

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

COUNTY BUILDINGS, MARTIN STREET, STAFFORD, ST16 2LH

ON

TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY TWO

Before:

Ms Margaret Gilmore, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

**Transcribed from audio by W B Gurney & Sons LLP
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Time noted: 9.09 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning gentlemen, welcome again to the second day of our hearing in Stafford and it is lovely, as I said yesterday, to be here. We will get going straight away with our first speaker and we would love you, sir, to give us your name and your address.

MR CANTRILL: (Conservative Party) Thank you very much. My name is James Cantrill and my address is Red Hill Farm, Stone Road, Stafford. Just to add some context I am a former Stafford Borough Councillor and I was the agent for Jeremy Lefroy the Stafford MP in 2010 and 2015 and I continue to be on his staff.

First thing, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation, I hope to start this morning's proceedings on a positive note and that is to welcome and support the Boundary Commission's proposals for the Stafford constituency, Constituency Number 36. I think that the proposals are very sensible for the following reasons. Yesterday we heard a number of submissions proposing the splitting of wards and I am certainly not passing any comment on those proposals but I am pleased to note that the proposals for Stafford would actually unify two wards namely Seighford and Church Eaton ward and Milwich ward. Both of these wards are currently split across the Stafford and Stone constituencies and their formation came out of the redrawing of the Stafford Borough Council boundaries, reducing the number of councillors in preparation for the 2015 local and general elections. And having been involved in organising those elections last year, I concur with the Commission that splitting wards between constituencies should only be in exceptional circumstances, although I acknowledge that it is sometimes unavoidable.

In my experience split wards cause confusion for the electorate and in practical terms, extra costs for those people contesting the seats and hoping to spread their message. In both these cases the impact on democracy is not beneficial. The part of the Seighford and Church Eaton ward that is proposed to move from Stone to Stafford would see the village of Bradley move back to Stafford following a short vacation since 2010, plus the village of Haughton and Church Eaton. These villages, along with the ward of Gnosall and Woodseaves, which the Commission also proposes to move into Stafford from Stone, sit within Stafford borough and enjoy a huge variety of links with Stafford town, whether these be the fact that local primary schools feed into Stafford high schools, the links between local parish councils, churches, sports clubs or the fact that the local doctors' surgeries are part of the Stafford and Surrounds CCG, it is clear that in terms of local links all roads lead to Stafford. In fact on a regular basis the MP for Stafford receives calls and correspondence from residents in Gnosall, Haughton, Bradley, etcetera, who assume that they are already in the Stafford constituency.

I could go on, the links are so numerous, but suffice to say that the proposals for Gnosall and Woodseaves ward and the Seighford and Church Eaton ward are plainly common sense. Geographically, if we look at the actual map of where those wards link in to the Stafford constituency, and I have got the pointer of power here at

the moment (indicating), we can see that Gnosall and Woodseaves ward is there in comparison to Stafford town and down here we have got Bradley, Church Eaton and Haughton. So actually in terms of Bradley – as the crow flies – in its current constituency, the crow would have to fly over Stafford to get to Stone and for those of us who are not crows the local road network would require folks in Bradley, Church Eaton and Gnosall at the moment to drive round the Stafford road network to get up to Stone here, the current constituency they are in. So also, the point I am making is geographically along the Shropshire border, which is along here, it makes geographical sense for those wards to be linked in with the Stafford constituency.

In terms of the Milwich ward, which is up here, the proposals would see the village of Salt return to Stafford, also having been moved out in 2010 and the village of Weston move into Stafford. The village of Weston has similar links to those that I have mentioned for Gnosall, Haughton, Bradley, etcetera. The south boundary of the ward, which actually goes all the way along here, the south boundary of the ward runs along what is known as the Beaconside Road, right on the edge of Stafford town itself. Within the Milwich ward is MOD Stafford, which is around here, Stafford's Beacon Barracks. The Staffordshire Technology Park and the Staffordshire County Showground are also within that ward, all facilities which are linked directly with Stafford town itself. The technology park alone houses a large variety of businesses who use it as their Stafford base, including a local Stafford Housing Association, the Stafford branch of the National Farmers Union and even, within there, a local church which serves communities actually within Stafford town. Clearly there are no special circumstances that I can foresee for keeping the ward split between two constituencies and certainly none for moving MOD Stafford and many Stafford businesses into another constituency right on the edge of the town, or of course, for bringing the border of a constituency right up to the border of the next town. I therefore strongly support that proposal to move the Milwich ward wholly into the Stafford constituency.

I would also just like to make the point, moving to South Staffordshire, to support the proposal by the Commission to keep the South Staffordshire District Council ward of Wheaton Aston, Bishops Wood and Lapley with the Stafford constituency, not just because it would keep the South Staffordshire seat unchanged, and obviously leaving things unchanged where possible is normally welcomed, but because the residents of South Staffordshire who were introduced into the Stafford seat in 1997 have become a greatly valued part of the constituency. Links that existed have grown stronger and recent developments have increased employment links. The previous proposals of three or four years ago looked at moving Wheaton Aston, Bishops Wood and Lapley into the South Staffordshire constituency, which I was disappointed by, I therefore welcome this proposal to leave matters unchanged.

Clearly I am disappointed that it is proposed to move the Haywood and Hixon ward into the Lichfield constituency, however, as others said yesterday, if I could offer you a solution that would not cause significant knock-on impact to other seats or break through the county boundary, I would. But I cannot, and therefore in conclusion I

welcome and support the Commission's proposals for the Stafford constituency as practical and common sense.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any points of clarification? No. You absolutely do not have to answer this – are you across --- there has been one, at least one, who has put up a plan for changing some of the wards around a little bit. Are you across that at all?

MR CANTRILL: I am not aware of that, no.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Fine, thank you.

MR CANTRILL: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, it was really clear and really interesting and we love it when people come and give us support because it helps us balance the pros and cons and helps us to get to the right decision.

MR CANTRILL: Okay, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Okay, we are going to take a short recess, our next person is due to speak at 9.30 am and so we will just talk amongst ourselves and when they arrive we will then take their presentation.

After a short break

Time noted: 9.30 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are now resuming and I would love to call our next speaker, Mr Philip Atkins. Thank you and Mr Atkins when you get to the podium we would love to hear your name and address.

CLLR ATKINS: (Stafford Borough Council) Philip Atkins, Abbeyfields, Rocester, Uttoxeter, Staffs. I am a county councillor and leader of the county council. All I would like to say is the county council had a debate at the last council meeting on a Notice of Motion that I put forward. There were four points, which I cannot remember at the moment, but they were basically that we thought that you had done a good job at allocating the boundaries across the county, that they were a fair representation and bearing in mind that you have had to work within the remit of what parliament has decided, that there is one less MP, that it covers most of the communities that we have in the county.

But we are well aware that with the referendum vote and likelihood of there being no members of the European Parliament that with one less MP in the county that the workload of MPs and county councillors and borough and district councillors will increase. That is not a plea for more money for MPs or councillors or the like but it is

that organisations should bear in mind that they will need additional support on case work and the like.

And so that is basically what I am here to say. There was a vote taken at the council, the motion was passed and there were no votes against it. There were some abstentions. Oh yes, there was one part in the motion about the names in the constituencies, I noticed that there were three with no boundary changes whatsoever, the South Staffordshire, Cannock and Burton, but there are some of the names could reflect Staffordshire more, or the communities that they represent. So, for example, the Burton constituency could be Burton and Uttoxeter or Uttoxeter and Burton and the Tamworth constituency could be South East Staffordshire or South East Staffordshire and Tamworth. So it is a matter of just making sure that the names of the constituencies recognise the communities that the MP will represent.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much that was very straightforward and useful. Any comments or points of clarification? Yes, we have one here.

MR THOMAS: Neil Thomas from Doxey, Stafford. I spoke yesterday. Would Cllr Atkins agree that the proposed West Staffordshire constituency might better be called North West Staffordshire?

CLLR ATKINS: That is an interesting one. I think that the name --- well, it is on the west side but it could quite easily be the North West Staffordshire as South East Staffordshire, all I am saying is, and all the council were saying is, the names of the constituencies [should] reflect the area that it represents. So the answer is yes actually.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have had some evidence from people saying that when you start adding lots of names it gets a little bit complicated but clearly that is not a view that your council share.

CLLR ATKINS: Having spoken to people from the Cannock constituency, which is a good example, where Cannock and Cannock Chase is a recognised area, so Cannock Chase is a good name for that area because if you had Cannock and Rugeley you would upset Hednesford, and then you would end up with a --- we have got one division that has got an absolutely long name, Great Wyrley, Cheslyn Hay and Essington, and then it becomes ridiculous, so there is a key that it should not be too long but it should identify the area. Cannock Chase, I think, should stay as Cannock Chase.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, and you say you had a vote on it, can you tell me the make-up of the council?

MR ATKINS: The council is 34 Conservative, we have got one UKIP now and four Independents, from the top of my head, and then the remainder are Labour, so that would put them at 23.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And can you give me an idea of --- you say there were some abstentions, a vague idea?

CLLR ATKINS: The Labour group abstained from the vote but they did not vote against it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, okay. Thank you very much indeed, that is good for me and very clear and very useful to us, thank you.

CLLR ATKINS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have no speakers now until 11.30 am unless somebody walks in, so we will adjourn until 10.30 am and then likely adjourn again until sometime after that so just to keep you posted that is where we are at at the moment. Thank you.

After a short break

Time noted: 10.30 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning again everybody and welcome back. We are ending that adjournment, reconvening, and in your own good time our next speaker is Dr John Wilcock. So if you take the stage there, as it were, you have your laser pointer and if you start by giving us – because we need this formally – your name and your address please.

DR WILCOCK: I am Dr John Wilcock, 22, Kingsley Close, Stafford in the Manor ward. That is where I live. I am addressing you this morning because I regard myself as an industrial archaeologist, essentially, and local historian. I give lots of lectures on local history and archaeology around the region. Besides that I am a computer scientist, so I have served seven years in the computer industry and another 27 years' teaching computing at the local Staffordshire University. So some of my questions are going to be about computing, I am afraid. Can I start off on that? Okay, it is a question then; has Central Place Theory been considered?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: This is where we are collecting the evidence so really we cannot answer that. If there is anything on process then Glenn is sitting here beside me and can help me but this is very much --- we are so restricted by the law on what we can do.

DR WILCOCK: Yes, I do understand that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So that one I cannot answer.

DR WILCOCK: Let me explain what Central Place Theory is. It is that people naturally consider where they live and their population centre so that a good question

to ask them would be 'Where do you go shopping?' okay? So, if when they go shopping that is their central place, so the central places are, of course, connected into a network by the major roads usually and then we can put a sort of irregular polygon around the central place and the boundary between one central place and another central place is usually about half way between them on a major road and that defines the region. So, for instance, if people say 'Oh, we stop in Stafford' well Stafford then is their central place. Somewhere down to the south, then, somewhere around Penkridge, the question becomes rather different because some people will shop in Wolverhampton, so they consider that Wolverhampton is their central place. So the problems with Central Place Theory are the boundaries, there are always problems on the boundaries of Central Place Theory. However, these regions that we use for Boundary Commission should be aligned to Central Place Theory. So that is that.

Where does the information come from? Does it come from a geographical information system? Does it come from a geographical information system?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: These questions, which are about --- let me explain, I am the Assistant Commissioner, I come in here with a completely open book, so I have not been party to drawing up these plans, that is what gives me my independence, and another colleague who will go through it.

DR WILCOCK: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Glenn is part of a much wider team who have been part of drawing them and the processes used is something he could discuss with you outside but it is not really relevant to what I am hearing, so these, I assume, are theoretical questions?

DR WILCOCK: They are theoretical questions, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And also rhetorical questions?

DR WILCOCK: Yes, of course they are, but nevertheless, yes, from a cultural point of view, from a historical point of view the boundaries should reflect Central Place Theory, there is no doubt about that. So, there are some anomalies, then, in these proposals for boundary changes which I would like to look [at] in some detail, for instance. So, would you like me to look at Stoke-on-Trent first, yes?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely.

DR WILCOCK: We will look at Stoke-on-Trent North, then, so that is number 38 on the map. Okay, right, so, yes, well Stoke-on-Trent clearly is a cultural entity, it is the Potteries industry, of which I have given many lectures, so I know all about these regions and they should be a cohesive whole. From that point of view, if we look at the map, Number 38, on the north west we have Kidsgrove (indicating), I used to live in Kidsgrove when I worked for ICL. I never considered Kidsgrove to be part of

Newcastle-under-Lyme. It is very much more aligned to Tunstall and Burslem. So, really the people who live in Kidsgrove consider themselves to be part of The Potteries. So that is the first thing; Kidsgrove as a whole should be part of Stoke-on-Trent North and not part of Newcastle-under-Lyme. That is another thing.

The same sort of arguments apply to Brown Edge and to Endon. Brown Edge and Endon, these are on the north east part. They should be part of Stoke-on-Trent North, that is Endon and Brown Edge. Yes, okay, this is it here. Endon is here, Brown Edge is here and this is Kidsgrove here. So, Kidsgrove there should be Stoke-on-Trent North, culturally, also Endon and Brown Edge should be part of Stoke-on-Trent North, culturally. That is that.

The other boundaries are pretty good actually except that I would take Etruria and Hanley out of Stoke-on-Trent North. That is because The Potteries area has six major towns in it. Tunstall and Burslem group very well together in the north and I would add Kidsgrove to that so if we added Kidsgrove, Tunstall and Burslem they all ought to be in Stoke-on-Trent North.

Well, what should be in Stoke-on-Trent South then? Well, the remainder of The Potteries towns, which are Stoke, Hanley, Fenton and Longton, all those really should be part of Stoke-on-Trent South. These are on the south then, it is difficult to see the boundaries on this big map. Could we have Stoke-on-Trent South? I have got it in front of me here. Yes, I cannot really read it, oh, we are here (indicating) are we not? So Longton should be --- that is better, can we bring it a little bit further south? No, a bit further north sorry, yes, Longton and Fenton should be part of Stoke-on-Trent South in my view so that would balance taking out Kidsgrove on the north if we had Etruria and Hanley in the south. These outlying villages to the east, such as Endon ought to be part of Stoke-on-Trent, as I said earlier, and also the villages down to the south east, such as Blythe Bridge, should be part of Stoke-on-Trent South and an area called Blurton should also be in Stoke-on-Trent South. That is my view anyway. I think that probably copes with Stoke-on-Trent area.

Can we now look at the south western area of Stoke-on-Trent down towards --- to the left, that is, to the west of the D-road, really, to the west of the D-road we have Newcastle-under-Lyme, yes, we have Newcastle-under-Lyme here, that should be totally separate from The Potteries because it is a cultural entity and much older town altogether. Now, where would the boundary be between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Potteries, well roughly the line of the D-road, so that is pretty good, as is already on the map. Trentham should be part of Stoke-on-Trent South, really, because it is a residential area which should be in Stoke-on-Trent South. Also out to the south east we have Blythe Bridge, as I mentioned earlier, that should be part of Stoke-on-Trent South.

Okay, so we have covered Stoke-on-Trent North, I think, and Stoke-on-Trent South, can we look at the Staffordshire Moorlands now? Staffordshire Moorlands is 37, map Number 37. It is pretty good, actually, except that I would take Brown Edge and Endon out of Staffordshire Moorlands and put it with Stoke-on-Trent North and we

have already mentioned Kidsgrove should be in Stoke-on-Trent North. Otherwise I think that is quite good. Oh, Blythe Bridge and Blurton should be in Stoke-on-Trent South, culturally. That is the best I can do with Staffordshire Moorlands.

So we have looked at Stoke-on-Trent North, Stoke-on-Trent South, we have looked at Staffordshire Moorlands. Can we look now at the south western area which is --- what map is that? Yes, West Staffordshire, that is the one, West Staffordshire, 49. Yes, 49, here we are. We can see Stoke-on-Trent (indicating), I would propose the boundary changes that I had had before, that the D-road is the boundary between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, as it were. But, I would put Madeley in with Newcastle-under-Lyme, culturally. I think that is about all, really. I think Madeley should be in along with Newcastle-under-Lyme along with Keele, along with Keele, that is correct. Keele should certainly be in this area that we are talking about at present.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can I just ask you a question?

DR WILCOCK: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you mind [me] interrupting? If you did that there are two wards that we have got above Madeley, what would your suggestion be with those two?

DR WILCOCK: Halmerend and Audley and Bignall End?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

DR WILCOCK: Right, these are all mining areas, they really go with Madeley. But, on the other hand, it is a coal area, very old coal area, so it has links with Silverdale, for instance, in the Newcastle-under-Lyme area. So if Silverdale is in with Newcastle-under-Lyme, well so should Madeley and Halmerend and Audley and Bignall End, they should also be in that grouping from a cultural point of view. I think really that completes most of my thoughts on the area. I hope that has been interesting.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very! Do not go away.

DR WILCOCK: I know that there is restrictions on the number of inhabitants and so on, between 70,000 and 80,000, so there has to be a lot of juggling around, I do understand that, but these cultural areas should not be isolated from each other in my view.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, absolutely fascinating and really interesting to hear from you. Of course we have so many different counter-proposals, we must take account of all of them. Is there anybody who wishes to raise any points of clarification? Yes, and again, your name.

MR FARRELLY: (Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme) Yes, I am Paul Farrelly, the Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme. There are quite a few points of clarification I could ask, particularly about knock-on effects and numbers, but I suspect you have not been through all the numbers in any great detail.

DR WILCOCK: I have looked at the numbers, I tried to juggle the figures!

MR FARRELLY: So I will not put you at a disadvantage on that but the Commissioners will be well aware of them. Let me ask just two points of clarification; are you aware that in all the boundary changes that have happened over the various reviews that – and certainly I found this time when we were advancing arguments – that the Moorlands need not necessarily be contiguous with its own district, but actually the area of Brown Edge and Endon, to which you referred to as ‘culturally’ part of Stoke North, defines itself as not being Stoke?

DR WILCOCK: Some people might, I think, but culturally, you know, from a historical and coal mining point of view, particularly, they are part of the North Staffordshire coalfield.

MR FARRELLY: Yes, we had coalmines everywhere across Newcastle and Stoke-on-Trent and Biddulph and everywhere.

DR WILCOCK: I certainly would regard Endon as being part of Stoke.

MR FARRELLY: Could I ask --- just, the second question is that are you aware that in the Kidsgrove area there are five wards?

DR WILCOCK: Yes.

MR FARRELLY: And they do face in different directions.

DR WILCOCK: They do.

MR FARRELLY: But are you aware of within which local authority those wards sit?

DR WILCOCK: I am not sure, exactly, because I have not lived there since 1969, but I was a resident of Kidsgrove between '61 and '69 so I do know the area quite well.

MR FARRELLY: Okay, well since 1974 they have been part of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council.

DR WILCOCK: Yes I know, many people comment that that was wrong, that Kidsgrove should not be aligned with Newcastle-under-Lyme but should be part of Stoke-on-Trent North. But I agree, there have been boundary changes and I am not particularly aware of any modern changes there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do we have any further points?

MR LEWIS: I am Martin Lewis. Can I ask you just a general question about the West Staffordshire proposed constituency?

DR WILCOCK: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you --- we need points of clarification so if we could do it through the Chair that would be great.

DR WILCOCK: West Staffordshire? 49 is it? Yes, okay, yes.

MR LEWIS: Do you see some internal coherence to the proposed West Staffordshire constituency in that it is predominantly rural?

DR WILCOCK: It is predominantly rural but we have got, at present we have got on this boundary change here we have got Eccleshall in it, that is correct is it not, and Stone? If you asked people in Stone 'Are you aligned with Stoke-on-Trent or are you aligned with Stafford?' they would say 'Neither'. It is a residential area so it is correct that Stone should be out of the Stoke-on-Trent area and, indeed, out of the Stafford area as well, so it makes sense to align it with Eccleshall. This is a rural area. As I pointed out earlier, the wards to the north here, that is Loggerheads, Madeley, Halmerend, Audley and Bignall End, they are coal mining areas, particularly Audley and Bignall End. Halmerend and Madeley had a lot of old mines in it and so it should really be part of Stoke-on-Trent, in my view that is. So, we are left with this new boundary for West Staffordshire which includes mostly Stone, Swynnerton and Eccleshall and parts of Loggerheads, perhaps, which in my view is culturally correct.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any further points? I think you have covered one of mine between you there so thank you for that. Just two further points from me, one is that obviously we are restricted by numbers and it is an extent to which people have to look at numbers and we have to look at numbers. Everything you say we will absolutely take into account. On the issues of process Glenn would be very happy to take five minutes of your time afterwards and go through that with you if you are happy with that?

DR WILCOCK: Yes, yes I am, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And we could do that immediately, and I think we are now adjourning until 11.25 am.

DR WILCOCK: Yes, in my view the idea behind Central Place Theory ought to be well regarded. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

After a short break

Time noted: 11.30 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back ladies and gentlemen, and we are now resuming our hearing and if you are happy to go a few minutes early, Sheridan Tranter is our next speaker, that would be great. And Mr Tranter we will need your name and your address before you start, and if you want to point at maps and things you are very welcome. So, name and address please.

CLLR TRANTER: (Hartlebury Parish Council) Okay, my name is Sheridan and Tranter, I am also the Chair Hartlebury Parish Council. I actually reside at St Martins, Old Worcester Road, Hartlebury, which is actually in the county of Worcestershire, okay? Right, okay, Hartlebury Parish Council is independent of any political persuasion and today I will be speaking on behalf of the residents of Hartlebury, not just on behalf of the parish council. Our MP, Nigel Huddleston, is supportive of our concerns. A well-attended public meeting was held in the parish hall on 27 October, parishioners were unanimous in their support that we should not move into the parliamentary boundary of Wyre Forest. What this will mean to Hartlebury, to change the boundary would be totally to the detriment of Hartlebury Parish, since Wye Forest have stated in their last council meeting of 28 September, that they should change the local boundary from Wychavon to Wyre Forest, again I put supporting documents with this to help. By changing the local boundary from Wychavon District Council to Wyre Forest, domestic rates will substantially increase. Basically, it is being seen by Wychavon District Council as a land-grab, again, I have got supporting documents. Wychavon is well run and is actually the most efficient district council in Worcestershire.

If you have got the PowerPoint, have you actually got a clicker for it? If you carry on going through, because basically this is information that we gave to the residents of the amount, of the values, so that they are actually aware of the values for the actual boundary change, because --- carry on down, because this is --- if you can go back one again, please, because, again, this is something which I need to talk about, because with the boundary change it may actually change our county division as well because our county councillor has mentioned a concern as regards his division if we move into Wyre Forest and also, again, the district council would change. But I will carry on reading --- other district councils should basically emulate Wychavon in the way in which it functions.

Another concern is that Mark Garnier, MP for Wyre Forest, has endorsed Hartlebury's inclusion into Wyre Forest district, for reasons which are unclear. And I have also put information in there from The Kidderminster Shuttle "Wychavon District Council unanimously voted against the inclusion of Hartlebury into Wyre Forest. Hartlebury Parish contains some of the largest trading estates in Worcestershire, approximately 200 acres, Wyre Forest would stand to benefit from the rateable values to the detriment of Wychavon." Wyre Forest published accounts to show that by 2019/20 there will be a funding gap of £2,000,000. Again, this is a concern.

It would be confusing for residents to be moved into a parliamentary constituency which lies outside the district in which we reside. Wyre Forest is already within the Commission tolerance as regards the voting numbers, they do not require the inclusion of Hartlebury. Hartlebury has a closer affinity with the neighbouring parish of Ombersley, it is part of the county council division of Ombersley which would also have to change.

Finally, Hartlebury would wish to remain in a Mid Worcestershire constituency, if it exists, and should be reconstructed in a slightly different form. We would definitely want to be included within a Mid Worcestershire constituency. I am willing to take any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Just one thing which we were just discussing as you were speaking, and we are very grateful, obviously, for your evidence, but to clarify, your ward will not be moving into a different local authority, we are just proposing new parliamentary constituency boundaries.

MR TRANTER: It will force it because what has actually happened with the local district council, they have actually said that if we do move into theirs, they will actually change the local boundary. In doing so it means that the actual domestic rates will go up by about between eight and nine per cent.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Again, I do not think they can do that on their own, but it is not within our remit, that is something that would be done on a country or a nation basis through the Local Boundary Commission people. Tim is nodding, he used to work for them! So, that is a big step from where we are at now, it is certainly outside our remit, but it is a big step for you to be making locally, because --- anyway, we say that. So, at that point, I am going to ask if there is anybody here who wants to raise any points of clarification. (Affirmative response) It must be a point of clarification because what I am doing here is very much getting evidence independently of the proposals that are on the table, we are gathering it and there will be further consultations down the line if you really do not like what other people have proposed. But at the moment it is just a case of getting the evidence in, so please ask your question, try and couch it as a point of clarification. You do not want to? You are not sure you do?

MR TRANTER: I could possibly help there, because I have actually given some other information which I have passed over electronically to the clerk. Also I think, as you have already mentioned earlier, parliamentary-wise I think the one party, because it is a bit of a concern, because the problem that has arisen is actually based on one party fighting against the other about where the position should be. What we are anticipating is that hopefully another version will come forward to you when the parties come to actually say how they would like the boundaries changed, because we are actually --- basically through our MP and district councillor, they have actually looked at it and they are fairly certain we should be able to change it to

a different standing so we actually have a Mid Worcestershire boundary change as opposed to going into Wyre Forest.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Which parties, sorry?

MR TRANTER: It is the Conservative Party. Okay, thank you, we really do listen to the concerns of local people and we hear exactly what you are saying, of course we are going to give this a lot of thought and have a look at it and take into account what you have said, within the remit that we are restricted by.

MR TRANTER: Of course, I understand that you do have a remit.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, yes, thank you very much for your time, thank you.

MR TRANTER: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Cllr Irving, I think you are here, are you happy to go a little bit early since you are here? We might as well plough on.

CLLR IRVING: (Weston Coyney Ward) Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Ross Irving, it is 11 Coverdale Close, Meir Park, Stoke-on-Trent. Perhaps I might just say that I serve as a city councillor for the Weston Coyney ward of Stoke-on-Trent City Council. I have been a member of the city council for 40 years or thereabouts and I have also served as the member for Trentham and Hanford for 30 of those years so I know the Stoke South present parliamentary constituency pretty well, having lived and worked in it for a considerable period of time. I would like to say that I understand how you operate and you have to work within the guidelines as laid down and you use the wards as the building blocks to create the parliamentary constituencies and I personally welcome the reduction of members of parliament and certainly the reduction of the situation in Staffordshire by one MP. But of course that has created a problem for Stoke-on-Trent insomuch as the fact that under the present criteria Stoke-on-Trent city is only really entitled to two-and-a-half MPs under the numbers.

The present constituency proposals, I would just like to outline my personal objections to the proposals for West Staffordshire. Firstly they take in areas from three local authorities, Newcastle Borough, Stafford Borough and Stoke-on-Trent City Councils and without shadow of doubt they break community ties within Stoke-on-Trent. It also breaks community ties in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The proposal for West Staffordshire creates a very odd shaped constituency; it is very large geographically. There are little or no unified transport links, no major roads linking the different areas or single public transport. It would take multiple buses crossing multiple constituencies to get from the north to the south of the proposed Staffordshire West constituency. It does not share school catchment areas across the constituency. It does not have any common shopping areas. People, for example, from Madeley do not shop in the same area as those from Burton. There

is no central shared town or shared community. The proposed boundary with Stoke-on-Trent South is not clear it, it runs along a highly populated residential road, Lightwood Road in the South constituency. There are concerns from residents in Stoke-on-Trent wards that they are being removed from the city, which is a key part of their identity. The number of contacts from residents as a local councillor highlighting this concern has been many.

What I would like to propose is a counter-proposal to create a Stoke South and Stone parliamentary constituency, this would increase the number of local authority wards from Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the counter-proposal includes the following Stoke-on-Trent local authority wards: Lightwood North and Normacot, Meir South, Meir North, Meir Park and my own seat of Weston Coyney. The counter-proposal has six wards from Stafford Borough and 10 wards from Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The Stafford Borough local wards would remain, Newcastle-under-Lyme local authority wards would go into the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

The benefits of the counter-proposals for Stoke-on-Trent South and Stone: the proposed constituency would now become more compact geographically, it would keep community ties among the Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford Borough wards. As I say, I have lived in that area for a considerable period of time and many of the people in my neighbourhood shop in Stone, I live in the Meir South ward and that is also common in wards such as Blurton and Trentham and Hanford. Transport links do exist between all the areas of the constituency, you can get on one bus from the north of the constituency to the south and there are excellent road links, the A34 stretches from Trentham and Hanford right the way through to Tittensor, Darlaston and on into Stone. The A520 starts at the city boundary in Weston Coyney, continues through Meir, on to Meir Heath, down to Knenhall and again into Stone. It then changes its name, I think, to the A5026 on into Eccleshall so there are, again, direct road links. The clear boundary along the A50 to the north and along the Ridgeway and the Brook between Weston Coyney and Meir Hay wards which would be divided between Stoke South and Stone and a new Stoke-on-Trent Central constituency.

It has the benefit, this proposal, of having less change overall for communities, addresses in the Meir area of the city, for example, use Meir Heath, which is in Stafford Borough, which also has existing community connections. The constituency would now only include two local authority areas, instead of the three that would be proposed with the West Staffordshire seat. It can be argued that the city of Stoke-on-Trent would still be represented by three members of parliament, as a quarter of the city would be going into the new proposed constituency and it would carry the title Stoke-on-Trent South and Stone. The proposed Stoke South constituency would have to take more wards from the proposed North constituency and would also need a change of name to Stoke Central. Stoke North would retain Kidsgrove, Butt Lane, Ravenscliffe, Talke, with welcome additions of Newchapel ward. Less change overall for constituencies and these areas would not be moved for the third time in three boundary reviews. The Kidsgrove area is in an economic zone of Stoke-on-Trent and it uses Stoke-on-Trent in their postal address. Newcastle-under-

Lyme would only have wards from one local authority, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and it would return to the pre-1997 boundaries and would have all the borough's countryside hinterland as part of the constituency. There would be no impact on the proposals for the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency and this would become coterminous with the local authority boundaries. Community ties across the area are maintained and there is less change overall.

In conclusion I would like to say that the Boundary Commission's West Staffordshire constituency has a number of issues. There are no community ties, it is too large geographically and difficult to travel around due to no or very little transport links and connections, and it takes in areas from three local authorities. The benefits of the alternative proposal of Stoke-on-Trent South and Stone, it keeps local community ties, it takes in areas from two local authorities, it is a compact shape geographically with good transport links. The three constituencies would still have Stoke-on-Trent in their titles. These counter-proposals would present less change in North Staffordshire than the Commission's current proposals. So I think --- no, I better just mention the figures to you that we have calculated. The conclusions for the counter-proposals are within the range that is recommended between 71,031 and 78, 507 and they are more even than the Commission's proposals, with electorate numbers of a similar size. The proposals that I am making would give the Stoke South and Stone constituency an electorate of 74,914, Stoke-on-Trent North, 75,725, Stoke-on-Trent Central, 75,732 and Newcastle-under-Lyme 71,622. So that really is the conclusion of my presentation, I would answer any questions if you have any.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do we have any questions from the floor? I have a couple, but --- points of clarification and as ever, we need your name first please.

MR FARRELLY: Paul Farrelly, the Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme, and I know Cllr Irving.

CLLR IRVING: Yes, I was trying to be careful what I said Paul!

MR FARRELLY: Just one point for clarification – this is the same proposal advanced by Cllr Jack Brereton yesterday – you say that Newcastle-under-Lyme, under your counter-proposal, would return to the pre-1997 constituency boundaries – in what sense?

CLLR IRVING: Well, my understanding – and I have to say I have taken this as a second hand read – but my understanding is that the Kidsgrove and the surrounding wards were pre-1997 in Stoke-on-Trent North parliamentary constituency, and that was what these proposals would do again, is to transfer them to Stoke-on-Trent --- well, retain them within Stoke-on-Trent North.

MR FARRELLY: Sorry, just a supplementary --- sorry, I may have misheard you but I think you said that it would return Newcastle-under-Lyme to its pre-1997 boundaries?

CLLR IRVING: Yes, that is what certainly the report that I have read said, if I am incorrect I apologise.

MR FARRELLY: Could I just point out for information that I am ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You can clarify, if it helps.

MR FARRELLY: Just to clarify, the two wards which you are proposing to move from the proposed West Staffordshire to Newcastle-under-Lyme were the wards that mainly comprise the Newcastle Rural District Council which was abolished in 1974, that is Loggerheads and Whitmore and Madeley, and since the following boundary review for 1983 they were into the Stafford constituency which then became the Stone constituency, as a point, so there was no pre-1997 constituency boundary which included those wards for Newcastle-under-Lyme.

CLLR IRVING: I am grateful for your correction Mr Farrelly. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further --- yes, we will bring the mic over to you and as usual if we can have your name.

MR LEWIS: I am not clear in what you are proposing as far as the West Staffordshire constituency is concerned. Is it that you are going to take all the Newcastle Borough parts and put in them in Newcastle?

CLLR IRVING: Yes.

MR LEWIS: And does that mean, then, that all the remaining parts that are mainly Stafford Borough, ALL the remaining parts, including Eccleshall and ---

CLLR IRVING: Yes, there would be, I think it is six wards from Stafford Borough ---

MR LEWIS: Can you just list them please?

CLLR IRVING: I do not think I have got that information with me, it might be in the pack. I think it more than likely is. It certainly does include Eccleshall, it includes Barlaston, Fulford, Swynnerton, Walton, I think --- there are six of them, I think it goes quite the way down to Knighton I would think, but I do not know whether that is a separate ward or not without looking at the papers, but it takes in the six wards of Stafford borough and 10 wards from Stoke-on-Trent city.

MR LEWIS: Right, and in numbers terms, in voters terms, just roughly what is the divide between the people in Stafford and the people in Stoke South?

CLLR IRVING: I have not taken that into account I am afraid, I do not know what the difference and the balance is. I have tried to sort of calculate the numbers around the requirements for the number of electors per constituency and I have not really

balanced it between the few --- I have been trying to look at --- which is the geographical sense and the links between Stoke South and areas such as Barlaston and Stone and Fulford, which have quite close links so I must admit I have not calculated the difference between the two borough council areas.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, can I just ask another question? So, just on – because we are gathering evidence here – on the information you have given us, you have done a very clear breakdown between four constituencies but you have not given us the information, I think it is probably the same question you were asking, you have not given us the information on the effect on West Staffordshire, is that correct?

CLLR IRVING: No, my proposal obviously does not include West Staffordshire, it includes a Stoke-on-Trent South and Stone and it includes a Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, okay, understood. Thank you very much indeed.

CLLR IRVING: Okay, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time, really appreciate it, we will have a good look at these and see what we make of them. Is there anybody else in here who is expecting to or would like to speak, because we have space now should anybody choose to? (No response). In which case, our next speaker is due at 2.00 pm and it is now 12.00 pm, so what we are going to do is in case people want to talk or people come in we will adjourn until 12.30 pm, it may well be that we re-adjourn again until 2.00 pm, but we adjourn officially at the moment until 12.30 pm.

After a short break

Time noted: 12.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen we have no speakers now until 2.00 pm so we will continue this adjournment until 2.00 pm. Thank you.

After the luncheon adjournment

Time noted: 2.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome back to our resumed hearing here in glorious Stafford. Our next speaker is Mr Andrew Garcarz, and if you would like to come up here. I am probably mispronouncing it, forgive me. We will need your name and your address please and there may well be a map up there if of use.

MR GARCARZ: (UKIP) Good afternoon. My name is Andrew Garcarz, you got the pronunciation absolutely fine, my address is 1136 Tyburn Road, Birmingham, B24 0TB. I am here to speak about constituency Number 6, which is conveniently displayed on the centre of that screen, which is fabulous, and I am sure it is not just a coincidence! And it is now going to be known as Birmingham Ladywood, well, that is the proposal, and it is planned to replace parts of the Birmingham Erdington constituency and some others. Please excuse the fact that I have omitted to bring my reading glasses so I will try to be as accurate as I can.

When I entered my postcode into your constituency finder I thought I had actually woken in an alternative universe, because Birmingham Ladywood is about as far away from my part of the constituency as Australia could be from New Zealand. I read your criteria for changes, which the government have obviously implemented, which include things like special geographical considerations, size, shape, accessibility and, importantly, any local ties that would be broken. I will come back to those a little bit later in my submission, but the current wards of Erdington are Tyburn, Stockland Green, Erdington itself and Kingstanding, which form a contiguous block, but three of the four are no longer part of the new proposal. Included now are areas of Aston, Nethells, Duddesdon, Bordesley, Soho, Winson Green, the city centre itself and Ladywood.

The existing constituency has far more in common with areas like Sutton Coldfield, Castle Bromwich and Oscott than some of these other areas I have just mentioned. It has shared services, infrastructure, local newspapers that cover the whole area, transport links and shared facilities. Socially, economically and culturally the population breakdown in Erdington, for instance, is predominantly white, predominantly non-Muslim, predominantly English-speaking, although with about a five per cent increase in Polish and Eastern Europeans. To the best of my knowledge there is only one mosque in the whole of that community. It is predominantly, again, a Christian Catholic community. That is not the case for the inner city areas that the proposal plans to include in this constituency, which in some places are as high as 90 – 95 per cent ethnic origin; people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, Asia, the Indian Afro-Caribbean [sic] continents. Essentially there are significant differences in things like property value, employment, potential wealth, if you look at the council tax values you will see the differences in the areas there. Culturally this is as diverse as one could imagine and seems counterintuitive to the creation of an integrated and unified constituency.

So I would urge the Commission to review and reconsider these proposals as a matter of urgency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any points of clarification on this? Are you happy to take these?

MR GARCARZ: Yes, sure.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley. I did not entirely get what you were saying, something passed me by, but are you suggesting that Tyburn should be included in the Erdington constituency?

MR GARCARZ: Well, currently Tyburn is part of the Erdington constituency, which includes Castle Vale, Pype Hayes, Erdington itself and Stockland Green. Three quarters of that constituency are being taken out of the new proposal and as you can see from there (indicating) it is creating this long, meandering corridor that spreads from the outer city areas of Castle Vale and Pype Hayes right through the inner city and city centre areas so it is a non-contiguous arrangement.

MR RILEY: I think strictly speaking it is only one quarter that is being taken out.

MR GARCARZ: Well, three of the four wards being removed seems to be three quarters rather ---

MR RILEY: Oh, I see what you mean. You are suggesting that three wards are being removed from Tyburn.

MR GARCARZ: That is right.

MR RILEY: Rather than Tyburn is being removed from the three wards.

MR GARCARZ: Well, yes, as I say, if you look at that map there, Pype Hayes --- Tyburn ward is one of the significant ones and then you have got Erdington and Kingstanding and, as I say, the four wards which currently constitute the Erdington constituency as it stands now, three of those four have been removed to allow the creation of this new, rather bizarre shaped ward.

MR RILEY: Okay, I understand what you are saying now. Can I just ask, then, in terms of what is Erdington, is Stockland Green part of Erdington?

MR GARCARZ: Yes indeed.

MR RILEY: As much as Tyburn or more so?

MR GARCARZ: Absolutely. I mean, literally, I was born in Stockland Green, I grew up in Erdington, I lived in the Castle Vale, I now live in Pype Hayes, so that whole area has a huge, not just because I was there, obviously, but it has a huge common history, shared ---

MR RILEY: So, if an Erdington constituency was going to include Stockland Green, Erdington and Kingstanding and someone suggested taking Stockland Green out, you would be opposed to that?

MR GARCARZ: I would think that the residents would have a general feeling that part of their constituency is being artificially removed, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any further points of clarification? Are you aware of that we have actually had quite a lot of discussion on this in our hearing in Birmingham? Are you aware of any of the other counter-proposals and also the support for some of these changes that have been presented as evidence to us? And if so, would you like to comment?

MR GARCARZ: I am not aware of any proposals that have been submitted. I was unable to attend the Birmingham hearings otherwise I would have been there, so this is, I am afraid, I am playing catch-up now so I do not know what has already been discussed or suggested or proposed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, just a reminder in that case, we would love to see your submission in writing, are you planning to put in a written submission?

MR GARCARZ: I have put a written submission in but not in this detail so I will resubmit a more ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think it is a good idea but the final date for written submissions is 5 December.

MR GARCARZ: I think I can do it before then.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So please do, we would love to see it and of course it will go --- as I say we have got --- I have just got all the stuff we have had out on that area, there is a lot of it but this will all go and we will be considering it all as a whole. Really grateful that you have come along.

MR GARCARZ: Can I just say one more thing?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sure.

MR GARCARZ: I have actually stood as a parliamentary and a council candidate in the Erdington constituency and in the Tyburn ward and canvassing that new shaped area, knocking on doors from Castle Bromwich to Soho is one heck of a patch to try and produce a message that would appeal to that community, it is going to make the amount of walking I have to do to go and canvas quite significantly greater, but anyway thank you very much for the opportunity to come and speak today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And thank you for coming to. Is there anyone else who would like to speak now? (No response). And if not we will adjourn now until 3.00 pm. Thank you very much.

After a short break

Time noted: 3.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, lady and gentlemen! We are now at the point where we can resume again and it is for Simon Jevon to speak. Thank you. And as usual, name, address.

CLLR JEVON: (Kings Norton) Hi, thank you Mrs Gilmore. My name is Simon Jevon and my address is 5, Kings Park West, Kings Norton, B38 8LE. I am one of the councillors for Kings Norton, but if you would not mind I would like just to talk briefly about the Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency first. That is where I was born and went to school and represented the ward of Wednesfield South for 12 years. I just want to make the Commission aware of something they probably already know but Wednesfield covers more than just the Wednesfield North and the Wednesfield South constituency, it covers Fallings Park, or lots of Fallings Park and lots of Heath Town and many of the residents there have Wednesfield addresses, they all have the WV11 postcode. It all covers the area formerly covered by the Wednesfield Urban District Council that is now defunct. And I can show you on the map with the pointer if you want to see it, if you can zoom in a little bit more please and put the wards on? Thank you. So we have got the Wednesfield South ward and Wednesfield North ward (indicating) here. If you ask any local resident in this boundary, all through Wood End up to the St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School here on the corner of the Cannock Road, all of these areas all the way down to Nechells and that bit there, they would all give you Wednesfield addresses. So one of the Cannock proposals yesterday does talk about keeping Wednesfield together with North and South, it does not actually do it, it keeps a lot of it together but a huge part of Fallings Park, going towards Park Village, would split off by their friends and neighbours in the other parts of Wednesfield.

To talk about the other side of the constituency, the link with Willenhall that Wednesfield has, it is true that there are very, very strong links there. As the councillor there for 12 years it was really, really hard to actually see where the lines were drawn. In many, many cases there are no natural breaks whatsoever, the only way you can see that you have gone into a different ward or a different borough in this case is the change of the colour of the street signs there. Roads go in and out of council boundaries there, in fact there was one road in the Wednesfield North ward where you have to drive out of Wednesfield and Wolverhampton to go into Walsall and Willenhall to get back into Wednesfield, so the natural link there is great. And I think – to congratulate the Commission – you have kept the three biggest areas within Wolverhampton together. You have kept Bilston together with Coseley in that constituency, you have kept the Tettenhall area together with the Wolverhampton West constituency and you are keeping the two-and-a-half/three Wednesfield wards together in the new Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency; natural and real communities.

If I can just touch on the area that I live at the moment, I moved to Kings Norton four years ago, I would just like to talk briefly about the Commission's proposal for the new Birmingham Brandwood constituency, where at the moment Kings Norton is placed. I think you have got it right that some parts of Brandwood are linked with

Kings Norton, many of the areas there have Kings Norton addresses. This is the bit sort of to the north of the Lifford Lane area in Brandwood. Excuse me, could you put the wards on again for me please? Thank you. So this is my current ward here, of Kings Norton, the Lifford Lane tip is there and all this area there in this Brandwood ward would have Kings Norton addresses. And more than that they identify with Kings Norton as well, obviously normal human beings are sensible people and the world that do not know what ward boundaries are, they will go on to a council's website and they will look at the name of the area they think they live and so I am getting calls, quite a lot, from residents in Brandwood who have Kings Norton addresses. There is a very clear link there between the two areas. We have very few links with Billesley but almost zero with the Springfield ward. I am speaking with non-political residents, neighbours, over the last few weeks since our first hearing, I have to say I have not met anyone yet who is not involved with politics who thinks that Springfield and Kings Norton have any links. Out of interest – because I am not too hot on the Springfield area myself – I searched on Google, a traffic search, on how long it would take me to get there. The interesting thing that came up, and this is to put it in context, sorry, this journey I have Google-mapped comes from the very edge of Kings Norton ward here, which are the high six-hundreds of the Redditch Road, all the way up to --- I think it was on the corner of the Stratford Road in Springfield, the furthest part, would take one hour 28 minutes by bus to get from one side of the new constituency to the other. And it is so far you can even get a bus and a train to it, and that takes one hour 25 minutes. Birmingham traffic is notoriously bad, but at the moment it would take to get from one side of Birmingham Northfield to the other about 15 minutes. Residents in my part of Birmingham and the current few wards that make up the Birmingham Northfield constituency, we do look south for our day-to-day activities. I am not saying that we never go into the city centre, we all do, but for our day-to-day activities, our social life, we do tend to look towards Longbridge, towards the south of the city, the cinema at Great Parr, the shopping area in Longbridge, Bournville College, everything is south of us.

And so moving on to the final part of my piece today, just to speak in support of the proposal to keep Kings Norton in a Birmingham Northfield constituency and that is together with Bournville Longbridge, Northfield and the following polling districts from Brandwood, which are CGC, GCD, CGE, CGK and CGL. So, as I said, we do agree with you and I agree with you as a resident that we do have a lot in common with some residents in Brandwood, with those residents who have Kings Norton addresses.

Can I talk about West Heath in respect of the Boundary Commission's proposal? At the moment West Heath covers two wards in Birmingham City Council. It covers Kings Norton ward and it covers Northfield ward. This problem has been fixed with the new local government boundaries, so we are talking about the area around here, this is known as West Heath to anyone that lives in Birmingham. So the current boundary is on the Redhill Road, with the new local government boundary, the Kings Norton North ward comes here, West Heath ward is there. So, working on these current boundaries if we went with the Commission's proposal it would split West Heath in two and there are roads that would be split, Wychall Lane and Wychall

Road in Kings Norton would be split in two – it is not a main road at all – under the Commission's proposals.

The final thing that I would like to say in support of the counter-proposals, the links between Kings Norton and Bournville are very, very strong. They are very, very similar places, we all have our own village greens and probably the only difference is that Kings Norton has pubs and off-licences and Bournville does not. We have a business association that covers Bournville and Kings Norton ward called the Lifford Business Association, I think it works well at the moment but giving them only one MP to deal with would work even better. We even share a railway station, you can go to work and get on the train in Kings Norton and when you come home you get off in Bournville.

So in conclusion, I would just like to say that from my perspective and as local councillor with my residents we would like to stay with our neighbours and our natural community and those wards in south Birmingham. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Do we have any points of clarification?

MR FARRELLY: I have asked many other people to give us an explanation as to why they consider the wards that they are proposing to split are exceptional or have compelling reasons for them to be split. I do not think anyone has really answered that. Can you explain why out of 40 wards in Birmingham there are just these two wards, Brandwood and Springfield that you are proposing should be split? What is compelling and exceptional about those wards?

CLLR JEVON: I think if you asked the residents in those wards, as I said in my presentation, that a lot of the residents in that Brandwood part of Kings Norton, or a lot of it, would say that our Kings Norton addresses --- so maybe we should be looking at what the residents think and not us as politicians. They have Kings Norton addresses and the ward they live in, they know where they live, it is not necessarily an issue of political boundaries.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Anything else? Any other questions. (None). I think that was very clear, thank you very much indeed.

CLLR JEVON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. Excellent, and useful. A useful reminder for me! Really appreciate it. Again, we have not got anyone speaking now, so we are going to adjourn for 50 minutes until 3.50 pm unless anyone in the room wants to go first, but we can adjourn until 3.50 pm, we have to stay anyway.

MR FARRELLY: (Inaudible).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, let Glenn finish.

MR REED: No, the simple answer, apart from you Mr Farrelly we have nobody who is scheduled to speak.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine. I just have to make it clear we cannot close, we will be here for probably another hour or so, or less than an hour.

MR FARRELLY: I have remembered my reading glasses, whether they work or not is another thing. I am Paul Farrelly of 200 High Street, Alsagers Bank, ST7 8BA. It is a Stoke-on-Trent postcode by quirks of GPO Sorting Office history, very much Newcastle-under-Lyme like lots of other ST postcodes that have been mentioned, in the area. It is also my home town, where I have been the Member of Parliament since 2001 and which I have known intimately, along with the rest of the area, for all of my 54 years. And you may find it strange that a member of parliament has spent two days here but I can promise you that given the trauma that we went through with the previous initial proposals, it is well worth spending two days just to make sure, I hope, that we do not revisit that disruption from five years ago.

Like my constituency Labour Party Chair Allison Gardner yesterday, Dr Gardner, and indeed – officially at least – the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, a rare meeting of minds it would seem, I am here to support the initial proposals for Newcastle-under-Lyme and North Staffordshire. The Labour Party, of course, has not supported the legislation underpinning this review and we have got, indeed, a private member's bill from my colleague Pat Glass in the House this Friday seeking to annul the legislation, but clearly we appreciate that you go on and on and the constraints under which the Commission is working. You cannot take this into account, of course, but could I just get off my chest, for the record, one reason why we are more than sceptical about the process. Since I stood here exactly five years ago, the electorate of Newcastle-under-Lyme has fallen from 68,692 to 63,467, but we have not suffered any massive Merseyside-like depopulation, in fact Newcastle is a very attractive place and people keep coming to live there. Those 5,000 plus people have not gone away, but with individual voter registration, which has accompanied the boundary reviews, they have simply dropped off the rolls, not least at Keele University in my constituency and most sadly, indeed, are young people --- that I still have to represent the same numbers of people.

That said, can I welcome the work the Commission has done so far and the approach so far in this long, drawn-out process. As Dr Gardner said yesterday, the decision, again, to treat Staffordshire as a sub-region of the West Midlands entitled to 11 seats makes a great deal of sense, it simplifies things and all the main political parties subscribe to this. Secondly, it is good to see that with these initial proposals the Commission has not gone back to the drawing board for Staffordshire but has very much built on previous work in which we all made arguments over pretty much a two year period, from March 2011 until December 2012, all those years ago. And for North Staffordshire, give or take a few boundary changes in the meantime in

Stoke, these initial proposals largely reflect the 2012 revised proposals. And indeed for Newcastle-under-Lyme are exactly the same.

And just finally, in this preamble, I want to put on record my thanks to the Commission because in doing that, in following the revised proposals, the Commission has listened to a wave of objections, previously, to plans which would have ripped Newcastle-under-Lyme's historic constituency asunder. And if my memory serves me correctly, five years ago by this time, over 9,000 people from Newcastle had expressed their opposition in one form or another to those initial proposals from the Commission. So we are really pleased that they have not been revisited, nor in this Chamber in the last two days, and that the current proposals put forward what I would call a recognisable, cohesive Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency with a strong identity and strong community ties. And in fact the key point about the proposals for Newcastle-under-Lyme is that they precisely trace the boundaries of the urban parts, the urban and suburban parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme borough, while assigning the rural parts, which have their own common issues, to the new West Staffordshire seat.

And just to put my position and that of many others in Newcastle in context, I think it is worth rehearsing some of the other main arguments that the Commission listened to five years ago. This time, as before, the Commission is proposing a Staffordshire Moorlands seat contiguous with its district council. Everything in North Staffordshire, indeed, flows from that approach, and the Labour Party contested that last time. And while I still believe, certainly, that the Moorlands has as many disparate communities and certainly no god-given rights in this respect, we do understand the Commission's thinking and we recognise with this review that we lost that argument last time round and therefore it would be fruitless to put forward any counter-proposal to that which is currently set out for the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency.

In 2011, too, there were strong arguments against splitting Burslem, the mother town of The Potteries, and the revised proposals avoided this and so do these. So this is also welcome. And also last the Commission listened very carefully that the proposals for a new Newcastle and Stone seat not only broke strong community ties in my borough but they did not really respect natural geography or transport links either, namely that the southern parts of Stoke-on-Trent, such as Hanford and Trentham have more natural borders and connections along the A34 with Stone and those arguments were strongly advanced independently last time by Newcastle's former chief executive Ian Jenkinson, for instance, from whom you also heard again yesterday, and they were succinctly summarised by Dr Gardner as well. And so the Commission listened to that argument as well, revising the proposals of a disconnected Newcastle and Stone seat in favour of the new West Staffordshire constituency, which I, again, support this time.

Now, unlike Cannock Chase and Staffordshire Moorlands, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough is clearly too big to fit into one constituency. Currently its 24 wards are split between four constituencies but under these proposals that falls to two, which is sensible. And I just want to make some – hopefully brief – observations about the

proposals for certain parts of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough, be they proposed for the Newcastle-under-Lyme seat or for the West Staffordshire seat. And firstly in this respect I entirely agree that Loggerheads and Whitmore and Madeley wards, which lie to the south and west of the M6 in the borough, fit most naturally into the new West Staffordshire seat. The M6 motorway here is almost – if it were not man-made – a natural boundary. And these two wards are largely rural in nature, like the rest of the seats, and have long been part of the Stone constituency, which is represented by my prominent Brexiteer Conservative neighbour, Sir Bill Cash.

The counter-proposal advanced yesterday by Cllr Jack Brereton from Stoke, and again here by his colleague Cllr Ross Irving, envisages them coming back into a regional Newcastle constituency. But I have been the MP for 15 years, have many friends there in these two wards, and the reality is indeed that there has been no groundswell whatsoever for such a change. Secondly, let me take an area that you have heard a little about during these hearings, the wards that comprise Kidsgrove Town Council, not least, again, following the remarks of Cllr Brereton yesterday, and this area, which I have known well since childhood, used to have four wards. But since local government reorganisation some years ago it now comprises five. It is not a homogeneous area, and from south to north they are Talke, Butt Lane, Ravenscliffe, Kidsgrove and Newchapel. They do – as I said previously – face in different ways. Now, the 2012 revised proposals envisaged the area being included in the Newcastle constituency like the current proposals and I agree with that conclusion. As you heard yesterday, the area has been part of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council since the major local government reorganisation of 1974. And Kidsgrove Town Council, third tier like a parish, is the direct successor of the old urban district council that was abolished.

As you also heard yesterday, its situation, as far as the parliamentary constituencies, has always chopped and changed quite bewilderingly for some people. Going back into history, following the initial and first boundary reviews of modern-ish times in 1950 and '55, it formed part of the old Leek division whose direct successor is the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency envisaged under these proposals. That situation continued after the second review implemented in 1974 and it was only after the third review in 1983 did the Kidsgrove wards move into Stoke-on-Trent North, and that was also when the old Newcastle Rural District Council areas of Loggerheads, Whitmore and Madeley moved, by the way, into the Staffordshire constituency and then later into the new Stone seat where they have been ever since. But going back to Kidsgrove, in the fourth review, for 1997, they then moved back to Staffordshire Moorlands again. And in the fifth review for 2010, four of the wards reverted back to Stoke North with Newchapel left in the Moorlands. So despite what you may have heard yesterday about all the alleged links with Stoke-on-Trent North being developed while the area was part of that constituency, notwithstanding the railway is from Victorian years, you can see from a historical perspective, for the vast majority of the post-war period the Kidsgrove area was included in the Moorlands, not Stoke-on-Trent North. And the anomaly of one of its wards – one of its five wards, Newchapel, admittedly more rural – being split between two constituencies has persisted just for the last six.

And again, as you heard yesterday, these current proposals not only correct that anomaly regarding Newchapel but also correct the anomaly of this large area finally forming a settled part of a Newcastle constituency which is precisely aligned with the urban parts of the borough where all the areas share common issues and where the issues and ties are different from rural areas.

If you take local links, as Dr Gardner mentioned yesterday, she talked about her close work as a Chesterton councillor with Kidsgrove area colleagues over common transport issues along the A34 and the A500 corridor from Junction 16 of the M6. Democratically, too, the two areas of the borough are linked by the Talke and Red Street county division, which extends over the A500 into Chesterton. With its rail station, Kidsgrove does retain a historic transport connection with Stoke-on-Trent through the line that links the city with Crewe. Newcastle station, I am afraid, closed in 1964 as part of the Beeching cuts, making us the biggest town in the UK without one centrally, but there is nothing much we can do about that. But the most used routes by people, by the local population, the A34 and local bus links, all run south and north to Newcastle-under-Lyme and not laterally to the city centre of Stoke-on-Trent.

Mr Jenkinson's written submission, with his data and maps, I have not seen them yet so it may expand on this further, but I would say that if we want to drill down into the detail, in addition to the 4A bus from Kidsgrove through Talke to Newcastle, the 94A service that passes from Kidsgrove through Tunstall actually has as its destination Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre. So people from Kidsgrove most definitely come to Newcastle to shop as their, I think one other speaker called it their centre of place, and of course everyone from over North Staffordshire goes to Hanley, which is the city centre of the area. So any points made in that respect apply equally to every single person in the area. And people also come to Newcastle where the local authority is based to use local services and to get advice from various agencies. Quite often, indeed, at my surgeries in Newcastle library, Kidsgrove residents and by that I mean residents of all the wards drop in with housing and other problems, and I, under parliamentary protocols have to redirect them as I am not their MP. And then I explain to them that they are in Stoke-on-Trent North, to which they will invariably respond, confused that Kidsgrove or Talke or Butt Lane 'is in Newcastle isn't it?' and then I have to explain the difference between local authorities and constituency boundaries.

Some of the problems most certainly involve housing, and you heard yesterday from Dr Gardner, I recall, that the Kidsgrove area has got a shared coal mining history with Newcastle and that is reflective in extensive local social housing, with the old Coal Board Cornish homes with their concrete-tiled trapezoid roofs, and if you do go and look you will see them as a particular feature. And they are all owned by Aspire Housing which is the registered social landlord to which Newcastle-under-Lyme borough's council housing stock was transferred at the millennium in 2000. Aspire still predominantly serves the Newcastle area, including Kidsgrove, and as the local authority it is Newcastle council, not Stoke-on-Trent, that is currently

addressing housing issues in Kidsgrove with a scheme for new registration of private landlords to tackle abuse, for example. And this is a common issue between the two areas, with a common council as a local authority and a common registered social landlord.

So, yes, by virtue of their geography the Kidsgrove and Ravenscliffe wards in particular also have strong connections with Goldenhill and Tunstall in the north of Stoke and Newchapel looks north to Biddulph and Staffordshire Moorlands. But all five wards, including Talke and Butt Lane, which actually lie directly on the A34, all four wards of Kidsgrove are indisputably part and parcel of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Before closing I just want to mention Audley and Bignall End and Halmerend wards. I actually live in Alsagers Bank, which is part of the latter, and these – it has been quite rightly said – have been long, long part of the Newcastle constituency, with strong ties, they are largely rural in nature but with a mix of former mining and – for want of a better word – conventional, rural villages, and there are working farms all over. You heard further from Dr Gardner yesterday regarding the democratic lie of the land locally so I will not repeat everything that she said. But just to summarise: these initial proposals place two county divisions entirely in a single constituency, Newcastle rural in West Staffordshire and Talke and Red Street in Newcastle-under-Lyme, but they do split the Audley and Chesterton division between the two; but if you look at all the options within the constraints I am afraid that at least one split is inevitable. On the other hand, positively, they do avoid dividing the parishes in the area with a reunited Kidsgrove Town Council going into Newcastle and all of Audley parish into West Staffordshire along with the Betley and Wrinehill and Balterley parishes. I love – as you can imagine – where I live deeply, from on high, up the long black bank which used to be the site of open cast mining overlooking Newcastle, Alsagers Bank looks towards the town centre a couple of miles away, and then the Cheshire plain with its marvellous sunrises to the west. And I would dearly love to keep it, it is where my house is, but looking at the proposals for North Staffordshire in the round, within the constraints, like the other political parties, I find it really difficult to put forward firm counter-proposals which do not cause major disruption elsewhere in Stoke-on-Trent and which also do not end up splitting Newchapel from Kidsgrove again, which was the source of controversy when it happened at the last review. And that is the quandary presented, sadly, but the more restrictive mathematical limits set by the legislation compared with any previous boundary review which we looked to you to tackle.

If I could take just one example of a counter-proposal which --- I can do mind games and --- but you have heard one counter-proposal which you heard yesterday from Cllr Brereton who represents Baddeley Milton and Norton on the eastern edge of Stoke-on-Trent North adjoining the Moorlands, and he is proposing that Stoke North retains the urban Kidsgrove area of Newcastle, which is on the opposite western side from him and that Newcastle adds the rural borough wards to the south and west of the M6. But as a result, without any in-depth examination of community feeling and ties, the boundary of the new West Staffordshire constituency would change into a strange shape, if you wanted to highlight it, it would cross the A50 and

then curl through Meir North and Weston Coyney artificially around the town of Longton, and that seems a much stranger shape for a constituency than is currently proposed. And importantly, in the round for Stoke-on-Trent, it would unbalance the initial proposal's planned representation of the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent. Arnold Bennett, by the way, did not miscount he just thought 'Anna of the Five Towns' scanned rather better than the lispy but more accurate alternative. Under the counter-proposal that you have heard, the new Stoke North would contain just two of the towns, Tunstall and Burslem, losing Hanley, so the future MP for the new Stoke South would represent four; Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton.

Now, under the legislation the Commission does not have to have regard to MPs workloads, to which the county council leader Philip Atkins referred to earlier, but boundaries do affect the effectiveness of representation when your resources are limited. And so where the Commission's initial proposals get the balance better in this respect, I think they deserve to be supported rather than counter-proposals that do not.

So, in conclusion Ms Gilmore, there are not any ideal solutions, just – as Mr Jenkinson put it yesterday – least worst options. So on balance, with the caveats I have mentioned, I support the proposals for Newcastle-under-Lyme, West Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands, and the Labour Party's submissions – with some minor amendments for the rest of the county. And can I thank you, Ms Gilmore, for the friendly conduct of this hearing, for the work of all the staff and your patience and we look forward to seeing what you conclude after further careful consideration. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for those kind words. Are there any points of clarification that anyone would like to raise? (No response). I think it was very clear to us, just a couple of things to say; thank you for your kind words, very, very important for us to hear positives as well as negatives, so we do not get balances wrong, and you are not the only MP who has sat through two days, you can tell where there have been issues in the past or there could be in the future.

MR FARRELLY: We should form a club!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: People who absolutely care very much, so we can see that and we appreciate the fact that you have come today and also that you have addressed some of these counter-proposals as well and we are going to take it all away and weight it all up. So I would like to thank you for that. And then because we have had a couple of questions in the room here, Glenn, would you be able to explain now what you anticipate the process is going to be over the next year and the next time there will be consultation etcetera.

MR REED: Yes, well, as you are aware, the closing date for representations is 5 December. It is going to take us some while to collate all that information. We will then be publishing everything that we have received, whether through a written

representation or through the evidence presented at hearings with the transcripts. That will be at the beginning of spring, actually I have not got a specific date for that, but the beginning of spring, and that will trigger a four week consultation process whereby anybody can see any of the representations that have been submitted and then can further comment on those representations. After that the Commission will then consider all the representations and will be publishing revised proposals towards the end of next year, in the autumn of next year, which will then trigger a further consultation period. So there is still some way to go in terms of the consultation but certainly the evidence that has been presented during this initial period of consultation and at the hearings will be published and available from the early spring.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So two sets of further consultation to look at other people's counter-proposals and what have you, so it is going to move on through next year. Thank you very much, we have somebody who we do not think is going to turn up but is listed for 4 pm so we anticipate no more speakers but we will adjourn and we will come back here at 4.10 pm and that is probably when we will close. So, thank you very much indeed, really appreciate all your time, lovely to meet you and we have had a great time here in Stafford and been very well looked after, so thank you. And this is my chance to say thank you to all our staff here, they are magnificent! Thank you.

After a short break

Time noted: 5.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, we think we should be clapping you – for durability! This is our last hearing in Staffordshire, it is the last hearing in the West Midlands, so this is where all the work begins, thank you again so much for your time and we are now formally closing. Good night and have a safe journey home.

The hearing concluded

A

CLLR ATKINS, 4, 5, 6

C

MR CANTRILL, 2, 4

F

MR PAUL FARRELLY MP, 10, 16, 17, 24, 25, 30

G

MR GARCARZ, 19, 20, 21

I

CLLR IRVING, 14, 16, 17, 18

J

CLLR JEVON, 22, 24

L

MR LEWIS, 11, 17

R

MR REED, 25, 30

MR RILEY, 20

T

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 30, 31

MR THOMAS, 5

CLLR TRANTER, 12, 13, 14

W

DR WILCOCK, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11