really integral to the area. The two towns have been together in one parliamentary constituency since 1885. In the numerous various different boundary reviews that have taken place over that period, the conclusion has always correctly been that Warwick and Leamington should remain together in the same parliamentary constituency.

I do not think that there is any reason why that anything has changed to stop that this time. We have so many different organisations that operate across the two towns. That is how they set up to represent the residents in both of those areas. Those include faith groups, charities and other voluntary organisations. They really do not recognise any border or boundary between the areas that they currently represent.

We also have many people in the area, in my ward in Leamington, for example, a lot of them will work in Warwick and there will be other people, other residents in Warwick, that work in Leamington. I think the 2011 Census on their travel-to-work patterns showed that 55 per cent of the people in this area work within 5 kilometres of their house, which shows how important the area is to all of the people that live here. They live and work in this area as well.

They deserve parliamentary representation in both of those angles from the same Member of Parliament. It just makes a lot more sense if people are always in the area, both for living and for working, that there is one point of call that they can go to that ultimately helps them out. It shows that the towns are not just a community unit. They are also an economic unit. They work together alongside each other.

Then, you have to just have a look at the other services that there are across both of the towns. If you take, for example, our further education provision, we have Warwickshire College which has its campus in Leamington and really helps many of the students in

both Warwick and Leamington to get further education qualifications that help them into the local workforce in all the sectors that are important in this area.

As well as having their campus in Leamington, they also have one of their other campuses in Warwick that work together. The current proposals that we have in front of us would, in essence, mean that you would have Warwickshire College in Warwick and Warwickshire College in Leamington in the two separate seats. So you are splitting the further education provision that the towns have, even though a student maybe having to go to both campuses.

If you then take it in terms of schools, our schoolchildren that go to primary schools in Leamington or primary schools in Warwick, often go to secondary schools that are located in different towns. An example would be Myton School, which under your proposal would be in the Kenilworth and Leamington seat. There are a lot of students in Warwick that will go to Myton School, particularly in the Budbrooke area and other areas.

We are now proposing that those students would be living under a parliamentary constituency and going into a different one and so they were having to be contacting a different parliamentary representative for any issues that are taking place. Rather than the sort of organic way that the towns have worked together and sort of not really recognised those boundaries or borders and operate across both of them, we are now saying that actually we are going to put a dividing line in between the two.

You can look at other services, the police station and justice courts, that are here. They have integrated services for all the people of both the towns of Warwick and Leamington. You can just go on and on. It has probably been mentioned already, but we are a multicultural area in Warwick and Leamington and we have people of various different faiths.

I know that the Christians in my ward are represented by the Warwick and Leamington Deanery; the Sikhs in my ward, it is the gurdwara sahib, Warwick and Leamington; equally, the Muslims in the area, it is the Masjid and Muslim Community that represents both Warwick and Leamington. The way that even our faith systems are set up is across both of the areas, and yet we are suggesting that we should split these people that worship together politically in these Commission proposals.

Again, public transport, NHS provision, fire service, the co-operation between the schools, the fact that you can travel between the two towns just by walking or cycling or via the canals, and we just have, in essence, a little bridge where you are from one town into the other shows how interlinked the two areas are.

I think if I went and asked many of the residents in my ward where the boundaries between Warwick and Leamington were, you would get different answers from different

people, because they are so blurred where it is. Again, going back to your proposals, you propose that the Warwick Town ward of Myton and Heathcote would go in with Leamington and Kenilworth. You would have Warwick School, you would have a large part of what is considered Warwick, one fifth of Warwick Town Council would be going with Leamington and Kenilworth. It would not be in the Warwick constituency, which would seem slightly draft. Also, within that Myton and Heathcote ward you would have the Leamington Spa Shires Shopping Centre and you would have the Trident Centre.

You would have all sorts of different areas that have that connection to Leamington as well. With the way that the Commission is setting it out in terms of the district boundaries, we have one ward that is both Warwick and Leamington and is so impossible to split. Either way that you put it, people are going to not feel that it is best suited, which sort of, again, emphasises how entangled the two towns are and how the communities have really grown up together as one unit.

I think that I started by saying that there are alternative proposals that could take place and, obviously, Warwickshire has a fair bit of history. Warwick and Leamington currently has the area of New Cubbington in it in terms of our district and town wards and, yet, the Cubbington wards left Warwick and Leamington in 2010. There are areas like Stoneleigh and Cubbington which would be a natural fit with Warwick and Leamington.

Again, I mentioned Radford Semele which sends many of its secondary school students to schools in Warwick and Leamington. That could easily fit and make up the numbers that the Commission requires. Obviously, that all has an impact on the various different areas around Warwick and Leamington as well. We do not exist in isolation.

You have got a bigger picture to actually put together. With my other hat, I work for the University of Warwick which, at the moment, there is a road, Gibbet Hill Road, that goes through the centre of it. On one side, the campus is Coventry South. On the other side, the campus is Kenilworth and Southam. Your proposals, at the moment, do not look to deal with that.

You would still have what is a single community split into two different parliamentary constituencies. Warwick and Leamington, if it stayed together, would have a knock-on effect onto Kenilworth and Coventry. I think the university itself shows that, contrary to what the Commission said, there is a history and there is that organisation between Kenilworth and Coventry - that West Midlands and Warwickshire angle - that could help solve some of the issues and bring communities together that are not currently represented under one parliamentary constituency.

You can just highlight all of the different organisations that exist. The Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise partnership, the Chambers of Commerce, they all exist over that Coventry and Warwickshire relationship. I would urge the Commission that

they should actually look into that a bit more in depth to see how those areas could go together, particularly when we are on the same housing grouping basically.

At the moment, as a District Council we are having to cater for Coventry's housing needs, which is on the border of Kenilworth and Coventry. That is where the proposed site is. It shows that, in the future, there is going to be that greater link between Coventry and Kenilworth anyway. Just to sum up, I think that as a Leamington town and district councillor we are much stronger when we are with Warwick.

There are so many different services and organisations that exist within Leamington that operate across both the towns of Leamington and Warwick and that we should be looking to keep both of them under one parliamentary constituency, taking in areas such as Stoneleigh and Cubbington or Radford Semele. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. If you would just stay there a second. Do we have any questions? We have one sort of question/point of clarification, because it is not a debate at this stage in proceedings. If you just say your name again, please?

MS KERR: Hi. My name is Stephanie Kerr. Hi Andrew. My question was really for the Commission, really. I was curious as to how far or how much, if at all, proposals for new housing in our areas go towards influencing your thoughts on the numbers in sort of question?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have very specific data that we have to work to by law, which is the 2015 data which relates to numbers, numbers of constituents and what have you. There is a clause that some have quoted which says you can claim exceptional circumstances. We have certainly had people point out to us housing opportunities that are up and coming, but there is a reason why the Boundary Commission is meant to look at boundaries every five years and that is part of it. So an awareness because it has been brought to our attention, but that is not going to allow us to include people who do not exist, electors who do not exist.

MS KERR: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response). I was just going to ask you a couple.

CLLR THOMPSON: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I enjoyed listening to you and, again, it is good to hear a different viewpoint. I have been looking at your ward numbers as well. There was just one I just missed, one of your statistics, which was interesting. You said a certain percentage in the area work within five miles of their house.

CLLR THOMPSON: Yes, the 2011 Census, if you look at the figures and combine the various different figures there, it works out at about 55 per cent.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: 55, okay, thank you. I was going to ask you a question about Kenilworth but I cannot remember what it was now, having been distracted there and so I am sure I will raise it again with somebody else. Thank you very much indeed.

CLLR THOMPSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks for your time. Is there anyone in the room at the moment who is expecting to speak or who would like to speak? (No response). Our next speaker is not due until about 7.00, about an hour's time. What I am suggesting we do now is adjourn until for about an hour until 10 to 7. So 6.50 we will reconvene and then we have got a number of people who are down to speak between 7.00 and 8.00. Thank you very much.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, we have four further speakers listed. None have turned up yet, and so I am simply going to adjourn and hope that, as soon as one of them comes, they will speak. We have got one due at 7.00 and then 7.20, 7.30 and 7.40. They do like to keep us here to the bitter end. I am going to adjourn indefinitely really, unless you want to go out, in which case I will put a specific time on it.

After a short break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are now going to end that short adjournment. We do have three more speakers listed. One is in the room. Brian Seymour-Smith, if you are ready, we would love to hear what you have to say. We will need your name and your address and we will be putting a map up of where you want to speak about. If you want to, there is a pointer there.

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: Yes, there is no need. My name is Brian Seymour-Smith. I live in Chaddesley Corbett, do you want the full address?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, please?

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: It is Keepers Cottage, which is Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, DY10 4RE.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: I would like to talk about Meriden but just give you some brief background first before I start, if that is okay. As I say, my name is Brian Seymour-Smith and I work as a political researcher and community organiser for Adrian Bailey MP in West Bromwich West.

Working with Adrian, and also in the Black Country, this has given me a tremendous insight into the value of political leadership and community togetherness. From my experiences, this happens because all strong communities, I believe, need to share common characteristics and attitudes. Strong communities are based on historical, sociological, economic and political belief that local people have a genuine say in the way that they live.

My experiences in the Black Country suggest to me that this is exactly what happens here and that is why I believe that political boundaries are so important. However, tonight, I am here to talk about the proposals to the boundary changes in Meriden constituency in the borough of Solihull, a constituency which is actually very close to my heart.

The reason is that in 1997 I was honoured to stand as the Labour Party candidate for Meriden and, after spending nearly two and a half solid years and non-stop community and political campaigning in the constituency, I think it is fair to say that it is a constituency that I have grown to know extremely well.

Having read carefully the Boundary Commission and Labour Party proposals, and based on my own experiences, I feel I can, therefore, offer a significant contribution to these discussions and I hope that you will kindly take these into consideration when you reach your final proposals.

As you will be aware, the current Meriden constituency is a very diverse constituency. For example, in areas such as Knowle and Dorridge, Meriden contains some of the wealthiest people in the West Midlands and property prices are also some of the highest in the West Midlands. Knowle is a beautiful, affluent, historical town which dates back to pre-Tudor times, boasting many historical buildings and offers a vibrant display of physical and economical wealth.

So too does Dorridge, again in the south of the Meriden constituency, which again is historical and wealthy and also came into its own thanks to the development of the railways in the 1800s. Then, by contrast, in the north of the constituency, areas such as Smith's Wood and Chelmsey Wood grew up as a Birmingham City Council housing estate overspill in the mid-1960s.

Chelmsey Wood is located near Birmingham International Airport and National Exhibition Centre and lies only eight miles east of Birmingham City Centre. A great deal

of investment and time has gone into the area. However, for local people the challenges remain mainly the same: Degrees of poverty; educational challenges; housing problems; economic depression; unemployment; antisocial behaviour, and environmental issues as well.

Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that local elected borough and parish representatives, together with community leaders, have worked tirelessly to overcome these problems and I do think a positive boundary change would prove highly beneficial.

Briefly, before I come back to Meriden, I note in the case of the Solihull constituency that the Labour Party proposes Solihull constituency should stay as it previously was constituted because of the size of the current constituency itself, and that is why I support this. I have spent many hours at council meetings in Solihull and so I think I know a little bit about the area.

However, in the case of the neighbour, of Meriden, I think it is vital that changes do take place because of the make-up of the constituency and, when concluded, certain criteria should have come into play, I believe, in that decision. First of all, that all residents of Meriden, north and south, feel that the changes are a positive attribute which provide beneficial and personal and economical social needs for whatever they desire, that the changes reflect the area in which they live and that their own political representation is not compromised by those changes but, in fact, has an opportunity to be enhanced.

I certainly think with the proposals that I would like to put forward that that might well be the case. Therefore, based on the Labour Party proposals and my own experience, I believe that Meriden constituency would benefit from the following boundary changes. First of all, in the south of the constituency, I understand that there are suggestions that Knowle and Dorridge should merge with seats in Coventry.

This, I think, would be totally non-beneficial to the voters of Knowle and Dorridge. The political, environmental, social and economic make-up of both these areas is completely different and would lead to a total mismatch. Knowle is strongly orientated towards Dorridge and Hockley Heath and its neighbouring area, Blythe ward. Because of their make-up, these wards I feel, should, if possible, stay together.

They clearly belong to Solihull borough but, again, I accept that this cannot be combined because the existing Solihull constituency is obviously far too big. Instead, it makes to me sense to add them to wards to the south in Stratford-upon-Avon constituency, Henley-in-Arden ward and other nearby similar wards of Stratford district.

I believe that the Knowle and Dorridge, for example, would fit almost like a glove, if you like, into the nearby Stratford-upon-Avon constituency. Apart from the political beliefs, I also believe all of these wards would thrive still further from the historical touristic connections which the famous Stratford-upon-Avon constituency name offers.

However, in the centre and the north it is different. For stability, for remaining part of Meriden should remain, I believe, as a political constituency in itself and not be lost. This would mean Meriden ward, for example, Bickenhill, Castle Bromwich, Chelmsey Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge and Smith's Wood would be kept together in one constituency.

However, what I would do is I would support the strong Initial Proposals by the Commission that the nearby Sheldon ward in Birmingham is incorporated into Meriden. The two wards are next to each other, as I know from having canvassed the streets, are very similar in make-up and would make a good fit.

Again, I would strongly support the proposals which suggest that the Coleshill North, Coleshill South and Water Orton from North Warwickshire District wards are also incorporated into a new Meriden constituency. To me, logically, Coleshill North, Coleshill South and Water Orton boundaries are very similar in make-up to Castle Bromwich in the very north of the Meriden constituency. Again, I believe that the fit would be perfect and, also, would cause minimal political and social disruption.

In conclusion, then, may I thank you for taking the time to listen to my suggestions and I sincerely hope you feel that this has been a positive outcome and may I also wish you every success with your review. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any questions from the floor, points of clarification needed? (No response). It was quite a lot you got through there, but I think I am clear on what you are planning or what you are suggesting. Just one bit of clarification, so you are suggesting that Sheldon come out of Birmingham?

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: Yes, indeed. Sorry, my hearing is a little bit deaf, sorry, I do struggle.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, that was the only question. Sheldon comes out of Birmingham then?

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: That is correct, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is very echoey in here.

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: Sheldon is very, very similar to Kingshurst, which is right on its border. In fact, when you go down the high street they run from one into the other and I think it would be a natural suggestion to have the two of them together.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great, thank you very much. Well, if

there are no further questions, we will move on to our next speaker.

MR SEYMOUR-SMITH: Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks for your time. It is really important that you came along, and great to get all these different views on different ideas, all of which will be considered. Our next speaker is Mr Mark Weissenberger, please. Again, if you could give us your name and address, thanks.

MR WEISSENBERGER: Thank you. You will be pleased to know that what I am going to say is going to be much, much shorter than the chap - I am sorry I do not know who you are, earlier - less wide-ranging and not as well-researched, because I have come straight from work to make just a couple of very granular points.

My name is Mark Weissenberger. My full address is 22 All Saints Road in Warwick. I am a Chair of Examiners at OCR Exam Board. I have literally come as a member of the public who lives in Warwick and has lived for many years in both Warwick and Leamington.

My point is brief, very specific to this ward and this district only, really. I have not looked at your wider concerns, but what I do understand is that the proposal is to split the existing constituency of Warwick and Leamington which, you have probably heard many many times already, to those that live here seems slightly bizarre.

I appreciate, and I have read some of the background, the reason as to why this is going on, but if I can just focus on Warwick and Leamington. Compared to some other connected constituencies that exist at the moment, certainly around Warwickshire, as you will be well aware, it is one contiguous town, not like some others where there is any gap between the two.

We have one district council obviously, as many places do, and completely shared services. To talk from a more community aspect, I am very heavily involved in sporting clubs and communities, amongst other things, and the pool of people is drawn from across the two.

I know that is not directly relevant to the constituency per se, but the MP has to represent the interests of a particular area. I struggle to think of any one area, whether it is social, community based or our services and facilities, that are not shared between the two towns because of the geography, if nothing else, really.

Historically, we have a lot of links. I went to Myton School between the two towns. The nature of the two is such that a lot of people manage to live their entire lives within the same area. To split Warwick - I am sorry, I have come straight from work, I cannot remember the new proposals actually - and Leamington into separate constituencies,

compared to some others that I have seen that I saw some sense to, I just wanted to register my voice that I just think it is a massively retrograde step.

An MP representing Warwick on the one hand and Warwick and Leamington on the other would have to talk to each other all the time, because they would be dealing with the same community of people and I just cannot see the sense in it. Maybe around the edges there are things that can be shaved off in terms of the population side of it, I do not know, but I just wanted to make that plea from a local resident.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do not go away quite yet. Actually, it is a case of adding on, I think, because the numbers are quite low. It is really important that you come along. For us, we love to hear from local residents. How often in a day, in a week, I do not know, would you be crossing between the two towns?

MR WEISSENBERGER: Every day of my life and, at the weekend, multiple times. I live on All Saints Road, you do not know it but it is about 300 yards from Leamington, but there is no difference. If you took the sign off, it is the same town. To me, it is the same town and so it feels bizarre to put a wall in the middle of it, really. I do not know how anyone else feels that lives locally?

Whilst there is a feel of what Warwick is and what Leamington is, do not get me wrong, the spirit of the towns is quite different, as I live and the services I use I walk to Warwick, I walk to Leamington and I do not treat them any differently. If we go for a walk, we walk from one town to the other along the canal. Yes, I cannot say very much more than that, really; whereas Kenilworth is slightly over there, Stratford is slightly over there, Leek Wooton etc., but these two towns are to me one town as a resident, really.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anybody want to ask for any point of clarification about that? (No response). Really important that we heard you today and so appreciative that you have come straight from work. Thank you; really good. Is Jess Dunncliff here? Do you know if she is coming or not?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (inaudible).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: All right, maybe something has happened. Thank you very much. In which case, could we hear from John Holland, please? Again, if we could have your name and address, please?

CLLR HOLLAND (Warwickshire CC): John Holland, 55 West Street, Warwick. Good evening. I am John Holland. I am elected to Warwickshire County Council as the councillor for Warwick West and, also, Warwick Town Council as councillor for Saltisford ward and have served in the past as mayor of Warwick and, thus, here to represent the views of many thousands of my residents.

I have two points that I would like to particularly make. The first is that we are very keen indeed that the town of Warwick should stay on its existing town boundary and being split between two parliamentary constituencies will create, I think, quite a number of problems.

The second point is that Warwick and Leamington, obviously, are very adjacent towns with a lot of interchangeability between the two towns and it is quite important to us that Warwick and Leamington stay in the same parliamentary constituency.

If I can explore my first point first. Our discussions in Warwick Town Council, which represents all of the residents within the town of Warwick, are very clear that we wish to protect our town boundary. The proposals involve four fifths of our town being in one constituency, the Warwick and Stratford, and one fifth of the town being in the Leamington and Kenilworth constituency. That will clearly give us quite a number of problems because we have developed, over many years, a good relationship with our Member of Parliament.

Mr White, the current MP, recently came to the Town Council to talk about a number of issues, unitary authorities and so on. His predecessor, Mr Plaskitt, used to come many times and presented long service awards to councillors when they were retiring. We really need to develop a relationship with one Member of Parliament.

We have a number of historic charities in Warwick who are restricted by their trust deeds to giving funds to people within the town of Warwick. I am a trustee of one of those, the Warwick Dispensary Trust Charity, and we do need to comply with the requirements of the Charity Commissioners to work within that one town boundary. I really would submit that we need Warwick to be in one constituency only.

My second point is that, on this side of the River Avon, the Myton and Heathcote ward, which clearly has a lot of links with Leamington, having a very long boundary, it seems sensible that Warwick and Leamington stay together. The schools serve children from both towns.

Myton School in Warwick recruits quite a number of children from Leamington. The primary children from Warwick go to schools in Leamington or Whitnash. Schools are now very clearly a government service and there is very little role for the local council.

Again, if we are dealing with one Member of Parliament, life will be a great deal easier and smoother than if we have to work out which Member of Parliament we need to take our problems to. That is just simply the way the area works. We have been Warwick and Leamington constituency for well over a hundred years, and to change something I think you need a positive reason to make life better and in this case it would not.

Actually, the position of our residents is better if Warwick and Leamington work together. I have looked carefully at various proposals and I can see the Labour Party proposal making a lot of sense. I would, therefore, submit that that would be an alternative which I would ask you to consider and enable us to stay as the current Warwick and Leamington constituency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We have actually had two Labour Party counter-proposals, I should let you know: One wider one, I believe, and one more local from two local MPs. I will just leave you with that. Are there any questions or points of clarification?

MR RILEY: Ian Riley, just making the point that you have had one Labour Party submission and you have had a separate submission from two Members of Parliament acting in their own capacity.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So one Labour submission and one from two Members of Parliament in their own capacity. All right, thank you, so we understand that. And you were referring to the Labour one?

CLLR HOLLAND: Ma'am, I may have been trying to be too helpful. My main concern, as I say, is that Warwick Town stays as one in one parliamentary constituency and that we do not get four fifths of the town in one area and one fifth in another. My second concern is that Warwick and Leamington are very interchangeable in many ways in public services and, particularly, those provided by the Government. I was perhaps being more helpful by suggesting an alternative. Let us just stick to what I am asking for.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We like alternatives as well but, yes, we have plenty on the table. Just one further question, which is, of those two things that you want, which is Warwick to be kept whole and then Warwick and Leamington to be kept as one constituency, is there one of those two things which is more important than the other?

CLLR HOLLAND: They are both very important. As to which is the more important, I am not sure that I can say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I just wondered if you had a view?

CLLR HOLLAND: They are two separate issues, but both of them are very important to us in Warwick and to my residents.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you so much for coming along. That is really good. Do we have any further questions on that? (No response). It is really good that we have heard you and we will absolutely give it due consideration.

Thank you for your time in coming so late this evening.

CLLR HOLLAND: And thank you for listening.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just one more check to see if Jess Dunnicliff is here? (No response). In that case, we do have no more speakers listed. She was listed about half an hour and so I think something has happened there. We have got a pretty full list tomorrow, quite a lot of people, so we will reconvene at 9 o'clock here tomorrow morning and we will run between 9.00 and 5.00. Thank you so much for your time today.

Adjourned until 9.00 am on Friday 11 November 2016

A

MR ASHMAN, 36, 37
CLLR ATKINSON, 68, 69

B

CLLR BLUNDELL, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 34, 47, 48, 49
MR BRITTIN, 59, 60
MRS BUTCHER, 73, 74

C

MR CLAYTON, 10, 11
MS CONNOLLY, 34, 36, 37
DR COWDEN, 24, 26
MR CROWTHER, 70, 73
MR JIM CUNNINGHAM MP, 29, 30, 33

F

CLLR FARRELL, 49

H

MR HALL, 14, 19, 24
DR HENDERSON, 54, 55, 56, 57
CLLR HOBBS, 43, 45
CLLR HOLLAND, 101, 103, 104
MS HOWE, 76, 77, 85, 86

K

MS KERR, 83, 84, 85, 86, 95

L

LORD HAYWARD, 16, 17, 18, 33, 48

M

MR MACKAY, 56, 58
MR MALLE, 57, 58, 59
MR MURRAY, 11, 36, 64, 69

O

CLLR O'BOYLE, 45, 47, 48, 49

R

MR RAWCLIFFE, 66, 67

MR RILEY, 63, 103
MR GEOFFREY ROBINSON MP, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37
CLLR ROBINSON, 64, 65, 66

S

CLLR SAINT, 74, 76, 78
MR SEYMOUR-SMITH, 96, 99, 100
CLLR SLEIGH, 51, 54
CLLR ST JOHN, 37, 39, 40
MR STERNBERG, 40, 43
MRS STIRLING, 60, 61, 63, 64

T

CLLR TAYLOR, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 33
MR TESSIER, 2
THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37,
39, 40, 43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84,
85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 95, 96, 99, 100, 101, 103, 104
CLLR THOMPSON, 91, 95, 96
MRS TOPHAM, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83
MR TURNER, 26, 28
MR TUSTAIN, 77, 78, 82, 83

U

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER, 9, 49, 81, 86, 101

V

MS VERWEIJ, 89, 90, 91

W

MR WEBER, 5, 8, 9, 10
MR WEISSENBERGER, 100, 101
MR WESSON, 86, 88, 89