

**BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND**

**PROCEEDINGS**

AT THE

**2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND**

HELD AT

**THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, COUNCIL HOUSE, VICTORIA SQUARE,  
BIRMINGHAM B1 1BB**

ON

**THURSDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2016**  
**DAY ONE**

Before:

**Ms Margaret Gilmore, The Lead Assistant Commissioner**

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Time noted: 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 the new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the West Midlands region. It is fantastic to be in Birmingham and to see so many of you this morning. My name is Margaret Gilmore and 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. I am responsible as well with my fellow Assistant Commissioner, David Latham, who is here, for analysing all the representations received about the initial proposals for this region and then presenting recommendations to the Commission as to whether or not those initial proposals should be revised. I am assisted here today by the members of the Commission staff, led by Sam Hartley, who is sitting here beside me. Sam 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 until 8, and tomorrow it is scheduled to run from 9 to 5 pm. I can vary that timetable. 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 and have been given a timeslot and I will invite them to speak at the appropriate time. Every timeslot has now been filled, but if there is any free time during the day or if we have any spaces where people do not take up their time or at the end of the day I will obviously invite anyone who is not registered to speak as well if they want to.

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, and 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 Sam who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the West Midlands.

MR HARTLEY: Good morning, everyone. As Margaret mentioned, my name is Sam Hartley and I am Secretary to the Boundary Commission for England. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their roles to recommend new

parliamentary constituency boundaries and at this hearing I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly.

As Margaret has already stated, she will chair the hearing itself and it is her responsibility to run the hearing at her discretion and take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here today to support 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 new constituency boundaries which were published on 13 September 2016. We used the European electoral regions as a template for the allocation of the 499 constituencies to which England is entitled, not including the two constituencies to be allocated to the Isle of Wight. This approach is permitted by the legislation and has been supported by previous public consultation. This approach does not prevent anyone from putting forward counter-proposals that include one or more constituencies being split between the regions but it is likely that compelling reasons would need to be given to persuade us to depart from the regional based approach that we have adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

In considering the composition of each electoral region we noted that it might not be possible to allocate a whole number of constituencies to individual counties. Therefore we have grouped some Local Authority areas into regions and 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. In some areas it has been necessary to propose constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries and to alter the boundaries of some existing constituencies that have electorates within five per cent of the quota so as to ensure that electorates of all the constituencies throughout the region are within the five per cent of the electoral quota.

We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Staffordshire and 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 and 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. Three constituencies in the county of 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 are well defined and well understood units which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. We consider that any division of these units between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for electoral registration and returning officers who are responsible for running elections. It is our view that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified and our initial proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes to split wards strong evidence and justification will need to be provided and the extent of such ward splitting should be kept to a minimum.

The scale of change in this review is significant and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation. We are consulting on our proposals until Monday 5 December, so there is still time after this hearing for people to contribute in writing. There are reference copies of the proposals present at this hearing and they are also available on our website and in a number of places of deposit around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at [BCE2018.org.uk](http://BCE2018.org.uk). I urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December.

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

Final points of housekeeping: there is no fire alarm due today so if it goes off it is real and use either of the doors here as exits, and the toilets are outside, turn right for the gentlemen's toilet and left for the ladies' toilets, and please switch your phones to silent or vibrate, thank you. At this stage I will hand back to Margaret to begin the public hearing, and thank you for your attendance today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Sam. Let us get down to business. Our first speaker is Chris Williams from the Green Party. Just a reminder to everyone to give names, addresses and if you are a councillor or anything like that I think it is useful to state that.

CLLR WILLIAMS: (Green Party) I am planning to speak for about half an hour, is that okay, within half an hour? Yes, great. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. As you say, I am Chris Williams, I am a Green Party councillor in Chelmsley Wood on Solihull Council. I will refer today to the changes in Solihull but my principal reason for speaking to you is, of course, to present the outline of the opinions from our members across the West Midlands region on your proposals.

In summary, we do thank the Commissioners for the work you have put into this to balance so many different factors. It is very difficult. Some of the proposals are excellent, although there are some that do need change and amendment, you will not be surprised to hear, in order to respect community ties and to make more workable constituencies. We see great problems caused by the proposals for Birmingham and the knock-on effects on neighbouring boroughs, and we see the need for significant change in Herefordshire and South Warwickshire.

The suggested changes that I will outline are motivated by the need to keep together strong local ties in constituencies. We do not want to see constituencies awkwardly split up or the grafting together of different communities with weak links. We do not have an MP in this region and at the last general election we were not close to winning one, so none of our suggested changes are motivated by any political gain. Some in the wider public sphere - I am not suggesting in this room - have admitted that some of the suggestions may well be for that reason.

Before I go into specific detail of any suggested changes on these specific constituencies I would just like to say how concerned we are of one thing that is largely outside your control, but is a factor to consider only to be sure that our concern is on public record, but you can take it into account to some extent. We are concerned indeed at the use of the electoral registration data from December 2015. I appreciate that is largely outside your control, but that particular month in 2015 was a particular low point in the electoral registration as a result of the introduction of individual voter registration, IVR. Research has demonstrated that at that point in time a significant number of people, particularly within certain demographics, were missing from the electoral register and that has favoured one particular party in the formation of these, not due to the Commission's own wishes, but that is what has been the consequence. Of course, the Government chose to speed up the IVR timetable against independent advice from its own Committees and the Electoral Commission.

The use of these skewed figures will mean that at the 2020 General Election many constituencies will be oversized, and, unfortunately, that will not reflect well on the Commission through no fault of your own. The narrow margin for permitted constituency size will mean the need for a further review next time around. I should quote paragraph 40 of your guidance which says that “The BCE is not obliged to shut its eyes entirely to the growth or decline in the electoral register that has occurred since the review date”.

In terms of the specifics of our submission, I would first like to turn to the big problem of Birmingham. I am sure you faced some difficulties with dealing with Birmingham. We do not support the recommended constituencies produced for this city. The proposals generally include some sausage-shaped constituencies and generally cross local authority boundaries into Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Solihull. I wonder if any other city’s constituencies cross so many authority boundaries in England. The most bizarre suggestion of all is the Birmingham Ladywood constituency stretching the full width of the second largest city of England, and then crossing into Sandwell as if Birmingham is not big enough. Castle Vale on the eastern edge and Smethwick in Sandwell really do not go together. The difficulty in forming proposals for Birmingham with whole wards has resulted in constituencies with communities with no connection whatsoever.

The problems have been created due to making up constituencies using wards as building blocks. In May 2015 in Birmingham the wards were huge, the biggest in England by some margin. Some are ten times the size of other wards in some of the rural districts in this region, and the permitted five per cent deviation from the 74,769 figure means that in some cases a binary number of Birmingham wards would actually result in a constituency voting population outside the required margins. It is very hard to tweak them. This appears to have encouraged the BCE to have six constituencies going outside the local government boundary of Birmingham that are either primarily Birmingham or include part of Birmingham. I understand that the BCE avoids splitting wards for understandable reasons and the logic works very well indeed for most of England, but here in Birmingham the city is the most extreme outlier in terms of ward size, and that logic has stretched beyond what is reasonable in our view and some illogical results have been created.

The other thing you as Commissioners try to do is to respect local authority boundaries but for six of the ten constituencies here that desire has not been met. Looking at your own guide at paragraphs for the 2018 review of parliamentary constituencies at paragraphs 26 to 31, the section on other statutory factors, it says that you “aim not to cross external boundaries where possible but recognises this is often necessary. The internal boundaries are more important to the Commission and the BCE treats wards as their basic building blocks and seeks to avoid splitting wards where possible” as Sam has outlined “as they are taken to be generally indicative of areas which have broader communities of interest”.

The circumstances you explained that you would consider splitting wards are twofold, where a ward was significantly cutting across local ties or whether splitting a single ward may produce a significant domino effect of otherwise a necessary change to a chain of constituencies. In the case of Birmingham there has been that very domino effect on neighbouring boroughs, for example proposals in Solihull I would say need significant revision and are caused by the Birmingham situation. Solihull has just the right number of electors to have two constituencies within its boundaries yet there are proposals for three with very significant change, including part of Coventry that goes right up to Solihull town centre.

What can be done about this? Well, your counterparts in the Local Government Boundary Commission have decided on its final arrangements for splitting up of Birmingham's 40 wards into 77 smaller wards. The larger number of smaller building blocks, which have greater regard for local ties, allow for more refined crafting of constituencies take both greater regard of local ties, which is one thing important to you, and help avoid crossing into neighbouring boroughs as Birmingham can have a binary number of constituencies without having to take in wards from outside of four other boroughs. I appreciate these new wards were not in use in May 2015 but they will be used for elections in May 2018 before Parliament decides on these new constituency boundaries.

We are calling for a more sensible set of constituencies to have regard to local ties and authority boundaries. It is not only because of the recent boundary changes but because of the unworkable proposals that these constituencies are in any case. Given new wards have been created, it gives the BCE a guide on how to consider splitting the current wards that would make up sensible new constituencies. The alternative is Birmingham constituencies which will consist of seats with split wards anyway as the BCE has so far used the old wards which have not just been tweaked by the Local Government Boundary Commission but have been fundamentally changed. In Birmingham it is even more critical that constituencies and wards have a close connection. This is the largest local authority in Western Europe and managing resources across such a large area with such a large population is very challenging. The City Council breaks down a large part of its organisation into constituency level devolved decision-making by using the old ward boundaries and producing sausage-shaped constituencies, most of which cross borders, which will not allow for sensible working in the future of this authority. We urge the BCE to have a big rethink for Birmingham. I have not proposed specific proposals because I think there is so much change needed.

I would like to move on to Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire. The Commission's proposed North Warwickshire and Nuneaton seats would be good choices if we had considered the Warwickshire/Staffordshire border to be a hard border. However, given our concerns about the proposed Tamworth and Lichfield seats we would recommend transferring the Dordon ward to the Tamworth seat, a change which would leave both

Tamworth and north Warwickshire within quota. I will come to the logic of that later. However, the Commission's proposals for the rest of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire constitute a necessary radical change because of the decision to cross the Birmingham border and to keep Coventry North East identical.

As our Birmingham proposal would no longer necessitate crossing the city boundary into Solihull, we propose that the existing constituencies of Solihull and Meriden be retained with only minor changes, swapping Blythe into Solihull and Elmdon into Meriden. In order to meet the new quotas there has to be some change in Solihull to meet the guidelines. Whilst this proposal does break some community ties between Elmdon and the rest of the town of Solihull it breaks significantly fewer than the Commission's proposal which takes the ward of Lyndon from the town as well and requires part of Tanworth be moved across the border into Solihull, the Warwick Tanworth-in-Arden ward.

As much as I like the suggested name of the proposed Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North constituency, the combination of communities with weak ties is not a constituency I support. The Solihull wards north of the A45 have weak community connection with Sheldon, Lyndon and Elmdon as well as a poor physical connection as the airport's runway splits the proposed constituency very much in two.

In Coventry your proposals break a significant number of community ties. In particular, it splits the natural community of Coundon which extends through Bablake, Radford and Sherbourne wards between Coventry South and the Coventry West proposed seats. It also splits the community of Radford, part of which is in Holbrook ward between those same constituencies. In Radford's case several hundred households have been put in a different constituency from their community hub, which is only a few minutes away in Jubilee Crescent. Our suggested change for Coventry, and I have given you the detail in the handout, does not break any existing ties between communities as spread across wards; we aim to keep those together.

We propose two constituencies entirely in Coventry and one that crosses the border with Warwickshire. Whilst Coventry and Warwickshire are in different administrative counties there are significant community ties across that county border, including shared local media. Two of these three constituencies that we have proposed have minimal changes. Our first Coventry constituency, Coventry East, consists of a current Coventry North East, plus Binley and Willenhall minus Foleshill. Our second Coventry North West consists of the current Coventry North West minus Woodlands plus Foleshill and St Michael's. The third we have suggested, Coventry South and Kenilworth, consists of the remaining Coventry wards plus the three wards of Kenilworth town. It contains the whole of the University of Warwick campus which crosses the county border in any case. Kenilworth has close links with Coventry with many traditional family and community ties. Kenilworth likes to see itself as an independent town but it needs to join with somewhere for the purpose of creating a constituency.



Finally, on south Warwickshire we believe that the towns of Warwick and Leamington should be kept together if possible, they should not be split up. The two towns have strong community ties forming a single urban area. We propose that this part of Warwickshire contains three seats: Rugby and Southam, Warwick and Leamington and Stratford-on-Avon, with the rural areas currently in the Kenilworth and Southam constituency divided between Rugby and Southam, Warwick and Leamington and Stratford. This provides for minimal change from the current constituencies and reduces the problems existing that Kenilworth and Southam seat has with a very disparate and large rural area with many communities that do not fit together. We do not think the proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire seat makes any sense at all; a constituency stretching from the border of Worcester to the M40 would be very incoherent and which will have all of the problems we have sought to avoid in our proposals for Herefordshire, which I will come to.

Whilst we do not propose a seat that crosses this border we suggest that if the Commission does include a seat in their final recommendations crossing Warwickshire and Worcestershire, the Warwickshire wards involved should be the ones close to that border, such as Alcester or Bidford-on-Avon. I think you have got the specific details in the handout there.

Moving on to Staffordshire, we support the proposal to keep South Staffordshire unchanged and strongly support the plan for Cannock Chase to remain as it is. For Lichfield and Tamworth we agree with most of the Commission's proposal but we oppose the plan to move Whittington into Tamworth constituency. Whittington has very strong ties with Lichfield rather than Tamworth. The village primary school has always been in the catchment of a Lichfield school, King Edward VI, consequently generations of villagers have their friendship groups in Lichfield, socialise in Lichfield, join sports teams, and so on, in the city. Whittington has always received the *Lichfield Mercury* newspaper rather than the *Tamworth Herald*. They have an intimate knowledge of Lichfield life. Village events are reported and advertised in the *Lichfield Mercury*. Whittington Barracks was built in the late 19th Century to house soldiers from the First Battalion, 38th Regiment of Foot raised in Lichfield in 1705. Whittington has links to Lichfield going back centuries. The church services were originally held by monks who walked over from the Friary at Lichfield. The village butcher would walk cattle from the Lichfield Smithfield market to Whittington up until the mid-20th century. Villagers have always been involved in Lichfield customs and festivals. They are very much part of Lichfield and the current proposals would take that away.

For Tamworth, we propose instead that Tamworth gains Dordon from North Warwickshire. Yes, that goes across the border, but they have much stronger links. They have historic links to the town and receive the *Tamworth Herald* newspaper. Another option would be to consider adding the two Polesworth wards where they would have a much bigger impact on Warwickshire, so that would not be our preferred option.

We support your proposal of Burton and Staffordshire Moorlands and for the Potteries area in Stone we propose four other constituencies that are different to your proposals just for the purposes of causing less damage to the existing constituencies, less change. I have provided the detail of that and I will leave that for a written submission.

The final area I would like to consider in some detail is Herefordshire. The existing constituencies are Hereford and South, and North Herefordshire, both of which are below the minimum required for this review. Your proposals suggest creation of three large constituencies covering Herefordshire - Hereford and south, Malvern and Ledbury, Ludlow and Leominster - all of which are very, very close to the maximum, one just 300 electors away from the maximum. We do not think it makes sense for Herefordshire, which has fewer electors than necessary, to make up two seats to be split into three principal constituencies that cross not just one but two county borders. Herefordshire is geographically large, rural and very sparsely populated. Making all three of the proposed seats so large reaching the near maximum size exacerbates the challenges faced in sparsely populated rural areas. We believe the Commission should bear in mind the special challenges of transport facing such communities and not aim to create three seats that are so close to maximum size.

A proposed increase in the size of Hereford and South is very large and takes up to the upper end of the specified size. We suggest that a smaller increase in this seat would allow for scope for considering less major revisions to the North Herefordshire constituency.

We note that among the proposed constituencies in the West Midlands there are only four cases where a constituency crosses the county boundary at the moment and two of them relate to North Herefordshire. The constituency faces greater challenges than many others in the region. The Commission's proposals split the current North constituency into three, three wards go to Hereford and South, seven wards go to the new Malvern and Ledbury seat and 15 go to the new Ludlow and Leominster constituency. The proposed Malvern and Ledbury constituency includes one ward, Ombersley, from Wychavon District Council, which covers a rural area to the east of Worcester. We think it makes no sense to include that ward.

We suggest that an alternative is that only one ward needs to move from the North Herefordshire to the Hereford and South seat in order to meet the minimum size requirements for that constituency and that North Herefordshire can be expanded to meet the minimum size requirements by including some wards from either Worcestershire or Shropshire but not both.

Herefordshire is sparsely populated with very limited public transport. Both the current constituency and the proposed new ones face these challenges. However, the proposed Ludlow and Leominster constituency in particular is absolutely enormous, physically by far the largest in the region and possibly in all of England. Although

Ludlow and Leominster are quite close and well connected by road the same cannot be said for the whole constituency. It would take over an hour to drive from Kington in the southwest to Middleton Scriven in the northeast.

Under the proposals Leominster would be linked to Ludlow in Shropshire and Ledbury to Malvern in Worcestershire. While these towns do have good links they are not nearly as strong as the links between Leominster, Ledbury and Hereford within the county itself. We are concerned that the links between half of Herefordshire's population and Hereford itself as the centre and capital of the county would be undermined by these proposals.

It seems to us that under these proposals should they become a new boundary, the interests of Ludlow and Malvern would naturally tend to dominate over the interests of Leominster and Ledbury as these proposals divide them from each other as well as from their county town. The Malvern Hills form the natural boundary between Malvern and Ledbury, a geographical boundary.

We support proposals to include all of the Holmer ward and all of Stoney Street in Hereford and South Herefordshire. It might also make sense to incorporate Credenhill as that is closely linked to Hereford city, however we think it would make even more sense to incorporate Old Gore ward into the South Herefordshire constituency as people are often confused as to why such a large area of southern Herefordshire is in the current North Herefordshire seat.

In terms of our concrete alternative proposals for Herefordshire we suggest that the Hereford and South seats should remain largely as the current constituency with the addition of all of Holmer ward and all of Stoney Street ward. We suggest that it should not be expanded to include Hagley or Backbury ward or Credenhill. We suggest that Old Gore should be included because everyone is confused that so many are living in the south of Hereford but in the North Herefordshire constituency. That would take the seat to the required size.

In terms of North Herefordshire we propose North Herefordshire and Tenbury Wells, crossing into Worcestershire. We suggest that the core of this constituency should remain as it is minus any wards or part of wards that are transferred out of the south constituency plus some wards from Worcestershire. The most sensible geographical option would be to incorporate the rural north western wards of Malvern Hills district into the North Herefordshire constituency. This would make up the numbers and would include Teme Valley, Tenbury, Markley, Hallow, Alfrick and Leigh and Broadheath wards. We suggest that the central and southern wards of Malvern Hills District Council could then be combined with wards in Wychavon, with which Malvern Hills district has strong links anyway to reform a revised constituency. The alternative of expanding north Herefordshire into Shropshire looks more difficult.

As a general principle we suggest that as small a number of additional wards as possible should be included in the expanded North Herefordshire given the points made on the physical size and sparse population.

Briefly on Shropshire, we accept the Commission's proposals for North Shropshire, Shrewsbury, Telford and Wellington, the Wrekin and Bridgnorth. Because of our belief that the Herefordshire constituency should only cross into one other county and that crossing into Worcestershire would be preferable, we propose combining Ludlow and the south of Shropshire with some of the wards of the Wyre Forest District of Worcestershire.

In Worcestershire our proposals differ from your proposals primarily because of our proposals for Herefordshire and Warwickshire. Your suggestion for Worcester does preserve much of the current city identity and we support the inclusion of Whittington to take the seat up to quota. However, the inclusion of Drakes Broughton does not make sense because the residents of that area more closely identify with the nearby town of Pershore. We propose leaving that ward in Mid Worcestershire where we place Pershore in terms of our detailed proposal you have. We believe that the Commission's proposal for Bromsgrove and Droitwich does make sense as they are similar towns with some overlapping priorities. We propose slightly different boundaries for this seat leaving Lovett and North Claines in mid Worcestershire. We support your proposals for Redditch.

We would be happy with the Commission's proposed revisions to Wyre Forest in isolation. The inclusion of Hartlebury makes a lot of sense given how distant many of the parts of the Mid Worcestershire seat are. However, we are not able to find a satisfactory arrangement that keeps all of the wards in Wyre Forest together, which addressed the more significant problem with Herefordshire. We therefore propose splitting Wyre Forest between two constituencies. We propose adding Kidderminster to a Mid Worcestershire seat and Stourport-on-Severn to a new Ludlow and Stourport seat.

Finally, we believe that the proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency would have exactly the same problems as North Herefordshire. Given my earlier proposals for Herefordshire and Warwickshire, we are proposing a South Worcestershire seat containing Malvern, Evesham and the rural areas in the south of the county, and a Mid Worcestershire seat going from Kidderminster down to Pershore. This Mid Worcestershire proposal is less spread out than the existing one and we believe an improvement on the current constituency.

Borrowing the civic data that you have got there, there have not been enough copies for others, those are the comments we have. We are not intending to make further representations. We believe that tackling the Birmingham problem will significantly improve arrangements for this city and the four neighbouring boroughs and the

consequential knock-on effects for Coventry. We have suggested a reduction in the size of Ludlow and Leominster and Evesham and South Warwickshire seat. We have found a way to keep Warwick and Leamington together and resolve the uproar that there currently is in Whittington and Lichfield. I thank you for the significant amount of difficult work you have put in so far. I wish you well with the rest of your work. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. That is very, very detailed. It would be very difficult to start picking that to pieces at this point in time because there is an awful lot in there that you had to get through. We note that Birmingham is still an open book in your view. Thank you for that. I am not going to ask questions. I do not know if anyone has anything very specific, otherwise I think thank you, we will take these back and look at them very carefully and move on to the next speaker. Much appreciated for the hard work you have done on that. It is very impressive. Now we are going to move on to Mr Greg Cook, from the Labour Party and again if you can manage it within half an hour that would be great.

MR COOK: (Labour Party) My name is Greg Cook and I am an official of the National Labour Party based in our Head Office, which is Southside House, 105 Victoria Street, SW1. I am making this submission on behalf of the Labour Party and the West Midlands region of the Labour Party. It is being presented as an overall response to the initial proposals of the Boundary Commission and follows a detailed consultation process within the Labour Party which has involved all Members of Parliament, Constituency Labour Parties and others within the region. I am going to cover four areas, the first three relatively briefly to talk about the review process, secondly the statutory criteria and, thirdly, some of the policy areas which the Commission have issued their guidance on and then finally move on to talk about the initial proposals and our views on them.

To start with our comments on the process itself, and we welcome the initial proposals of the Commission and the very clear and comprehensive way in which they have set those proposals out. While we disagree with some of the proposals themselves and in the presentations to the different regional hearings we are setting out alternatives which we believe better fit the statutory criteria. We do accept that in all cases the Commission have fully considered the different options and explained the decisions which they have made. We also welcome very much the Commission's efforts to stimulate and encourage public participation in the process and from our own point of view to consult with the political parties on their policies and procedures and we are grateful in particular for the opportunity at this hearing to set out the views of the party on the Commission's initial proposals.

Under the terms of the Act the Commission may obviously in choosing between the different schemes take into account four criteria: special geographical circumstances, local government boundaries, the boundaries of existing constituencies and any local

ties that would be broken by changes to those constituencies. It is self-evident the Commission may not be able to respect all of these criteria or, indeed, in some places any of them in every part of the region while keeping the electorates of constituencies within the permissible range. We accept that in some areas the disruption to existing constituencies is likely to be substantial; it may be difficult to respect local authority boundaries and that local ties may be broken. Where we put forward alternative proposals to those of the Commission we do so on the basis that we believe them to be, at least on balance, more consistent with those statutory criteria and we obviously note and accept the electoral quota for the review is 74,769 and that all seats in the West Midlands region must therefore have electorates of between 71,031 and 78,507.

I want to cover five policy areas which are relevant to the proposals themselves; firstly the use of European electoral regions sub-national review areas for the purposes of the initial proposals, which we welcome. Were the Commission not to use this approach the review of the constituencies in England would become much more complex with almost limitless options and the result would be that meaningful consultation and public participation would be much harder to achieve. The electorate, we note, of the West Midlands region at 3,989,320 gives an entitlement under the Sainte-Laguë allocation to 53 seats with an average electorate of 75,270, which is quite significantly 501 electors above the electoral quota.

Secondly, on the issue of wards and divisions, we note the Commission's policy of using district and unitary wards as the smallest unit with which to build constituencies and also their remarks on this issue which state that they recognise there may be exceptional and compelling circumstances that make it appropriate to divide a ward, but we also note that no such proposals have been made in the West Midlands region or indeed in any other part of England. The Labour Party supports the policy of the Commission and we believe that any such proposal that is made should be treated on its merits but within an assumption that whole wards and divisions should remain intact in the absence of those compelling and exceptional circumstances such as are described.

The large average electorates of the wards in some of the metropolitan districts in particular within the West Midlands region are such that we believe it is right the Commission should at least consider whether it may be necessary to divide a ward in order better to respect local ties, existing constituencies in local authorities, but the Labour Party is not making any such proposal and we actually believe it is possible to have a satisfactory arrangement of constituencies without doing so.

Thirdly, on the issue of so called "orphan" wards, we note the concept of the orphan ward, which is where one ward of a local authority is added to a constituency wholly or partly in another local authority and that this is often regarded by definition as "undesirable". We accept that such arrangements are often anomalous and they are clearly at odds with the respect for local authority boundaries. However, we believe the

dogmatic policy which considered that such arrangements are always undesirable is not appropriate and that the addition of other wards just for the sake of not having a single ward in such a scenario is not by itself necessarily to be preferred if it means that ties are broken and electors are moved in that ward. We note that in this region there are a number of such proposals that have been made, most of which we support, others we believe are unnecessary, but we do accept that most of those proposals have been made in order to try to minimise change which we do believe is appropriate and where we make such a proposal it is with the same intention.

On the use of sub-regional review areas we note there is no requirement on the Commission to avoid the crossing of county boundaries as there used to be under the legislation prior to 2011. In this region the Commission have allocated a whole number of seats to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent counties and that the rest of the region comprises one large review area. We believe the use of counties as units in this way is a sensible approach insofar as it is consistent with respect for local authority boundaries, but in this region its application is limited in its usefulness as most of the county electorates are not suitable for the allocation of a whole number of seats. Where a review area comprises a number of counties we also do not believe there is any particular merit in limiting the number of seats containing parts of more than one county if that is at the expense of the other criteria.

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

To turn to the initial proposals of the Commission, I am going to set out our views on those initial proposals and make some counter-proposals to some of them. While we refer to the proposals in terms of the statutory criteria we do not, in this submission, include detail of the community ties and other relevant matters underlying them, which will be amplified in the statements of individuals and written representations of people in the areas affected. We support, or at least we are offering no alternative to 39 of the proposed constituencies in the West Midlands region although we do believe some of them to be imperfect and may break ties and cause disruption, but we also believe however there may be no better alternative available and as in all areas will consider all other proposals that are made.

We do note the county of Staffordshire, including the city of Stoke-on-Trent, can sustain 11 whole constituencies with an average electorate of 74,121, and also that four of the existing constituencies in the county could remain unchanged and therefore it is sensible to allocate 11 whole seats. The table sets out the electorates of the different

county units and combinations of counties as proposed by the Commission; the current seats and their theoretical entitlement, which is obviously the electorate divided by the electoral quota and what their rounded seat entitlements will be and in the right-hand column the average electorate under those entitlements.

Of the other counties, other than Staffordshire, Herefordshire and Shropshire obviously cannot stand alone because the average electorate of whole numbers of seats in those counties will be more than five per cent below the electoral quota. The same applies effectively to Worcestershire, where it would almost certainly not be possible to create six whole seats, certainly not without dividing wards. Additionally, the average electorate of five seats in Warwickshire would actually be too large at 80,263. The marginal theoretical entitlements of all these counties mean that there is no combination that can easily form a grouping that could be allocated a whole number of seats, four of them having a joint theoretical entitlement to 17.54 constituencies. We therefore believe the Commission is right to include the West Midlands County in one large review area comprising the whole of the region apart from Staffordshire.

If we turn to Staffordshire firstly itself, we support the initial proposals in the south of the county, which means that three constituencies are unchanged and another is amended only to adjust to new ward boundaries. We also support the inclusion of the Haywood and Hixon ward in Lichfield constituency, of the Gnosall and Woodseaves ward and the whole of the divided wards of Milwich and Seighford and Church Eaton in the Stafford constituency.

We note the electorates of the six current constituencies in the north of the county are all significantly below the electoral quota and that this is therefore where the major change takes place. We do welcome the inclusion of all five wards which make up the town of Kidsgrove, including Newchapel in the same constituency, and we also note that the proposals result in the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency being coterminous with its district council. We accept that major change is necessary within Stoke-on-Trent but we are concerned that, with the initial proposals, almost 40 per cent of electors in the three current constituencies are moved to a new seat and that ties are broken within the city by these changes. We believe in particular that the proposed West Staffordshire constituency appears to be made up of parts left over from other constituencies and lacks much internal coherence, comprising as it does part of the south of Stoke, including Blurton and Trentham, the town of Stone and a large rural area including Audley and Bignall End and Halmerend, which are in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency at the moment and have ties to that town. While we ourselves are not putting forward any definitive counter-proposal here we will carefully consider any alternative proposals that are made, be they comprehensive or localised.

In Shropshire we fully support the initial proposals for the four seats which are wholly within Shropshire, including the unchanged North Shropshire constituency and the Shrewsbury seat, which is retained intact with the addition of one division, and we also



agree that the new name of this constituency is appropriate. We support the proposal to increase the electorate of the Telford constituency through the inclusion of the Donnington and Hadley and Leegomery wards, and the whole of Oakengates and Ketley Bank. We believe this is the logical way to amend this constituency and it enables the inclusion of six divisions of the Ludlow constituency, including the town of Bridgnorth in a Bridgnorth Wellington and the Wrekin seat.

We do note that the initial proposals divide Herefordshire between three constituencies, only one of which is entirely within the county. We do though support the changes to the Hereford and South Herefordshire seat, which now includes most of the villages immediately adjoining the city of Hereford which therefore have the strongest ties with them, and we believe the Ludlow and Leominster seat is well-shaped with the two main towns acting as the community focal points within it, and we also support the Malvern and Ledbury constituency.

To turn then to the remainder of the region, we note that the local authority areas of Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton currently comprise 23 seats and that they have a theoretical entitlement jointly now to 20.05 and under the initial proposals they are allocated 20 seats, but with the Sheldon ward of Birmingham included in the Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North constituency. The area of Coventry, Solihull, Warwickshire and Worcestershire currently comprises 17 constituencies and has a theoretical entitlement to 15.96 and whilst 16 seats have been allocated, those seats also include the Sheldon ward of Birmingham and that part of Herefordshire which is in the Malvern and Ledbury constituency, which obviously makes it a rather larger unit. The result is that the average electorate of these 16 constituencies is very high at 76,662 and the Commission have been required to make changes to them solely in order to increase the electorates of some of those constituencies so that most of those electorates are above the electoral quota rather than below it. Among the changes which have been made as a consequence of this there are a number of orphan ward proposals, such as the inclusion of Ombersley and Malvern and Ledbury, Hartlebury and Wyre Forest, Tanworth-in-Arden and Shirley in Solihull South, and the additional ward over the one that is required which has been added to the Worcester constituency.

We recognise the Commission is constrained by the large average ward electorates in Birmingham as well as by the under-representation across the region, which has an entitlement overall to 53.4 seats, which is exacerbated by the over-representation of Staffordshire, which has an entitlement to less than 11 seats but has 11. We therefore accept that this distribution of seats between the counties could only be adjusted by a major change in the West Midlands County, which we do not support. We believe, however, that the Commission have unnecessarily limited their options by having just one constituency which includes part of the West Midlands County and part of either Warwickshire or Worcestershire. This has meant that they have been required to make major changes to existing seats in order to ensure that they are not dividing any of the major towns. In particular, the initial proposals do divide the Solihull constituency and

they break ties within the Meriden constituency by including Knowle in the Coventry West and Meriden seat and Dorridge and Hockley Heath in the Shirley and Solihull South seat. They also transfer the rural parts of Rugby Borough back into Nuneaton constituency and they separate Kenilworth and Southam. Most importantly, the changes also mean that Warwick and Leamington, which have been part of the same constituency for over a hundred years and which share almost continuous development between them and are effectively twin towns, would be divided with Warwick in a seat with Stratford-on-Avon and Kenilworth with Leamington.

We recognise the Commission must make changes to the three seats in Coventry and there is no straightforward way of increasing the electorate of one of those seats and of allocating the remaining Coventry wards between other seats. We do not, however, support the proposal to include two wards of Solihull in a Coventry West and Meriden constituency. We believe the western boundary of Coventry is particularly well-defined with the built up area leading directly into a very rural area and we do not believe if there are many, if any, ties between Balsall Common or Meriden, which are the main settlements in Meriden ward, and Coventry, while Knowle is a completely separate area which looks towards Solihull. We do support the Commission's arrangement of the remaining wards of Coventry between a Coventry North East constituency, which would be unchanged, and the Coventry South seat which is a robust well-shaped seat which includes the centre of the city and all the wards which surround it. In Solihull the Commission have divided the town and a longstanding seat, which does not need to be changed with the Lyndon and Elmdon wards included in the seat with Sheldon, Chelmsley Wood and Castle Bromwich.

We propose that instead the Solihull constituency should be unchanged and that the Meriden constituency should be amended to include, as is proposed, the Sheldon ward of Birmingham, but also the North Warwickshire district wards of Coleshill North, Coleshill South and Water Orton, which have road links into Chelmsley Wood and Castle Bromwich as well and with Meriden and Balsall Common, while the ties of Meriden with Bickenhill ward, which are broken under the initial proposals would be restored. We would then propose that the remainder of the North Warwickshire district should be in a constituency with the Bablake, Holbrook and Woodlands wards of Coventry that we would propose should be called Coventry West and Atherstone and we believe that the Bablake ward in particular, which is semi rural, merges into the Fillongley ward of North Warwickshire and overall this is a much more satisfactory and robust means of incorporating Coventry wards with those of another district.

We note the electorate of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough at 90,571 is much too large for a single constituency but we would propose that 14 of its wards should form a Nuneaton and Bedworth seat, which would then obviously be entirely within that borough. We would propose that the Exhall ward should be included in the Coventry North East seat, which would otherwise be unchanged. While Exhall does contain part of the town of Bedworth the majority of its electors are in Exhall itself, whose parish

church is in the settlement of Ash Green and another part of the electorate lives in Keresley End, all of which are south of the motorway and not part of Bedworth itself.

We then propose that the Rugby constituency should be retained intact but for the changes to adjust to new ward boundaries, including, therefore, the whole of the Admirals and Cawston ward and additionally the Nuneaton and Bedworth ward of Whitestone, and this constituency could be renamed Rugby and East Warwickshire to recognise those parts of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough which are contained within it, some of which already are in that seat.

We also propose that the Kenilworth and Southam seat should be retained, including the whole of the Rugby ward of Dunsmore and the Stratford-on-Avon wards of Kineton and Red Horse, and this constituency should also include the Coventry wards of Wainbody and Westwood, which incorporate much of the campus of Warwick University, which is an issue which the Commission refer to in their initial proposals document and that campus would therefore be united in one constituency. This would allow the retention of the Warwick and Leamington constituency, including the whole of the currently divided Manor and Milverton wards and also Arden.

We then propose a Stratford-on-Avon seat which would include Tanworth-in-Arden and the Solihull wards of Blyth, Dorridge and Hockley Heath and Knowle, restoring the ties between those wards which are broken by the initial proposals, and then we would propose the inclusion of the Stratford-on-Avon wards of Bidford East and Bidford West and Salford in the Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency along with the Wychavon ward of Drakes Broughton, which has been referred to, which the Commission suggests has only been included in Worcester constituency because the electorates of other seats are too large.

We would then suggest the retention of the Inkberrow ward of Wychavon in the Redditch constituency with Barnt Green and Tardebigge in the Bromsgrove and Droitwich seat. The Bromsgrove district wards of Rubery North and Rubery South would then be in Birmingham Northfield constituency; Rubery community is divided between Bromsgrove and Birmingham and that part of Rubery which is in Birmingham is in the Northfield seat.

Overall, this counter-proposal we concede does result in the additional division of some local authority areas, such as North Warwickshire obviously and Coventry being divided between four rather than three seats; however, we believe it is outweighed by the ability to retain the existing pattern of constituencies and thus to minimise the breaking of ties. Under this counter-proposal Solihull constituency would remain unchanged and several other constituencies would retain significantly more of their electors, and that is set out in the tables, so the Kenilworth and Southam seat, which is abolished under the initial proposals, would retain 82.1 per cent of its electorate, Meriden 66.2, the existing Mid Worcestershire, the successor seat is Evesham and South Warwickshire 58 per cent,

Redditch would be retained intact, Rugby 99.8 and Warwick and Leamington again retained intact. In addition, the Nuneaton and Bedworth seat would be wholly within that borough and while the Labour Party supports the arrangement of wards in Coventry North East and Coventry South, we believe the Coventry North and Atherstone seat is more integrated than the proposed Coventry West and Meriden, and the southern part of Solihull borough is united in the Stratford-on-Avon constituency. In total, within the 14 constituencies within the counter-proposal, a total of 790,681 electors, which is 80.7 per cent, remain in their main successor constituency compared with 702,908, which is 71.7 per cent under the initial proposals, which we would argue is a very large difference and very significant difference indeed.

In the rest of the West Midlands county we recognise the Commission have been required to make major changes partly because of the large ward sizes, particularly in Birmingham, and undoubtedly were the Commission to consider dividing wards they would have many more options for allocating seats in this area. The nature of a conurbation such as this, however, is that most areas will have ties to most others nearby and indeed it may be difficult to define those ties in terms of wards and polling districts. More importantly, the reduction in the allocation of seats, which goes down from 23 to 20 across the area, means that it is not possible to preserve the existing pattern whether or not wards are divided. We do not believe, therefore, there are likely to be real benefits in dividing wards to outweigh the difficulties of doing so, nor that the difficulties which the Commission have make those circumstances exceptional and compelling, and we note that most of the seats as proposed by the Commission contain the majority of electors in a current seat, the Birmingham Hodge Hill and Sutton Coldfield constituencies are unchanged, Aldridge, Brownhills constituency is retained intact.

In Birmingham five constituencies retain three of their current four wards intact while the Brandwood and Northfield constituencies each retain two with two other wards swapped between them. The shape of these constituencies, which has been referred to, and indeed of the Birmingham Edgbaston and Birmingham Selly Oak and Halesowen seats in this part of the city, whilst seeming awkward in fact we would argue reflect the radial road routes which run out of the city centre. In Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton the seats are mostly well-shaped and most of the larger towns are kept in individual constituencies. We support the proposed Aldridge, Brownhills and Bloxwich constituency and Walsall Central, which are both wholly in one borough and the Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency, which includes three wards of Walsall and five of Wolverhampton. We welcome the retention of most of Wolverhampton South East and Wolverhampton South West constituencies in respect of either Wolverhampton South and Coseley and Wolverhampton West constituencies. We support the proposed Stourbridge and Dudley West constituencies and the Warley constituency, which now includes the Rowley Regis area. We also support the West Bromwich constituency, which is the successor to West Bromwich East and

Dudley East and Tipton, which combines wards of Dudley North and West Bromwich West.

To sum up, the details of all the constituencies where we make a counter-proposal are set out in the appendix and we will make a detailed written representation setting out our arguments, including detailed statistics and mapping before 5 December. We reserve our position and will comment on all the proposals made during this consultation period during the secondary consultation period next year. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Cook. Thank you also for your kind comments about the Commission. Again, it is very complicated, a lot of proposed changes there, so I am not going to pick on anything specific. Are there any questions? If I can take it through the Chair.

MR PRATT: (Conservative Party) Of course, Madam Chairman, through you. My name is Roger Pratt. I represent the Conservative Party. In terms of the cross-border seats between Warwickshire and Worcestershire and Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands, I believe the Commission have two. I wonder if through you, Madam Chairman, Mr Cook could say how many cross-border seats between Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands there are in his proposals.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are you able to do that?

MR COOK: I can tell you which ones they are. Obviously the Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency as proposed by the Commission. There would be Birmingham Northfield, Coventry North East, Meriden and Stratford-on-Avon. I think I have them all there. Is that right?

MR PRATT: Kenilworth and Southam.

MR COOK: Coventry West and Atherstone, yes.

MR PRATT: Would you agree there are seven?

MR COOK: I will take your word for it if you have counted, yes.

MR PRATT: One other question of clarification through you, Madam Chairman. I wonder if you could tell me how many seats in the West Midlands the Commission propose consisting of four local authorities and how many you propose?

MR COOK: I think we only propose one and I believe the Commission in this region have none, although there are two at the moment in other parts of the country and others may be proposed.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: One more question at the back there, if that is all right.

MR BAILEY: Hello, I am Adrian Bailey. I notice with the Green presentation and with yours a lack of maps and it makes it difficult for members of the public to see what is going on. Would it be possible for us to see these before they are presented in the Boundary Commission's documentation later?

MR COOK: There will be mapping in our written representation, yes, which will be made available before the secondary consultation period.

MR BAILEY: Now?

MR COOK: No, not before 5 December. We are not promising that I am afraid, no.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is obviously very, very difficult and these really complicated things, and we have not been given maps either so far in the two presentations we have seen. Obviously we have our own maps in front of us, which we are trying to have a good look at. There is one of the very big maps on a board outside. I think that is it. Thank you very much indeed for your time. Our next speaker is David Murray from the Lib Dems, if you are here, Mr Murray.

MR MURRAY: (Liberal Democrats) Good morning. I am David Murray, the Liberal Democrats' Boundary Coordinator for this review. I was also the Coordinator for the 2013 review, so I have got some experience of what goes on in the West Midlands from the previous review, which I will refer to in one or two points in the presentation.

We agree with using regions as building blocks for the review. However, in the West Midlands, given the large sizes of the wards in the city of Birmingham, we believe that splitting wards would produce constituencies that are more compliant with Rule 5 than in the initial proposals. We support 12 of the BCE's proposed constituencies in the West Midlands and support two more but suggest name changes. We will be suggesting ways we believe 39 constituencies can be better formed.

Rule 5, we take into account the special geographical considerations, the local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015, boundaries of existing constituencies, which we hope as far as possible the BCE will be able to maintain and any local ties that would be broken by changes to those constituencies. By splitting wards in Birmingham we believe constituencies that are more compliant with Rule 5 can be created and a greater number of electors can stay in clear successor constituencies.

The BCE acknowledge that they considered, but in the end rejected, splitting wards in the West Midlands county. However, the Constitutional Affairs Select Committee report into the previously aborted review concluded that although local government wards are a perfectly sensible starting point for building parliamentary constituencies, the constraints created by the new rules for the distribution of parliamentary constituencies mean that Boundary Commissions cannot afford to bind themselves unnecessarily. They said, "We welcome the statement from the Boundary Commission for England that it will be more open to the possibility of splitting wards in the future. This should serve to minimise any disruption resulting from the Boundary Review process and allow for greater account to be taken of substantive community boundaries." That comes from the eighth report of the session from 9 March 2015.

In no part of the country other than Birmingham are we more constrained by the size of wards in terms of making up constituencies by not splitting wards. It has been mentioned already some of the strange combinations of Halesowen and Selly Oak, which straddles across the Woodvale Valley and the M5 to two quite different areas, and also the Ladywood constituency which runs across from Castle Vale, as said, right across into Smethwick like a snake across the whole of Birmingham. It is really quite unacceptable.

For the sub-regions the BCE has come up with one for most of the region and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with 11. We propose that the Hereford, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire should be a sub-region with 12, that Birmingham should have nine and that Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell should have 11, and the remaining Warwickshire, Coventry, Solihull, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent on the east side would have 21. They are smaller ones, so that it effectively protects the integrity of Birmingham's boundary by limiting the number of new constituencies to nine and not to ten.

As you can see, the total Birmingham electorate for the review is 686,804 and bearing in mind that the Sutton Coldfield constituency remains the same that leaves 613,670 for the rest of Birmingham for eight revised constituencies averaging 76,704. However, the BCE has kept ten constituencies, predominantly in Birmingham, by including parts of Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall resulting in substantial damage to community ties and also effectively taking a Black Country constituency away from the Black Country boroughs.

Birmingham currently has ten constituencies, each of which has four very large wards. In this review it would have to go down to nine in order to keep within the statutory range of electorates allowed. The Sutton Coldfield constituency will stay the same, but the other eight constituencies would have to be created from 36 wards to keep within the Birmingham city boundary. We believe it is better to create eight seats out of these remaining 36 wards by splitting along polling district lines rather than taking votes from the Black Country and breaking community ties.

We continue to talk to community groups and to colleagues in Birmingham Liberal Democrats to come up with detailed proposals for how wards can be split in order to provide a better solution. We will be looking at how this can be done by a minimum number of splits of wards despite the fact that the Boundary Commission had opted to actually be more flexible in terms of this approach, particularly in respect of Birmingham. We will make a full written submission before 5 December.

With Dudley and Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell, the Black Country, the four boroughs, by using split wards to create nine seats within the city of Birmingham the better solution for communities in the Black Country can be made. The combined electorates of the local authorities of Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell is 812,061, which will support 11 constituencies within the statutory range. Those are our counter-proposals for the Black Country constituencies, 11 constituencies contained within the four boroughs without going outside of the boroughs at all or lending part of their wards to Birmingham.

Number one is Wolverhampton West and number two is Wolverhampton East. These are both solutions that came out of the 2013 review for Wolverhampton and Walsall West, which is number three, also came out of the 2013 review and I do not see any reason for producing a very strange combination in Wolverhampton where the centre of the city of Wolverhampton is part of a constituency that does not even bear the Wolverhampton name, it is just called Willenhall and Wednesfield. Walsall North and South have been retained by combining the Aldridge and Bramhills and Bloxwich constituency into four and five. This maintains more of the existing constituencies than in fact the Boundary Commission has achieved.

We would like to see the retention of Walsall North and South, which works very well to the east of the M6. The M6 comes down [here](#) and it makes a sensible boundary between Walsall West [here](#) at number three and also Walsall North up [here](#). ([Indicating](#)) Rather than taking wards away from Dudley, both to Birmingham and also to Wolverhampton, we have kept a Dudley North, number six [here](#), Dudley South and Stourbridge. We have also retained seven and eight, which are the West Bromwich West and West Bromwich East which very close match the existing constituencies. The only change that we have made in terms of combination is number 11 [here](#), which is Halesowen and Warley. What we have done is we have taken half the wards from Warley and half the wards from Halesowen and Rowley Regis and combined them into Halesowen and Warley so that there is then sufficient spare wards to enable two West Bromwich wards, West and East, rather than just one West Bromwich one as the Boundary Commission has proposed.

If you look at the comparison there between the Boundary Commission's proposals and the alternative ones that we are proposing you can see that it retains more of the existing seats, and not only that but there are 11 in our proposal compared to ten from



the Boundary Commission. You can see the effects of actually stealing a constituency from the Black Country to top up the numbers in Birmingham, which we find unacceptable when they can both justify having constituencies in their own right, 11 in this area and nine in Birmingham. I am sorry that the actual numbers have shifted from the original column, but the ones supported are Cannock Chase, Hereford and South Herefordshire, Newcastle-under-Lyme, North Shropshire, Nuneaton, South Staffordshire, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent North, Stoke-on-Trent South, Sutton Coldfield, Telford and Wyre Forest. Those are the 12, and there are two more which we think should have name changes. We think Bridgnorth, Wellington and the Wrekin should be simplified to Bridgnorth and the Wrekin. This is because Wellington is already contained in the Wrekin constituency, so it does not need to be included in the new unwieldy seat name, and so it should just become Bridgnorth and the Wrekin.

The Burton CC should be renamed East Staffordshire CC - this has occurred at previous reviews - because this compliments the West Staffordshire constituency which the Boundary Commission has used to replace the Stone constituency. Burton is right down at the southern end of the constituency and is not representative of the northern part of East Staffordshire District Council, Uttoxeter and the areas further north, and they feel that the Burton name actually tends to exclude them. I think East Staffordshire would be a good complement to the West Staffordshire one that has been created.

On the minor changes to the constituencies, Bromsgrove and Droitwich: Bromsgrove should lose the Lovett and Claines ward and retain the Tardebigge ward from Redditch and end up with an electorate of 76,100. This is to enable Worcester to be brought within range, which we will deal with in a minute. Coventry North East, although it is in range the addition of Poplar from Bedworth brings the total to 77,584 and helps to keep Nuneaton as the Boundary Commission propose. Redditch returns Tardebigge to Bromsgrove to free Lovett and Claines for the Worcester constituency with an electorate of 75,457. Rugby and Southam, almost the same as the BC proposal, other than losing the southernmost Kineton ward to Stratford, leaving Rugby and Southam with 74,510.

Shrewsbury we have returned the Chirbury and Wortham ward, which was the orphan ward from Ludlow, to Ludlow and Leominster to compensate for the loss of additional Herefordshire wards to Malvern and Ledbury. This leaves Shrewsbury the same as the present constituency with 75,528 electors. Stafford, we are suggesting that Gnosall and Woodseaves ward becomes part of West Staffordshire as it is the only ward left on the west of the county that is not in that constituency. It is currently in the Stone constituency, which will become West Staffordshire, so this change will not alter its existing connections. It is also separated from Stafford town by the Seighford and Church Eaton ward. We therefore recommend that Haywood and Hixon should remain with Stafford leaving it with a slightly reduced electorate from 72,896 to 72,767.

We say West Staffordshire should include Gnosall and Woodseaves which is currently in the Stone constituency. This would increase the electorate to 76,255 but if the BCE

keep it with Stafford the electorate will then go up to 77,944, which will still be within quota.

Worcester, Norton and Whittington and Drakes Broughton should more logically be part of the Evesham constituency and the two northern wards of Ombersley and Lovett and North Claines is the addition to Worcester. Both of them are needed as Ombersley is not contiguous with the city on its own. As was raised in the last review, Ombersley ward is to the east of the River Severn and quite unsuitable to be part of the BCE's proposed Malvern and Ledbury constituency because of the limited crossings of the River Severn in that area, and it is part of the Wychavon district so it can remain in that part by being added to Worcester.

With Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon, Warwick has 97,927 electors and Stratford-on-Avon has 94,292 and are the two largest districts in Warwickshire and they should be entitled to their own constituencies without having to share one between them as the BCE proposes. This constituency should be separated into a Warwick and Leamington BC at present with an electorate of 71,321, and a Stratford-on-Avon CC 75,788 by retaining the South Warwickshire part which has been attached to the Evesham constituency. You may remember that in the 2013 review there was an actual sub-regional boundary that prevented crossovers between Worcestershire and Warwickshire and we believe that it is important in this area that these two are not linked together across a sort of narrow waste across the boundary between the two.

Evesham and South Warwickshire, we believe that Evesham should be a constituency on its own allowing Stratford to have its own constituency as proposed above. The seven Warwickshire wards which comprise 18,700 electors, would be returned to Stratford and in exchange Evesham would claim Norton and Whittington and Drakes Broughton, which are replaced from Worcester by Ombersley and Lovett and North Claines, and the five Malvern Hills wards of Kempsey, Longdon, Morton, Ripple and Upton and Hanley, totalling 11,221 electors, bringing the Evesham total to a reasonable 74,847 electors.

There is a modification of the Boundary Commission's map. The area in Warwickshire would go back to Stratford and the area to the west, which are the Malvern Hills wards, would actually join Evesham. That would make Evesham quite a compact constituency without going any further north than Bowbrook and Inkberrow because the northern parts, Ombersley and Lovett and North Claines, would be part of Worcester and the Hartlebury one would actually be joined to Wyre Forest.

To Malvern and Ledbury, to the east the proposed constituency would lose Ombersley, as we said it is on the wrong side of the River Severn to Worcester, and its five south eastern wards to Evesham. To compensate, it would gain the three wards between Tenbury and Three Crosses ward. This would add 7,436 electors giving a new total of 72,441 electors. Bearing in mind the geographical size of the constituency, a lower total

is appropriate. The addition of Bromyard Bringsty, Bromyard West and Hampton will obviously affect the Ludlow and Leominster proposal from the BCE. On Ludlow and Leominster, this constituency would lose the three wards above, totalling 7,436 electors, leaving a more logical eastern boundary on the outskirts of Leominster. This would reduce the constituency total to 70,097, below the statutory minimum, but by adding back in the orphan Ludlow ward of Cherbury and Wortham, which is 2,302 electors, from Shrewsbury it raises the total to 72,399. As this constituency, as has been pointed out earlier, is geographically the largest in the whole West Midlands region it is also appropriate to keep the electorates down near the minimum considering the difficulty of serving this area for any MP in the future.

There is the Malvern and Ledbury one. There are the three wards that fill in that gap between Tenbury and Three Crosses to make it a much more reasonable constituency. Ombersley would go to Worcester and the five southern wards would join on to Evesham. There has always been a crossover there between Wychavon and Malvern Hills in terms of wards in the past, so that is nothing particularly new.

Kenilworth and Leamington. This should become Kenilworth and Meriden, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats in the 2013 review. The constituency would combine the Meriden wards of Bickenhill, Blythe, Chelmsley Wood, Dorridge and Hockley Heath, Knowle and Meriden with the four Warwick wards of Abbey, Arden, Park Hill and St Johns, totalling 22,582. This also allows the addition of Tanworth-in-Arden, which is right at the northwest corner of Stratford, as in the BCE's original Shirley and Solihull South constituency, giving a total of 78,222 electors.

With regard to the Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North and the Shirley and Solihull South BC, as other people have said, we believe that the Solihull constituency should stay as it is. It is one of the Rule 5 things that, where possible, constituencies should remain as they actually are and not be changed unnecessarily without any additions or donations to anywhere else. Sheldon ward would be returned to Birmingham Yardley as now. As I say, under Rule 5 it is the intention to retain existing constituencies wherever possible and there seems to be no good reason to split Solihull, which is already just above the UK average and fits in well with the proposed adjoining constituencies.

Coventry South, we think this should retain its existing six wards, including Wainbody and Westwood, and be brought within range by adding Stoneleigh and Cubbington ward to the south of it. Coventry South had the largest drop in electors between 2010 and 2015 in the West Midlands, a staggering 8,525, due to its university and the effects of individual electoral registration, and by keeping the electorate of Coventry South near the minimum it allows room for inclusion and expansion of the individual electoral registration amongst students in the future without needing to alter the constituency at all because of exceeding its quota.

Coventry West and Meriden proposal from the BCE, we think this should be replaced by the original Coventry North West BC, which, with 70,716 electors, was just 315 below the minimum and, like Coventry South, needed one ward addition to exceed the minimum. In this case, the most suitable adjacent ward to the north is Exhall, which increases Coventry North West to 76,476. It is noted that Exhall has a Coventry postal address, so it would seem a better solution than tacking on Meriden and, even further away, Knowle to the city of Coventry.

North Warwickshire has one of the smallest electorates, 47,339, in the West Midlands and is not able to form a constituency without considerable assistance from neighbouring local authorities. It has been necessary to claim Bedworth's Exhall and Poplar wards from North Warwickshire added to Coventry North West and North East respectively. It is proposed that the four north eastern wards should be added to Tamworth CC, so the balance is made up of the three northern wards of the Meriden constituency, totalling 25,694 electors, bringing in the new North Warwickshire total to 78,396. The reason for that, if we look at Tamworth following that, as was suggested by the Liberal Democrats in the 2013 review and supported at the time by the *Tamworth Herald*, the Tamworth constituency could be centred on the town and not sort of lopsided with Lichfield wards of Little Aston and Stonnall and Shenstone to the west.

Newton Regis and Warton, which is right in the northeast of North Warwickshire, Polesworth East and Polesworth West with a total of 10,213 electors, which have an affinity with Tamworth and also good road and rail links from there, would be included. I think it is important to actually note as far as that goes that this does not put these wards in Staffordshire, nor affect their local services from North Warwickshire or Warwickshire County. It will not affect their postcode, their insurance premiums, house prices or council tax. I think it is important to raise this because at the last review people said that these terrible effects would occur if part of the Warwickshire wards were actually joined on to a Staffordshire constituency.

There is the North Warwickshire CC, it includes the three wards north of Meriden and it includes the remaining three of the Bedworth wards with Poplar going to Coventry North East and Exhall going to Coventry North West. The four that are actually adjacent to Tamworth and separate from almost the rest of north Warwickshire would actually make the Tamworth constituency much more rational and as I say was supported by the *Tamworth Herald*.

There is the Tamworth part. It allows the Shenstone, Little Aston and Stonnall wards to be returned to Lichfield instead of the Hayward and Hixon from Stafford, so it keeps Lichfield within just two local authorities and not three and it also uses the new wards round to the north of Tamworth. There is a slight problem in the area at the top, because although the Whittington and Streethay ward has this sort of bulge [here](#), which is the Streethay bit, Streethay is actually part of the Fradley and Streethay combined parish. (Indicating) By actually putting those in different constituencies that would

actually split those two communities in a different area. If one was going to seek a very rare occasion to have a split ward outside of Birmingham then that is possibly one area where this combines the parish there and you could actually put Streethay there back into the Lichfield constituency, and this is the main body of Lichfield here, and would be the more logical approach without shutting off the north of Lichfield and the new boundary would actually use this line here. (Indicating)

Lichfield can avoid being part of the three local authorities by returning the orphan Haywood and Hixon ward to Stafford. Instead, it can reclaim the Little Aston and Stonnall and Shenstone wards from Tamworth, giving it a 5,867 elector boost. In addition, the new Lichfield ward of Whittington and Streethay splits the Fradley and Streethay CP, as I have just said, putting the two parts of this combined parish into different constituencies. It is suggested that the 467 parliamentary electors in the Streethay part become part of the Lichfield and not the Tamworth constituency at the same time as it allocates space to the northeast of Lichfield and removes the kink from the boundary. This would give the revised Lichfield constituency an electorate of 76,064 and overall retain more of its Lichfield district wards. It still keeps the three East Staffordshire ones that it has had at present. Tamworth would have 77,184 electors, similar to the Lichfield total, with this small adjustment.

I should point out that, although I think it is useful from the community point of view to do that, it is not essential in terms of the actual quota. The actual figures for Tamworth and Lichfield would be met if that Whittington and Streethay ward remained unbroken. There is the difference. That part of Fradley and Streethay becomes part of Lichfield and you can see there how close it is to the Lichfield town itself. Haywood and Hixon would go back to Stafford as the only ward from Stafford that is actually moved across into a different local authority area. At the bottom, the two wards would be added back to Lichfield from Tamworth.

We believe that the Boundary Commission should consider revisions to its scheme to seek to retain more of the existing constituencies in the West Midlands and minimise the disruption to electors that was identified by the Government's Select Committee as a possibility of being two exceptional and compelling on splitting wards. Being willing to consider limited ward splitting will allow communities of interest to be better maintained. We will be submitting a full written response before 5 December with all the maps and so on to supply more evidence to support the case for being prepared to split wards and maintain stronger community links. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any questions? Yes, we will take a question there. We are just coming up to the break, so if we can be as brief as possible.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, through you, if I could just ask one or two questions. Firstly, a similar question to the question I asked Mr Cook. How

many constituencies cross between Warwickshire and the West Midlands under your proposals?

MR MURRAY: Warwickshire and West Midlands?

MR PRATT: Yes, Warwickshire and the West Midlands, the metropolitan area, so either into Solihull or Coventry?

MR MURRAY: I could not tell you that offhand.

MR PRATT: Would you agree it may well be four?

MR MURRAY: Yes, I would accept your figure.

MR PRATT: Could you tell me how many constituencies Bedworth is split between, the community of Bedworth?

MR MURRAY: Three.

MR PRATT: Finally, just a question with regard to your Black Country constituencies. You have proposed 11 constituencies for the Black Country entirely and you are dealing with Birmingham separately. Am I right in thinking there is a split ward between your constituencies Walsall North and Walsall South in that proposal?

MR MURRAY: There is a possibility of one but it is not necessary. It is purely whether the kink between Aldridge South and Central and South actually took the boundary along Leighswood Avenue and that went into Walsall. It is only just to balance up the electorates, it is not actually necessary, so it could remain as it was.

MR PRATT: I am grateful to you. I was not quite sure with this little bit on the map.

MR MURRAY: That is right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any other questions? Yes, we have one at the back there.

MR RICHARDS: Chris Richards. Madam Chairman, for the sake of clarity can I just confirm according to the map Aldridge Central goes into the South Walsall seat and Aldridge North goes into the North Walsall seat?

MR MURRAY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response) There we have it. We have one set of plans from the Boundary Commission, three

other sets of plan, all apparently perfectly logical, so time for a break. If we could possibly try and get back for 11.50, that would be great, we can then get back on time. Thank you very much.

After a short break

Time noted 11.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Let us resume our session now with Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party.

MR PRATT: (Conservative Party) Thank you very much indeed, and I too would like to echo the thanks to the Commission for all the work they have done on the proposals both in the West Midlands and elsewhere.

This is a representation on behalf of the Conservative Party and the West Midlands region Conservatives. My name is Roger Pratt. I am the Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party. In our presentation I will be quoting from the initial proposals booklet, from the Assistant Commissioner's report from the aborted review and also from the guide to the review. Just before I start I wonder if I can draw your attention, you have a handout as part of this and on pages 16 and 17 I apologise that in our counter-proposal some constituencies erroneously have been included twice, so if you just ignore the second lot from Birmingham Hall Green down to Meriden, but the figures still add up. The figures are right, it is just for some unknown reason I think as my colleague, Mr Cook, said at some stage it is cut and paste in some of these things. I apologise for that. I just wanted to point that out at the start.

We support the allocation of 53 seats to the West Midlands. We support the Commission's grouping in respect of Staffordshire and the proposed allocation to Staffordshire of 11 seats. What I would do is I would quote from page 11, item 21, in terms of the Commission's initial booklet: "Our division of the West Midlands region into sub-regions is a purely practical approach. We welcome counter-proposals from respondents to our consultation based on other grouping of counties and unitary authorities if the statutory factors can be better reflected in those counter-proposals." We are therefore proposing an alternative grouping, so we are proposing that Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton should be given 20 seats, Coventry and Warwickshire eight seats, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire 12, and Solihull two. If again I quote from item 25 on pages 11 and 12 of the initial proposals booklet, "The electorates of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Telford and The Wrekin are such that it is not possible to allocate a whole number of constituencies with electorates within five per cent of the electoral quota to each. We considered grouping them in one sub-region and allocating 12 constituencies, which is one fewer than at present" but then they rejected that. Also at item 49 on page 15 of the initial

proposals booklet it says, “While it is possible to create two constituencies wholly within Solihull borough we decided not to do so.” We have decided to do those alternative combinations.

The guidelines that we have used are the guidelines for the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, and those have guided our whole approach to looking for counter-proposals, so the rules on special geographical considerations, local government boundaries and really in terms of local government boundaries there are two key things: how many constituencies are included within a local authority and how many local authorities are included within a constituency, and then the boundaries of existing constituencies, which relates to the amount of change from the existing constituency, and local ties.

What I would like to do now is look at dividing wards between constituencies. We have had some evidence from others on dividing wards between constituencies. The guidance document in item paragraph 31 talks about the whole question of dividing wards. In the initial proposals booklet item 27 on page 12 it says: “All of our proposed constituencies covering the West Midlands contain whole wards. We considered an alternative that would divide the number of wards in the West Midlands county but we decided it was not necessary to breach our statutory policy of using whole wards. However, we would welcome evidence on whether an alternative configuration of constituencies could be formulated that was not based on whole wards, bearing in mind our policy of preferring to build constituencies with whole wards.”

I think I am right in saying that this is the only region in which the Commission have specifically said they would welcome people actually giving evidence on split wards. I think that is clearly because of the size of the wards in Birmingham. They talk about “exceptional and compelling circumstances”, but they have cited where whole ward solutions significantly cut across local ties and where there is a significant domino effect of otherwise unnecessary change to a chain of constituencies. It is different from last time because of that guidance that is given in the guidance booklet and also the fact that the Boundary Commission do publish on their website the electoral numbers for polling districts so that you can break down by polling districts, which was not provided in the aborted review but it is provided this time.

We believe we meet this criteria in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands and Worcestershire because we very significantly improve the local authority links. We propose much less change increasing the number of intact constituencies and by considerably improving local ties. We divide three wards, two in Birmingham and one in Dudley, and by that means we avoid a domino effect of unnecessary change in constituencies in Solihull, in Warwickshire and in Worcestershire, and also we think have a much better scheme within Birmingham itself.

If we deal with Staffordshire first of all, we support the Commission’s proposals in their entirety for the vast majority of the seats. No change in Cannock Chase, Newcastle all



within Newcastle-under-Lyme local authority, no change in South Staffordshire, very minor change in Stafford, Staffordshire Moorlands coterminous with the local authority, which is very good. I would quote here from the Assistant Commissioner's report last time on pages 34 and 35 of the AC146: "We can readily agree that having regard to the statutory factors there is an advantage in creating a Staffordshire Moorlands constituency that contains the whole of the district of Staffordshire Moorlands and no wards from any other district."

It goes on to say: "In our view this element of the Commission's proposals scores highly when account is taken of the statutory factors. We are not surprised that there is significant support for this element from residents in the district of Staffordshire Moorlands and others."

We think that is very sensible. The two Stoke-on-Trent seats both entirely within Stoke-on-Trent, and West Staffordshire we think is a logical combination of three authorities.

We propose that Burton should be expanded. It is sensible that it is a no change constituency but we think its name should be added - Uttoxeter somebody suggested, and East Staffordshire. I think Uttoxeter takes in the two main places within the constituency. We propose a very minor change between Lichfield and Tamworth, and we would actually call Tamworth, Tamworth and Southeast Staffordshire. This is just swapping the Hammerwich with Wall and the Whittington and Streethay wards between the two constituencies. The Commission in the aborted review did it the other way round and in 177 on pages 40 and 41: "On the basis of the material received we were not persuaded that this alternative", the alternative is what the Commission have done now "was better in terms of the statutory factors." This is just a minor change we are suggesting in Staffordshire and that would be the changes. We restore ties between the villages of Streethay and Whittington and the town of Lichfield, which is broken by the Commission proposals, and we restore ties between the village of Wall and the town of Tamworth, which are broken by the Commission. That is Staffordshire. That is relatively minor.

In the rest of the West Midlands we support the Commission proposals in their entirety for the following seats: the Aldridge, Brownhills and Bloxwich seat, which is a sensible extension of the existing seat, so it is the existing seat plus; no change to Birmingham Hodge Hill; no change to North Shropshire; a logical extension to the Nuneaton seat; the Shrewsbury seat, which again is the existing seat plus one more, one ward; Walsall Central, which is all of Walsall wards; Wednesfield and Willenhall we believe is a sensible combination; and Wolverhampton totally within Wolverhampton.

We do suggest three name changes. The North Warwickshire constituency we believe is a much more logical constituency than the current North Warwickshire because it includes the whole of the district plus the whole of Bedworth and it is sensible to keep Bedworth together, but we would actually recognise Bedworth in the name of the

constituency, so we would call it North Warwickshire and Bedworth, but we do not foresee any changes. Redditch we think would be better described by North Worcestershire and Sutton Coldfield and now it has got a royal title we think Royal Sutton Coldfield is sensible for that.

In the rest of the West Midlands we do not support the Commission proposals for all of the other proposed Birmingham seats. We believe that Birmingham has not been best served by the proposals of the Commission. Again, I would quote from item 50 on page 16 of the initial proposals booklet. "In the city of Birmingham we propose 11 constituencies that contain Birmingham City wards, five of which are wholly based within the city boundary. Of these 11 constituencies, two are unchanged and five contain three of the four wards from an existing constituency." Our proposals, which I will come on to shortly, are that instead of 11 we have ten constituencies containing Birmingham wards, six rather than five that are wholly contained, two that are unchanged, which is the same as the Commission's, and then two that are their existing constituency plus, so two existing constituency plus, four with three wards plus, so that is an improvement on the Commission proposals, and one which is two-thirds plus, and then we have Halesowen and we will come on to the Halesowen proposals where we have two of the three wards proposed by the Commission in that Halesowen constituency. We get rid of the orphan ward in Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North, which we do not think is necessary. We believe we have a better configuration of constituencies within Birmingham, which I will come to. There are 31 constituencies in this region we do not support, and this is largely because of the reconfiguration that we make. I will not go through them, they are all there and it is better if I just go through what the proposals are when we come to the alternatives. Those are the 31 constituencies we do not support.

We propose the following seats. We propose a Birmingham Erdington, which is three of the existing wards plus, Birmingham Ladywood, which is the existing constituency plus, and Birmingham Perry Barr, which is three wards plus. We would retain the Aston ward within Ladywood. We would move the Stockland Green ward to Perry Barr and the Tyburn ward back to Birmingham Erdington where it currently resides. This is the Commission proposal and you can see the very awkward shape that was referred to earlier of the proposed Birmingham Ladywood constituency and by taking Aston back into Birmingham Ladywood and making it the existing constituency plus one ward you improve that very considerably.

We restore ties between the Aston ward and Ladywood, and the Nechells ward, which are broken by the Commission proposals; all three wards are inner city areas which share close ties. We restore ties between Tyburn ward and Erdington ward, which are broken by the Commission proposals, both wards are outer suburban wards which share close ties. We substantially improve the shape of the Birmingham Ladywood constituency, which under the Commission's proposal is a very long narrow seat stretching from Smethwick town centre to the outskirts of Castle Bromwich, a distance

of over ten miles by road, and by just moving those three wards we ensure that 18,425 fewer electors move from their existing constituency.

If we come to South Birmingham and the Black Country, we propose a Birmingham Edgbaston seat, and, rather than the proposal of the Commission, we would have this seat entirely within Birmingham, taking five wards in, three of the existing wards plus the Selly Oak ward, which is not in the current proposal for Edgbaston, so we would add the Selly Oak ward. We would have a Dudley East and Oldbury seat, which is a sensible combination of Dudley and Sandwell. We would have a Dudley West seat, which is all within Dudley, and this is where we do split the Brierley Hill polling district between Dudley West and Stourbridge. The advantage we have of that is that we unite Gornal in one constituency and again I would refer to the Assistant Commissioner's report last time, AC305 on page 57, and this states:

"The MP for Dudley North, Mr Ian Austin, the Labour MP, approves the Commission proposal to keep the Upper Gornal and Woodsetton and Gornal wards together, stating that Gornal is an area with one of the strongest identities in the Black Country."

We entirely agree with him and we think that those two wards should be kept together and that is what we would propose in Dudley West, unlike the Commission which separates them. We would then have a Halesowen and Bartley Green, which would take just two wards from Birmingham rather than three wards. We have said we would put Selly Oak into Edgbaston, so we keep the two Birmingham wards but that enables us to unite Halesowen, which is divided by the Commission, because there are four wards comprising Halesowen and the Commission only takes three in.

We then have a Stourbridge constituency, which is the existing Stourbridge constituency plus. We have a Warley constituency, which is all within Sandwell, and unlike the Commission proposal, or in contrast with the Commission proposal, we move nearly 17,000 fewer electors, so there are 17,000 more electors that are currently in Warley that are in our proposed Warley and we have a West Bromwich. Again, there are 8,000 more electors in the current West Bromwich East than there are in the Commission proposals, and we then have a Wolverhampton South and Tipton seat, which is the same five Wolverhampton wards but it is different wards other than that in order that we can ensure that we unite the Gornals in one seat.

That is what the Boundary Commission proposals look like as far as South Birmingham and the Black Country is concerned. That is what our alternative proposal is. The advantages are that we restore ties between Hayley Green and Cradley South ward and the Bellevue and Halesowen South wards, which are all part of Halesowen and which are divided by the Commission proposals. We restore ties between Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood ward and the rest of the Stourbridge constituency, which are divided by the Commission proposals; the entirety of the current constituency of Stourbridge is contained in our proposed Stourbridge constituency, thereby preserving ties within that

seat. We restore ties between Greet Green and Lyng ward and West Bromwich Central ward, which are divided by the Commission proposals, both wards form the centre of West Bromwich. Dudley local authority is contained within four constituencies as opposed to five under the Commission proposals, representing an improvement, and Birmingham local authority has one additional constituency entirely contained within its boundaries and 21,924 fewer electors move from their existing constituency.

We then move on to Warwickshire and the West Midlands and we propose a number of seats here. Birmingham Hall Green, the Hall Green constituency is currently the right size and the Commission could not get it right and we accept that would be very difficult and we could not get it right with no change. However, the Commission divide Hall Green four ways. It only has four wards in it and it can only be divided four ways and the Commission have managed to put four wards of Hall Green in four different constituencies, so Hall Green is divided four ways. We have two because this is one of the wards where we have a split, we have effectively two and two-thirds wards in our current constituency but all the rest of our current Hall Green constituency was in the Hall Green constituency prior to 2010, so we believe our Hall Green proposal is a very logical one. We have the Northfield constituency, which is three wards plus. We have a Yardley constituency, which again is the existing constituency plus. We then have a Coventry East, a Coventry North West, a Coventry South and Kenilworth. You may have heard about this before because these are exactly the same proposals as the Green Party produced earlier this morning, they do not differ at all.

You will notice that we do not keep Coventry North East the same but I think that is the case actually with all the parties, they do not leave Coventry North East as an unchanged constituency. Within the three seats in Coventry we have over 11,500 electors more than the Commission that stay in their existing constituency. We do believe this is a very logical proposal. We have Coventry South and Kenilworth, which is five Coventry wards, plus the three wards that make up the town of Kenilworth and, as was said earlier, that does unite the university in one seat.

If we take then Meriden and Solihull, basically we are in total agreement with the Greens, all you need to do in the Solihull borough is you need to move two wards. You move Eldon one way and Blythe the other. That is all that needs to be done and then the Solihull borough is kept intact. We have a Rugby and Southam, which is a very minor change from the Commission's proposals. We then have a Stratford-on-Avon and a Warwick and Leamington which are the existing seats plus, so they are the existing seats and therefore are much less change, much more compliant with Rule 5.

I note in terms of Warwick and Leamington, I am not sure whether this is a first, it may have happened before, but I am not sure whether we have had a situation where all four parties have all agreed that Warwick and Leamington should come together. That is the position that all four parties are in favour of, not quite the same proposals in each case but all four do agree that Warwick and Leamington should come together.

This is our map. I apologise for some of the maps that you may have in front of you. We got the slide changed. That ward may be erroneously in blue and it should be in red because it is currently in Coventry South, and that is the difference. (Indicating) That is our proposal, so we have Solihull totally within two seats as it is now with just a very minor change and we believe if you look at that Coventry configuration that is far more logical than any other proposals from either the Commission or anyone else for Coventry. It is a very, very sensible neat arrangement of wards within Coventry. This is what we do to Warwickshire so that we do not have an orphan ward. That was an orphan ward there, Tanworth-in-Arden, which the Commission linked with West Midlands. They only link one with the West Midlands. They also link across here, which we do not support, but they only that one link. We only have one link and that is the Kenilworth one, but it is much more sensible because you have three wards, the area of Kenilworth which goes very well with Coventry.

Our advantages in terms of Warwickshire and the West Midlands are we reflect the division of Moseley and Kings Heath ward from the remainder of the Commission's proposed Birmingham Northfield constituency by Highbury Park, also reflecting their separate north/south links. We restore ties between Sheldon, Stechford and Yardley, which are divided by the Commission proposals, so we bring the whole of the Yardley constituency together, the existing constituency. We restore ties between Billesley and Hall Green wards, which were divided by the Commission proposals. As I said before, they used to be in the same constituency. We reflect ties between the Southern Coventry and Kenilworth, which are linked by the A46 and the A429 and a number of bus routes. We propose a different arrangement in the city of Coventry, reflecting local ties as opposed to the Commission proposals which link a number of outer suburban wards which have no ties in the Coventry West and Meriden constituency. We restore local ties in Solihull, restoring the Lyndon ward to a Solihull constituency where it has ties with the Alton ward, which is divided by the Commission proposals. We restore close ties between the towns of Knowle and Dorridge, which are divided by the Commission proposals. We restore ties between the southern part of Warwickshire and the town of Stratford-on-Avon, which are divided by the Commission proposals. The entirety of the current constituency of Stratford-on-Avon is contained in our proposed Stratford-on-Avon constituency preserving ties within this seat. I think the proposed Evesham and Southern Stratford-on-Avon constituency is probably one of the least attractive aspects of the Commission proposals.

We restore ties between the villages of Tanworth-in-Arden and Henley-in-Arden, divided by the Commission proposals. We restore strong ties between the towns of Royal Leamington Spa and Warwick, which is divided by the Commission proposals. These two towns have been contained in the same constituency since 1885 and are very much interlinked. The entirety of the current constituency of Warwick and Leamington is contained in our proposed Warwick and Leamington constituency, thereby preserving ties in the seat. Stratford-on-Avon local authority is contained within two constituencies

as opposed to four under the Commission proposals, representing a substantial improvement. Two seats entirely cover South Solihull local authority, as opposed to three, none of which are entirely contained in the constituency under the Commission proposals, representing a substantial improvement. Only two wards are removed from their current constituency.

In terms of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire we propose the following seats: Bromsgrove and Droitwich, we propose the constituency less the ward of Lovett and North Claines. We propose the Hereford and South Herefordshire constituency less the ward of Credenhill. The Ludlow and Leominster, as the Commission, less Bromyard, we take Bromyard into a joint seat and we add Much Wenlock, which has strong links to Ludlow and Credenhill into that constituency. In Malvern and Ledbury we add Bromyard and we take out two wards from that constituency, Kempsey and Ripple. We have a Mid Worcestershire constituency, which is totally within the Wychavon district. We have a Telford constituency which loses Doddington and gains Apley Castle. That restores ties between Apley Castle and Hadley and Leegomery. It also restores ties in Doddington with its ward next to it.

In The Wrekin, under the proposal of the Commission that splits two parishes which we reunite, so The Wrekin is minus Much Wenlock plus Doddington, which, as I say, has ties with the ward which was kept in The Wrekin. In Worcester, we thought that the best option in terms of extending the Worcester constituency was to respect the River Severn boundary. The Malvern Hills district is split by the River Severn, so we have ensured that the whole of the River Severn, which is to the east of the Malvern Hills district and the east of the Malvern Hills district is with Worcester. We also take out of Malvern and Ledbury, as I think most other people do, the one Wychavon ward that was included in there. Wyre Forest we maintain coterminous, I do not think you should split Wyre Forest, I think it is sensible to become coterminous. That is the Boundary Commission proposals. This is our alternative proposal and that means that we have the whole of Wychavon in just two constituencies, the Wychavon district, whereas in the Commission proposals it is split between five different constituencies, including in two cases two orphan wards. What we do in terms of Worcester is that is the boundary of the Severn. Although it may not look very elegant that is the boundary of the Severn, so it is a natural boundary, and the A38 runs up those two wards straight into Worcester. We think those probably are the most logical wards to include within the Worcester boundary.

In terms of Shropshire we make those fairly minor changes but you can see how that Much Wenlock ward really protrudes and it is much better when it is returned to its existing constituency of Ludlow. In terms of that, we restore ties between Apley Castle and Hadley and Leegomery, divided by the Commission proposals. We restore ties between Donnington and Muxton, as I say we reunite parishes in both those cases and this therefore better reflects the communities in the northern part of Telford. We restore Much Wenlock to a constituency containing Ludlow within which it has been contained

since 1950. We restore ties between the Credenhill ward and the town of Leominster, divided by the Commission proposals. We thereby more closely follow the line of the River Wye as a constituency boundary to the west of Hereford reflecting its nature as a clear dividing line. We reflect local ties between the towns of Bromyard and Malvern, which are divided by the Commission proposals. We reflect ties between the Kempsey and Ripple wards in the city of Worcester. These are areas linked by the A38. We use the line of the River Severn, as I said, as a constituency boundary between the Malvern and Ledbury and Worcester constituencies reflecting its nature as a clear dividing line. We restore the Wyre Forest constituency to an unchanged constituency, which is coterminous with the local authority and does not contain an orphan ward as per the Commission proposals.

The Wychavon local authority is contained within two constituencies as opposed to five under the Commission's proposals representing a substantial improvement. 149,379 fewer electors move from their existing constituency across Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Coventry, Solihull and South Birmingham.

If we come to the rules, a reminder about the rules that govern our proposals, we think we have considerably improved the proposals on these rules because we propose considerably better local authority links with six additional constituencies contained within one local authority. The Commission have 26 with one, 24 with two, three with three, none with four. Our proposal has 32 with just one constituency, 18 with two and three with three, the same as that. We move 188,371 fewer electors than the Commission, restore many wards back to their existing constituency, thus being more compliant with Rule 5(c). We have a number of constituencies that are the existing constituency plus. Birmingham Yardley, Birmingham Ladywood, Warwick and Leamington, Stratford-on-Avon and Stourbridge are all the existing constituency plus, so that is a considerable improvement. In terms of orphan wards, we reduce net the number of orphan wards by four in the Commission proposals. We have five different ones and we create one further one, so net we are better by four. We break fewer local ties, restoring ties, for example, in Birmingham, in Halesowen, in Stourbridge, in West Bromwich, Solihull, in Knowle and Dorridge, in Coventry, Stratford-on-Avon, Warwick and Leamington and Telford, thus being more compliant with Rule 5(d).

That is the summary of our position. We support the allocation of 53 constituencies in the West Midlands but we do believe that is a much better scheme available, particularly in respect of Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull and, indeed, we think our scheme is very much better in terms of Birmingham. We do believe that we have made the case to ensure just three wards are split by considerably improving on all the Rule 5 factors and having a domino effect of constituencies that are much less changed, like, for example, the two Solihull constituencies, Warwick and Leamington, and Stratford-on-Avon.

We will, like the other parties, submit to the Commission before 5 December a comprehensive document outlining our rationale, whether we support the Commission or propose alternatives and we will take account of representations made at the public hearings and we may, in the light of these, amend our submission from that which we have outlined today. Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mr Pratt. Again, a very detailed outline there. Do we have any questions from the floor at all?

MR MURRAY: For clarification, could I ask if Apley Castle, which is part of Wellington and in The Wrekin constituency, has been split by its ties by adding it into Telford?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you just say who you are, just to remind us?

MR MURRAY: David Murray from the Liberal Democrats.

MR PRATT: We do not think so because the ties it has are ties with Hadley and Leegomery because there is a parish which is partly in one and partly in the other, so there are ties. Currently, Apley Castle is with Hadley and Leegomery in the same constituency, obviously The Wrekin. The Commission propose to break the ties between Apley Castle and Hadley and Leegomery and we believe we restore those ties, particularly the parish ties, by putting those two wards together.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response) Mr Pratt, thank you very much indeed. Do we have anybody here representing UKIP? (No response) In that case let us move on to Mrs Fitch, who is due to be our next speaker, if you would like to come up. Just to remind you, we need to know who you are and your address as well. Thank you.

MRS FITCH: My name is Mrs Aprella Fitch and I live at 20 Silver Birch Drive, Hollywood, Wythall, Worcestershire. I wish to speak in opposition to the Boundary Commission proposal to changes to the Bromsgrove constituency. I am sorry, Mr Pratt, you will not agree. Specifically, the proposal to place parts of Wythall and Hollywood wards into the Redditch constituency, which I believe will become the Mid Worcestershire constituency. It is very plain to see that the two existing constituencies are in fact very different. Bromsgrove is a rural/semirural area with a small retail and manufacturing profile. By contrast, Redditch is largely an urban area with high density housing and a considerable manufacturing and retail profile. The socioeconomic demography is also very different to that of Bromsgrove. Redditch was in fact a new town.

With respect, Commissioner, simply drawing a line down the middle of the A435 is divisive as it breaks up an established population and the particular allegiances of a



loyal Bromsgrove electorate, especially in Wythall and Hollywood. Local support groups function well to support parish, district and county councillors and this support automatically filters down for parliamentary elections and political parties too. It would not be reasonable to assume that an entirely new support network would be able to be created for an out of area MP whose local interests and concerns would be very different from those in Bromsgrove. Support groups have a long established social base in Wythall and Hollywood with strong links to Bromsgrove. These would be effectively destroyed and therefore not exist in another constituency, and I understand that is something you do try to wish to avoid.

As I understand matters, according to the Boundary Commission's website the current electoral roll for Redditch is somewhere in the region of 66,000. May I respectfully suggest this is probably less than an accurate representation of the population who by virtue of residency may have the right to vote. I am thinking specifically here of the large numbers of immigrants who have considerably increased the population of the town in the last few years. If all entitled to vote were registered to vote I am sure the electoral roll would automatically increase thereby negating the need to remove parishioners from Wythall and Hollywood.

Additionally, the provision in the Local Plan for the building of a further 2,000 homes in the Redditch constituency would add further to the number of registered voters in Wythall. I have found it perplexing that neither the district or parish councils have made any real attempt to inform local voters of the proposals for change and that political parties will not speak against the matter as one in particular expects it to gain a further seat in Parliament. These changes should in no way be about gaining party political advantage at parliamentary level. I would respectfully suggest that putting some voters from Wythall and Hollywood into Redditch does not guarantee their support and the self-interests of some may flounder.

Commissioner, may I respectfully ask you to reconsider the changes for Bromsgrove, please, and to invite not just the great and the good to your deliberations and those of the wider remit of the Boundary Commission but to allow all interested parties to express a point of view. There has been a paucity of information available to the general public in Wythall and Hollywood; all do not subscribe to internet services, we have no good local press coverage and, unless one is an engaged member of a political party, all of this is going to come as a nasty surprise to a lot of residents. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. I would point out that we are totally apolitical sitting here.

MRS FITCH: I know you are.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And that your view has as much sway as anyone else's who has spoken today, or that will speak in the coming days. Thank you very much. Before you go, does anyone else here want to ask any questions, or have any points of clarification? (No response) I think your views are very strong. Is there one particular thing of the list of reasons why you are objecting here which you would pick out? Is it the rural nature versus the more urban nature?

MRS FITCH: I think it is the social construct which will be broken, and that will have a huge effect on quite a number of people. It will affect the political picture as well ultimately.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. We have a slight pause here but Adrian Bailey, if you are in the room, it is a little bit early for you, would you like to speak now if you are able?

MR BAILEY: I am Adrian Bailey. I live in the Oscott ward of Birmingham. I came to the aborted review five years ago, I think it was, so the things I have to say are quite similar to then. When I first got interested in boundary reviews many years ago I was of the opinion that seats should have similar electorates as close as possible to each other. As I have got older I have got wiser, but unfortunately the Boundary Commission seems to have gone in the opposite direction and has a much more naive opinion about how constituencies should be formed. My proposals here pay a lot of respect to local authority boundaries, local ties and to the connections between local people, which in some cases the Commission seems to have ignored.

If we look at the first picture, which works very well on a Windows laptop, first of all I have split the area as closely as possible into local authorities rather than using this methodology which I described as "amorphous blobbism", which is treating the entire region as one large area and crossing boundaries willy-nilly.

Birmingham: Birmingham Sandwell, Birmingham has an entitlement to 9.2 seats and Sandwell to 2.9. It is possible to create nine whole seats in Birmingham, and I know of people who are going to put proposals forward that do that. It does mean that Sandwell ends up with three very small seats, the ones that Mr Pratt has just outlined, and some of which cross local communities. Birmingham ends up with nine large seats. What I have done is I have kind of compromised, and it is seat 25 there on the screen, to have a seat, Warley, which crosses the boundary and includes the Quinton ward of Birmingham.

In the rest of Birmingham we have Erdington and Perry Barr with the split ward of Oscott where the area east of the M6, the part of Perry Beeches east of the M6 is reunited with the rest of Perry Beeches in the Perry Barr seats. Edgbaston is made up of whole wards, including Ladywood and Selly Oak. The Northfield ward includes one polling district from another ward, that is the Sir Hilton's Road area, to bring it up to size.

Saltley is more or less made of whole wards but what I have done is in South Yardley there is what I call a panhandle, which is the area which is part of Small Heath and part of Sparkhill in the South Yardley ward, and I have put part of Small Heath in my Saltley seat, which could also be called Heartlands.

Then it gets more complicated because the Yardley wards are too big, so I have taken the area around Tyseley Lane and the area north of Fox Hollies Park out of South Yardley and put them into the Hall Green seat, and the border between Kings Norton and Hall Green constituencies is split mostly in Kings Heath ward, so Moseley is in the Hall Green seat and Kings Heath is in the Kings Norton seat.

In Sandwell you end up with three quite logical seats. I think West Bromwich and Wednesbury, the Tipton and Rowley Regis seat and the Warley seat, which includes Smethwick.

Over then to the rest of the Black Country - it is quite difficult to see here - we have Aldridge-Brownhills that includes a small part of the south of Walsall rather than Bloxwich, which has been in Walsall constituencies for a very long time. Walsall town seat, number 24. In Wolverhampton, in order not to split wards, we have Wolverhampton North, which includes Tettenhall, we have Bilston and Willenhall and Coseley and Penn, which could be called Wolverhampton South.

These seats could be rearranged with some ward splitting, but I have done enough ward splitting so I have decided not to split wards in Wolverhampton but of course local people might prefer it. In Dudley I have got a Halesowen and Stourbridge seat with the Wollaston area of Stourbridge in a Dudley West, or Brierley Hill and Kingswinford seat, and a Dudley Castle seat.

Going over into Warwickshire, as has already been said, and it is a sign that the Commission's proposals are somewhat perverse and wasting people's time and everybody seems to be agreed that the Commission's proposals should be changed, we have a Warwick and Leamington seat with Radford Semele, which is an orphan ward but it is needed to make up the numbers in Rugby and Southam seat. The three Coventry seats are North West, East and South and Kenilworth.

I wish to remind you that the Commission's proposals are, in Birmingham, seats as follows. There is a Hall Green and Glebe Farm West seat. There is a Erdington North and Bar Beacon seat. There is a Halesowen and Bournebrook seat. There is a Moseley and Frankley seat, Sparkhill and Hawkesley. There is a Quinton Warleywood and Sparkbrook seat, and there is a Smethwick East, Ladywood, Edgbaston North Handsworth, South Bordesley, Nechells and Erdington South seat. I respectfully suggest these proposals that I am presenting here are better than those.

Finally, on the sheet here I have mentioned a famous quote from a court case in 1983 when the Labour Party took the Commission to court to have the proposals thrown out. At that time the legal opinion was quite clear that this is not a numerical exercise. Even though the law has been changed to make sure that seats are within a five per cent tolerance either way of the quota that is still quite a large amount of room that the Commission has to work with. I think that if the Commission's work was ever judicially reviewed the courts would still pay a lot of attention to that earlier finding. Parliament did not tell the Boundary Commission to do an exercise in accountancy to count heads, divide by a number and then draw a series of lines around each resulting group. It told it to engage in a more far reaching and sophisticated undertaking involving striking a balance between many factors which can point in different directions. This calls for judgment, not scientific precision.

The Commission seems to have gone far too far towards respect for numbers, respecting the convenience of bureaucrats and politicians and not enough respect for local authority boundaries, local ties and local people. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, and hopefully these hearings are going some way towards putting that community, that local element and authority boundary elements into our initial proposals. Do we have any questions on that? (No response) Hopefully we will be able to have a look at some of your plans in more detail. Do we have Mr John Preston in the room, who is our next speaker? (No response) What we are going to do then is take a ten minute adjournment because he is due on at 1 o'clock, and the time now is 12.50. We did have one person who wanted to speak who had not been allocated a slot. Have they turned up or not? (No response) They are not here either. We will take a ten minute adjournment and literally at 1 o'clock we will resume.

After a short break

Timed noted: 1.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we are ready to reconvene. A quick reminder that anybody who comes to the podium should tell us who they are and give their address. The next person due to speak is John Preston. Is John Preston here? (No response) In that case, Andrew Mitchell, the MP for Sutton Coldfield, are you happy to go ahead and speak now?

MR MITCHELL: (MP for Sutton Coldfield) Good morning, and thank you very much for giving us this opportunity. You will be pleased to hear that I strongly agree with the Boundary Commission's decision about Sutton Coldfield. Your predecessors at the last time the boundaries of Sutton Coldfield, which is an ancient royal town, were discussed were minded to remove a quarter of it and put Kingstanding into Sutton Coldfield, which was in my view a dreadful proposal and was bitterly opposed by my constituents.

Indeed I believe that the Commission last time had more complaints from Sutton Coldfield than any other constituency in the country. Actually the Commission heard the voice of Sutton Coldfield and then decided not to change the boundaries and on this occasion too you have decided not to change the boundaries and we are very grateful. Thank you very much for that.

The main point I want to make, apart from supporting what you have decided to do, and part of the reason why you will have decided to do it is because we are almost slap on the right number of constituents that you wish to see in following the Boundary Commission.

The main point I want to make is that the constituency should be renamed Royal Sutton Coldfield. I want to explain why that is. After a very considerable campaign, endorsed unanimously by many different entities throughout our royal town, we have successfully reasserted our royal title. In a debate in the House of Commons on 12 June 2014, of which I have brought the Commission a copy of Hansard so you can see what the Minister said, the Government confirmed that, and I quote:

“There being no statutory ban I am not surprised that my right Honourable Friend”, that is me, “and his constituents should wish to use the title. In other words, I am pleased to be able to confirm today to him and his constituents that there is no statutory prohibition on the use of this historic royal title. I can therefore confirm also that there is nothing to prevent the people of Sutton Coldfield making use of their historic royal title.”

Throughout Sutton Coldfield that is precisely what we are doing. When I first became the Member of Parliament there were many parts of Sutton Coldfield that still called themselves “royal”, the Royal Athletics Club, and so forth, but now following the decision of Parliament and of ministers the “royal” part is reasserted. The only towns enjoying the accolade of “royal” in England are Leamington Spa, Tunbridge Wells and Sutton Coldfield. More recently, Wootton Bassett has been created a royal town for sad but noble reasons, of which the Commission’s members will be well aware. There are, in addition, four local authorities who are able to describe themselves as “royal”, and one county, Berkshire, although Berkshire County Council has not existed since 1998 and those entities do use the title.

In terms of parliamentary constituencies only one has had the name “royal” in its name and that is Royal Tunbridge Wells, which had the name from 1974 to 1983. The word was removed following the third periodical review implemented in 1983. The Boundary Commission reported that the decision to remove the word “royal” from a constituency name was to reflect the name of the new borough that was not on the same boundaries as constituted after the local government reforms. Of greater importance to the Commission, as I understand it, was that there was no objection at all in the local enquiry held in Kent to the removal of the name because it no longer was contiguous with the ancient royal town.

In Royal Sutton Coldfield we are in a very different position and as from May this year we have 24 town councillors elected to what is the largest town council in Britain. It is important to note that this is not called Sutton Coldfield Town Council but is designated as the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council. It is the wish of all of us that the title we have is proudly represented in the constituency name. My main point today, therefore, is to ask that the Boundary Commission agree that henceforth the parliamentary constituency should be named Royal Sutton Coldfield. That is the point I wish to make. Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that, Mr Mitchell. Does anybody have any points of clarification that they want to put via me to Mr Mitchell?

MR ROSS: Colin Ross. It is just a query on another naming convention. Being part of the Borough of Birmingham would another suggestion be Birmingham Sutton Coldfield?

MR MITCHELL: I think the gentleman is trying to provoke me! I have nothing to add, Madam Chairman, to the proposition which I have put before you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: There have been some suggestions that there could be other additions but we do not know where we are going to end up at the very end of all of this. How would that affect you? In a way it is a very similar question, another little bit of a ward being added to that constituency.

MR MITCHELL: To Sutton Coldfield?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes?

MR MITCHELL: We would oppose that very strongly because we are on the right number. We are within the ancient curtilage of our royal town. You consulted extensively last time about changing the boundaries of Sutton Coldfield. As a result, as I said, of the fact that you had more representations from Sutton Coldfield than any other constituency in the land you decided not to change it. I would very strongly urge you not to change it. I do not believe there is anyone locally who is pressing for it to be changed and actually I am in the comfortable position of speaking unanimously on behalf of the political organisations in the town, the charities organisations that make up Sutton Coldfield, we are all of the same mind about the boundaries. I think your Commission have been extremely wise in reflecting on what happened last time when you changed your view, and leaving the boundaries as they are, and I would very strongly urge you not to change them.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I just remind you and others that we do not take into account what happened before. We are where we are now by

looking at what we have available to us now, and within the remit of Parliament. We will of course take into account all suggestions put into this forum and if we need to we will take some legal advice. Thank you very much for that. Any other questions? (No response) Thank you very much for your time, Mr Mitchell. Our next speaker is John Preston, I believe. Mr Preston, if you are here would you like to come up and a reminder just to say who you are and give us your address. Because you have just come in just a reminder that you are actually being filmed for this as well.

MR PRESTON: My name is John Preston. I reside in Berwood Farm Road in Sutton Coldfield. My postcode is B72 1AG. I do not know whether you are able to bring that up a bit closer on the screen. With the Royal Mail my postcode is registered as Sutton Coldfield and we live right next to the Wylde Green shopping area. It is a two minute walk from my house. We get the local *Sutton Coldfield Observer*, the local estate agents class us as Wylde Green in Sutton Coldfield, but bizarrely we are part of that little wiggly border between Erdington and Sutton. My postcode is B72 1AG. That is exactly where we are there. (Indicating) We are part of this anomaly where the border is not straight, it does not follow the main road, but seems to weave along the back gardens of the houses, so we actually come under Erdington ward, Erdington constituency. That does not cause us massive difficulties. One of our councillors is here and he does a great job for us. The main problem we have is we consider ourselves to be part of Wylde Green. As I said, our local shops are Wylde Green. There is a Wylde Green Neighbourhood Forum. We would like to be able to affect decisions within the Wylde Green area but we are unable because we are unable to vote for matters that affect Wylde Green, our local area. It is whether anything can be done to address that.

I can show you a close up map showing our houses. The houses around us to the right, which I will try and point out, over this side here, these are B24 postcode. Over here they are B24 but this section here are B72, which is the Sutton Coldfield postcode. (Indicating) At some point historically, maybe, I do not understand why, the boundary seems to have shifted literally across our back gardens. If you go to the very end of our back garden you are in Sutton, you come to our front door and you are in Erdington. Those the main issues I wanted to raise. Whether that can be adjusted I do not know.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just to clarify, you want to be connected with Wylde Green?

MR PRESTON: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You are not worried about whether you are in Sutton Coldfield or in Erdington as long as you have that connection with your local community?

MR PRESTON: I would agree, yes. Our local shops are Wylde Green, the local neighbourhood forum is Wylde Green. I will show you the diagram of the Wylde Green Neighbourhood Forum, which unfortunately literally just cuts off our address. This includes Berwood Farm Road and Welwyndale Road.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just looking at the map here, you are like that already. What you are saying is it is not working like that?

MR PRESTON: We think this is incorrect. We think it is a historical thing that has been set up incorrectly and should be changed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do we know how long it has been like this?

MR PRESTON: I do not know. This is our Berwood Farm Road here. These three roads, so Berwood Farm Road, Welwyndale Road and Berford Crescent, I think it is. These are all B72. These are B24, these are B24, and when you go further up the road this has been included within the Sutton boundary and is B73, and this has been cut out and is B24. We would expect it to have followed the same lines as this. The boundary should have come down here and included us into it. (Indicating)

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In other words come down here and along the main road?

MR PRESTON: Yes. That would make more sense in my opinion.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is absolutely fascinating and interesting. Does anybody have any points of clarification that they want to make on that? (No response) Otherwise, Mr Preston, that is really interesting. Of course we will take that into account and have a look at it. Thank you very much for your time.

There was one other person it was suggested might want to speak. I do not know if that person is still here. Does anybody else want to speak who is in the Chamber at the moment? (No response) In that case we will adjourn for lunch now. We do need to clear the Chamber. You can leave belongings in here at your own risk but, as I say, we need to clear the Chamber and we will see you back here at 2.30, or just before. Thank you very much.

#### After the luncheon adjournment

Time noted: 2.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back. Let us continue our hearings. We have a long list for the afternoon.



We have Dominic McDonough and if you would come and just a reminder to everybody name and full address, and that we are being filmed. Thank you very much.

MR McDONOUGH: (Election Agent Conservative Party) Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you had a very nice lunch. I am Dominic McDonough. I am the new election agent in Sutton Coldfield for the Conservative Party. I am from 24 Warren House Court, if you want to send me an email.

Basically, I am here to back up what Andrew Mitchell said before lunch. We feel that the proposals are the best for Sutton Coldfield. We feel they are very sensible. We would like to see them kept as they are. As you know, proposals in the past were put forward and were vehemently opposed by the people of Sutton Coldfield. As Andrew said, you had more complaints about those than you had anywhere else in the United Kingdom, I believe.

Also we have the question of the royal status of the town and we believe that the constituency should be renamed "Royal Sutton Coldfield". This is not us blowing our own trumpet or trying to have a bit of a superiority complex. We feel that the town is now known as Royal Sutton Coldfield. We have a Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council who have supported the renaming of the constituency Royal Sutton Coldfield. They actually voted on it in the town council a couple of weeks ago and it was passed unanimously to support this move.

We would also oppose any changes to the current set up of the constituency because we feel it would cross communities and we do not feel that that is a good thing for anyone. We feel that Sutton Coldfield is unique. It is a town in itself, and I see a few smiles around the area there, but we do believe it is a town in itself and it is a community in itself. We also believe the numbers are round about spot on for the constituency and I would say we fully support your findings.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mr McDonough. Any points of clarification, questions? (No response) Is Mr Welch here?

MR WELCH: (Erdington Conservatives) My name is Clifton Welch. I am a member of the Erdington Conservative Association and have been active in the Tyburn ward for approximately five years. I am objecting to the Commission's proposals to remove the Tyburn ward from the Erdington constituency. The proposed constituency does not well reflect the local authority boundaries. There are long established local ties between Erdington and Tyburn. There is, for example, shared Children's Services through the Gunter Road Children's Centre, which serves North Erdington and Tyburn ward. In addition, Barney's Children's Centre services Birches Green in Tyburn as well as the Erdington ward. Pype Hayes, part of the Tyburn ward and Erdington wards run next to each other and residents from Pype Hayes are just as likely as residents from Erdington to use the Erdington town centre as their main shopping centre.

Only last Saturday, 29 October, the John Taylor Hospice ran a fund raising event at the Holly Lane Sports Club; a sporting and community venue which literally sits on the boundaries of Erdington and Pype Hayes in Tyburn. Residents from both wards attended in equal numbers. Indeed, the Holly Lane venue, which hosts football, cricket, weddings, parties, et cetera, attracts members and visitors alike from both Pype Hayes and Erdington.

The local St Mary's Church in Pype Hayes Tyburn attracts people from Erdington as well as Pype Hayes. It is also used as a venue for community and sporting clubs from residents of both Pype Hayes and Erdington. Rookery Park and Pype Hayes Park mark the border between Tyburn and Erdington wards, and serve the residents from both communities. In contrast, Tyburn has no connection, historical or otherwise, with Ladywood.

The proposed constituency does not take account of geographical considerations in that Tyburn residential areas, while physically joined to the residential areas of the Erdington ward, are separated from Ladywood by a significantly large industrial/commercial district with virtually no residents. Indeed, there is no clear route from the Tyburn ward to the rest of the Ladywood constituency. Indeed, the proposed constituency is in fact wider than the city of Birmingham.

I fear that if there are concerns or issues affecting residents in Erdington and Tyburn, such as public transport links, these will often be almost identical in nature, but, in contrast, might be very different or at the very least have a different level of priority to the needs of residents in Ladywood.

My counter-proposal would be to move Tyburn ward from Ladywood into Erdington, move Stockland Green from Erdington to Perry Barr and move Aston from Perry Barr to Ladywood. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I will ask you to repeat just one thing. You would move Tyburn from Ladywood into Erdington and what did you say just after that, just at the end?

MR WELCH: Tyburn from Ladywood into Erdington, Stockland Green from Erdington into Perry Barr and Aston from Perry Barr to Ladywood, a sort of knock-on effect.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any points of clarification? (No response) That was very interesting. Thank you very much indeed for joining us today. Could we call Mr Alden now, please? Thank you.

CLLR ALDEN: (Erdington Ward) My name is Cllr Robert Alden, I live at 96 Orchard Road, Erdington B24 9JD. Firstly, can I thank the Commissioners for their work in

putting together the draft proposals and for giving people the opportunity today and tomorrow to be able to speak about them. I am the leader of the Birmingham City Council Conservative Group. I am a councillor in Erdington since 2006 and I am an Advice Chair and Director of Erdington Town Centre Business Improvement District. I am also a resident of Erdington ward and I have lived in Birmingham my whole life.

I want to speak on a number of areas of Birmingham, but particularly Erdington where I am a councillor. I start off there in the north of Birmingham. I am very supportive of the Hodge Hill constituency being proposed and I think we have heard that from a number of people during the day. I would also ask the Commission to respect the wishes of Sutton Coldfield residents who would like the area to be called Royal Sutton Coldfield, reflecting the re-emergence of that name on the town council and used locally, and even Google maps now refer to it as Royal Sutton Coldfield, I understand. That leaves in north Birmingham three constituencies, Erdington and Pheasey Park Farm, Ladywood and Perry Barr. I would ask for a simple three ward swap between those constituencies to better represent local communities and local ties. I propose that Tyburn should be moved into the Erdington and Pheasey Park Farm. That would enable it to remain where it is currently. It is currently in Erdington constituency. It has a lot of community ties, as I will come on to later. Aston could then be returned to Ladywood constituency, again where it is currently, allowing it to retain its community ties, which I will also touch on. Stockland Green could be relinked to Witton in Perry Barr constituency where it has a long history of connections, which I will also come on to later.

Regarding the Erdington proposal, Erdington, Tyburn, Kingstanding, Oscott and Pheasey Park Farm are very well connected. If you take the Chester Road, King Road, Collingwood Drive selection of roads they all link into each other and they connect all five of those wards. They do not go near Stockland Green. That actually would provide a key transporter route between all parts of that constituency and buses like the 28 enable you to go the full width of that constituency all the way from Castle Vale over to Pheasey Park Farm.

Pheasey Park Farm itself, although in Walsall Council, the council themselves list addresses in the area as Birmingham. They also have a Birmingham postcode, B43. In fact, it is the only part of Walsall that has a Birmingham postcode, as I understand it. Local history sites describe Pheasey as physically part of Birmingham conurbation and separated by green belt from Walsall.

There are shared shopping centres along the Queslett Road that bind the community of Pheasey into the Oscott/Kingstanding area and Kingstanding, Oscott and Pheasey are very well connected with local schools from all areas having children from across all three of those wards.

Kingstanding ward and Erdington ward again have a lot of interconnections between them. Greater Perry Common area, which includes New Oscott and Perry Common from the current Kingstanding ward, are well connected to Court Farm, which is in the current Erdington ward by Witton Lodge Road, which goes between all those areas connecting them together and the Ring Shopping Centre on Witton Lodge Road. Indeed, that was something that was then recognised by the recent review of boundaries for the local council ward level boundaries which combined all of those areas into one ward because it recognised the connections between Kingstanding and Erdington.

On that, they also recognised that the border between Erdington and Stockland Green was a very impermeable barrier which people were not crossing and they retained that border in its entirety, not breaking that and adding any of Stockland Green to Erdington because they recognised that the two communities are not interlinked in that way.

Erdington and Tyburn, as we already heard from the previous speaker, are also very well connected and it should be noted that the boundary roads between those wards are all along quiet residential roads. If you go to the top of Grange Road down Woodcote Road across the playing fields that we heard about at Hollyfield Centre that is between the two wards, down Holly Lane and along Kingsbury Road, they are all quiet residential roads that residents would not know were a border between them if they were not already aware of council maps.

There are many joint issues between the areas; currently we have a big planning issue with the Nocks Brickworks site which is indeed on Holly Lane, it is in Erdington ward, but the opposite side of the road which will be severely affected by it is in Tyburn ward. We have a big public meeting on it and residents from both wards were invited to come to it in a couple of weeks' time, as they were on the previous one that took place about a month ago because it affects both. It is not the first time we have had that. When we had flooding on Grange Road, Woodcote Road area again there were joint meetings. We have never had a similar meeting with the Stockland Green area because those joint issues do not come up because it is a main road that separates them rather than these quiet residential roads.

Many users in Tyburn are users of Erdington High Street and of the library. We have that from experience of surveys we have done in the area about local users and where they originate from. Many share services, as we have heard, like Children's Services, many community events, like the Remembrance Sunday parade that takes place in Pype Hayes but always has councillors from Erdington and residents from Erdington there as well because it serves the whole area which is represented by the British Legion that covers the Erdington and Tyburn wards. There is a share housing liaison board that is all for all the council tenants. That is across the Erdington and Tyburn wards together. It is a joint one, it is quite rare in the city. I do not think there is any

other ones in the city which are two wards in their entirety combined, but in Erdington and Tyburn there is.

It should also be recognised that Tyburn has no links to Nechells and that is how they would get into Ladywood on the Commission's proposals. Indeed, you would have to cross over two canals, six motorway lanes, three industrial estates, a four lane bypass once you have got past all of that, Star City and a railway yard before you get to any other residential properties in Nechells because there just is not that connection between the communities.

Moving on to Perry Barr, Stockland Green and the Witton area, they are clearly separated from Erdington by the A4040. As I mentioned earlier, the Local Government Boundary Commission recently reiterated that and agreed with residents on that. Witton, which is split into Lower Witton and Upper Witton is split across Perry Barr and Stockland Green wards. Indeed, the area around Slade Road, which is the main shopping centre in the Stockland Green area, has historically been known as Witton Slade, and is well used by residents of Witton, which is the bottom of the Perry Barr ward. They would be very well connected. There is already a lot of permeability between the two wards and linking them together in a constituency would allow that to come together again as the community would recognise.

Looking at Aston and its place in Ladywood historically, part of the Aston community is Nechells, so those two wards have a lot of permeability between them, indeed the Aston Park straddles between the two wards uniting them. Aston ward also goes all the way up to the centre of the city centre, going past the ring road, including all of the new town area. If we were not to have Aston in Ladywood that would mean that for the first time in my memory the entirety of the ring road of Birmingham would not be in the same constituency and I do not think that would be a situation that would best serve the city centre and the way that Birmingham city centre works.

Much of the student accommodation for Aston and BCU is in Aston ward where the campuses are in the other parts of Ladywood constituency, so again putting them together unites them around common focuses. When you look at the north of Aston ward it is clearly separated from the Perry Barr area by the railway line, as you can see on that map curling along the top of there.

I also just wanted to add a couple of other places in the city. My Mum and Dad live in Edgbaston and from their experience Selly Oak is very much part of the Edgbaston community in terms of the university campus, which is in Edgbaston, and many of the students and lecturers live in Harborne in Selly Oak, bringing them all together. There are also groups to deal with parking issues from the hospital that covers all three of those wards and recently there was a work group from Harborne, Selly Oak and Edgbaston ward residents and councillors to deal with the Article 4 proposals, which is a

planning policy that was being proposed across those areas again linking those together.

Finally, my brother, who lives in Halesowen South ward has asked me to mention that Hayley Green and Cradley South locally are clearly identified as being part of Halesowen. Bartley Green, as many of you will know, historically has been linked to Halesowen, many of the local pubs which Bartley Green residents use are actually on the Halesowen side of the road. Fiveways School in Bartley Green is frequented by many children from Halesowen and that Weoley - this is me adding this - is clearly linked to Bartley Green historically. Indeed, when Birmingham used to have some very unusually sized wards, so some which were much larger than the others, back in the 1980s, Weoley and Bartley Green were all in the same ward as one large community.

With that, I thank the Commission for giving me a chance to speak.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any particular questions or points? Let us take that one.

MR BAILEY: Adrian Bailey from Oscott ward. About Stockland Green, would you agree that even though in the arrangement you are suggesting it might be suitable to remove Stockland Green from Erdington, it would be better if it was possible to keep Stockland Green in an Erdington constituency because of the close ties between Stockland Green and the rest of Erdington?

CLLR ALDEN: I am more than happy to answer that. I am afraid I would disagree. It is quite clear that the southern part of Oscott, which I know some proposals would be to split that ward, have far more community links, places like the Golden Hind pub with Kingstanding and Erdington area than Stockland Green does, and that would be a better proposal. What I have put forward, which is of course putting in Tyburn instead of Stockland Green, Tyburn has a clear community link with Erdington in a way that Stockland Green does not.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Stockland Green would go to?

CLLR ALDEN: Perry Barr, and Aston would come from Perry Barr into Ladywood where it is currently.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Can we have Gary Sambrook, please?

CLLR SAMBROOK: My name is Gary Sambrook. I am a city councillor and also a resident of Kingstanding, 113 Plumstead Road, which is B44 area. I have lived in Kingstanding for 27 years and I have been a councillor in Kingstanding since 2014. I was very pleased to see in your initial proposals, Oscott and Pheasey Park Farm being

put into the same constituency as Kingstanding because they do have a lot of shared common interests in terms of community ties. The estates of Kettlehouse and Oscott wards share facilities known as Kingstanding Circle and the Hawthorne Road shopping centre, which are on the boundaries of both Kingstanding and Oscott wards. The Collingwood Shopping Centre, which is in the southern part of Pheasey Park Farm, is also a shopping centre which Kingstanding and Oscott residents use, along with the community facilities at Collingwood Centre and at the 610 Centre on Kingstanding Road.

The Pheasey Park Farm also shares many transport links with Kingstanding and Oscott via the 33 bus route, the number 5 and the 934 bus route, which runs alongside Kingstanding Road. The 33 in particular is a commuter route which takes residents up from Collingwood centre through Kingstanding and Oscott and into the city centre as a means for people to get to and from work.

Demographically the areas are very, very similar, mostly housing. All of Kingstanding primary schools are all feeders into secondary schools which are located in Oscott, namely Cardinal Wiseman and Great Barr schools, so there are lots of links here. In the recent Local Government Boundary Review the links have been even more strengthened by the inclusion of parts of Oscott into Kingstanding ward.

The green belt which separates Pheasey Park Farm is also very visible at the northerly end, and, as a previous speaker said, the postcode for this area is the only part of Walsall which has a Birmingham postcode, so it very much considers itself, even though not under a borough remit but culturally and communitywise as part of Birmingham.

The links between Kingstanding and Oscott with Erdington are very strong and have been reinforced by the local reorganisation of the Local Government Boundary Review where the creation of a Perry Common ward, which takes in different areas of both Erdington ward and Kingstanding ward at the moment, which creates a new ward which is a link between the two.

The inclusion of Tyburn ward into the Ladywood constituency I think is a mistake and so the swapping Stockland Green into Perry Barr and the inclusion of Tyburn into Erdington would be a correct way of remedying the community ties with the constituency.

While I am here, I work in Halesowen and so I commute on a daily basis to Halesowen town and the proposals for Halesowen are quite concerning for many people in the town and the separation of the Hayley Green and Cradley South ward into the Stourbridge constituency. This particular ward was part of the Halesowen Urban District Council's expansion of the town in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the residents feel themselves part of the town. Between the westerly side of Hayley Green there is a visible barrier made by the green belt between Stourbridge and the estates which make up Hayley

Green, namely the Squirrels Estate and the Huntland Estate have very direct links to Halesowen town centre, which are less than a mile away to the town centre and there are no direct transport links to Stourbridge. I would very much request if you could look into keeping Hayley Green and Cradley South in a Halesowen seat made up with Bartley Green and Weeley ward as well.

As for Selly Oak ward being excluded from the Halesowen and Birmingham Selly Oak constituency, I think from a demographic point of view in community terms Selly Oak is very much made up of a student population which attend the university which is based in the Edgbaston ward and having those two areas, having the university and the student accommodation in the same constituency would make it much better for a Member of Parliament being able to represent the views of students much more effectively.

In conclusion, I think the very simple swaps in the north of Birmingham, which would include removing Tyburn from the proposed Ladywood constituency and placing in Erdington, Stockland Green ward being taken out of the proposed Erdington constituency and placed in a Perry Barr constituency. Aston ward being taken out of the proposed Perry Barr constituency and placed into a Ladywood constituency and then in Halesowen for Hayley Green and Cradley South to remain part of Halesowen and Bartley Green, and Selly Oak to be taken out of a proposed Halesowen and Selly Oak constituency and to be placed in an Edgbaston constituency. Thank you very much. I hope that is clear.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think I have it all, just about. You all talk so fast. Thank you very much indeed for that. Any questions, points of clarification? (No response) Our next speaker is Jess Phillips MP.

MS PHILLIPS: (MP for Birmingham Yardley) I will start by saying I am the MP for what is currently the constituency of Birmingham Yardley. The Labour Party have already put in joint submissions and I would support what our regional parties have put forward. I suppose it would only be right for me to say that I do not think that the process needed to be done at all, but what we have in Birmingham we will have to try and make the best of.

Specifically, in relation to the Birmingham Yardley constituency the proposal is to remove the Sheldon ward and replace that with the Hall Green ward, to even swap, and there is no strong feeling, I do not think, either way about this particular thing. I do not take it upon myself to decide what the people of Sheldon think, so as their Member of Parliament we have sent a leaflet to every single house with a survey for them to tell us what they think and those responses are coming in and when they are completed we will put that into a written submission to the Commission. At the moment, from the sample that we have had back, it is fairly even with just 60 per cent saying, yes, they want to go into the new Solihull Chelmsley Wood area and 40 per cent saying that they



do not with many people not really understanding the process, which I think is important to say. From the comments, the level of misinformation that constituents feel, many people feel that their house prices will go up if they go into Solihull while some people feel that their house prices will go down because it has the words "Chelmsley Wood" in it, or that they are going to lose particular council services.

I think the clarity for constituents in understanding that they will still be part of Birmingham City Council has not necessarily been made all that clear to them and so it seems fairly even. I do not want to say that they are not bothered but the statistics are that they are as happy as they are unhappy about it. There is no one strong feeling either way. I was with one of my opposition councillors this morning from the opposition party in that area and he said he had experienced a similar level of "It'll be all right", some people not happy, some people happy about that particular change. I will forward on to the Commission any further data that we get from that data-gather of every single elector.

With regard to the community links between the existing Yardley constituency and what it would be taking on in the new Hall Green ward moving in, there are already very strong and existing links between certainly the Acocks Green ward of that constituency and Hall Green, so, for example, the Hall Green Little Theatre is in Acocks Green. The schools, so Lakey Lane School, which if you were to ask anybody who lived in that area they would say it was in Hall Green although it falls into the Acocks Green boundary. Already there are 2,000 electors with a Hall Green postcode in the existing Acocks Green constituency and if you were to knock on any one of those doors they would tell you that they lived in Hall Green, even though they live in Birmingham Yardley constituency. There are a number of different community groups that have a cross Acocks Green-Hall Green remit already. Certainly there are opportunities for that to be strengthened where they have a postcode lottery. For example, there is a luncheon club at St Michael's Church and a luncheon club at Fox Hollies Forum and they try to work together but their remits are within ward boundaries, so there are some opportunities there for those to be closer. The links already exist and currently the ward boundary cuts right down a main road, the Fox Hollies Road, and I am almost certain that every single person on that street thinks that they already live in the same constituency. The catchment area for the schools already cross over the boundaries, so Nine Styles crosses over the boundary of both Acocks Green and Hall Green. Lakey Lane Primary School crosses over the boundary of Acocks Green and Hall Green. Those links are already strong and in existence. The shopping areas and the transport hub between Hall Green station and Acocks Green station, most people in the Hall Green area use Acocks Green as their main shopping centre already. It is the nearest High Street to them. I do not think that there will not be anybody screaming about that particularly and certainly we have had people come forward and say that they would like to do that.

I think as it stands, whilst I do not think that there is any need to do this at all, the proposals for Birmingham Yardley are not entirely controversial and would work either way. For every link that I can draw between Acocks Green and Hall Green I could draw a similar link between Yardley proper, as the people who come from there would want it to be known, and Sheldon. It is at two ends of the constituency. Should it not change at all that would cause no ructions. Should it change it will cause a few ructions. I think I am probably the easier one.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is really, really useful and it is good that you have come and told us that, which is quite positive in some ways, and we hear what you say in all those different respects. Do we have any questions on those particularly? We do.

MS PHILLIPS: I am not going to know the answer now, this is going to be awkward.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We need you to introduce yourself again.

MR BAILEY: Adrian Bailey from Oscott ward. I have worked in Nine Styles so I know the area quite well. You said at the beginning that what we have in Birmingham we will have to make the best of. I was not quite sure what you meant by that. Does that mean a lack of interest in engaging in this particular process in the Labour Party?

MS PHILLIPS: Of course not. I would not want you to put those words in my mouth. I do not want this process at all. This process is not my doing. I think it will be awkward. I think that some of the proposals about splitting wards and things will be very, very difficult and complicated. I do not want it but I am an ultimate pragmatist, I suppose, and one has to make the best of a situation that I did not ask for. I am entirely happy with my constituents as they are and I would like to think they are happy with me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response) Thank you very much, and we will look forward to hearing the outcome of your survey. It is great that you are bringing your constituents into this process; that is exactly what we want.

Can I call Cllr Bob Beauchamp. We have had somebody not turn up, so if you are able to come and talk to us now that would be great for us. Thank you.

CLLR BEAUCHAMP: (Erdington Ward) My name is Bob Beauchamp. I am a councillor in Erdington. It is Erdington constituency that I wish to address you on. It has been a long time coming, this adjustment of the boundaries, and I do feel there are several really big anomalies in what you are at present suggesting. What I am going to suggest is that this becomes a three ward constituency and simplifies masses of things in doing this. I say three wards, there are three wards in Perry Common, which is part of Kingstanding ward at the moment.

We have been told that you propose to put Tyburn ward into Ladywood. Tyburn ward going into Ladywood means that they have no physical contact with each other and you have to cross another ward to get from one to another, which is a real anomaly. It seems silly to take from the far eastern side to put toward the centre/western side of the city. It bears no logic insofar as most people in Erdington constituency do not cross the city to go to work. They sometimes go into the city to go to work or they work at the major factories on the eastern side, namely Jaguar Land Rover and the associated companies there. Most of the traffic goes down the side of the city, which is Tyburn ward, Erdington ward, Kingstanding ward and your proposal for Oscott ward which make up the west side, all except for Sutton Coldfield, which is a natural boundary anyway.

What I am going to suggest to you is that you make Tyburn ward --- If I may just refer to this, I still start at the top. Tyburn ward stays where it is and does not go into Ladywood. Stockland Green ward, which is the most westerly of the wards, is the obvious contender to go into Perry Barr constituency because it is close up to it and it has certainly got more in common with Perry Barr than anywhere in Erdington. It has its own centre, which is in Slade Road, which runs from Spaghetti Junction through the ward, and it does not rely on Erdington very much for anything other than residing in there. Perry Barr has a finger on the top of its ward presently which goes across the top of Birmingham and takes in Oscott ward. That is a real anomaly because it is split off from the rest of the city by natural boundaries, and when I say natural boundaries, the natural boundaries on the north are Queslett Road and Pheasey and on the west side are Sutton Coldfield and Chester Road, and on the east side is the M6 motorway, which really is a most peculiar place to have it unless Oscott ward was in Erdington, and that would make all the difference in the world.

This finger of Perry Barr that comes across, the suggestion is that that is taken on by Aston and you put Aston into Perry Barr. That would make up the difference of that strange piece that was added some considerable years ago just to make up the numbers for Perry Barr. Demographically, geographically and all the other graphicallies it just simply does not match. Historically and certainly communitywise it does not match at all, even educationally. To make a homogeneous three large ward constituency certainly makes far more sense within the community that is there.

Kingstanding, Oscott and Pheasey are all interwar houses which were built by a London company to make Homes Fit for Heroes. All the estates were beautifully planned out with the shops, corner shops, libraries, swimming baths, all that sort of thing which are part of that which, when it was built, was the largest municipal estate in Europe and to break that up in any way, as has happened with moving Oscott out of it, is really a very big anomaly. I do really urge you to consider that because even Kingstanding Circle Shopping Centre is split between Perry Barr right through the middle of the shopping centre, Perry Barr and Kingstanding, and that makes absolutely no sense at all. It

would make your life a lot easier, all the numbers would tally if that was done. You would not have any overgrown or undergrown or under populated wards and they would be nice and close together, part of Erdington, which they have always been in 73 years of knowledge to myself. My postcode is in Oscott and my postcode is an Erdington postcode, so that would suffice so far as that sort of thing is concerned. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Just to clarify, the three large wards would be?

CLLR BEAUCHAMP: Tyburn, Kingstanding and Erdington, Kingstanding taking over the Oscott ward, Tyburn being swung back from what you recommended, which was Ladywood, which is most peculiar, and Stockland Green going out to account for taking Oscott in, and Stockland Green going out to Perry Barr which it borders. It is ever so logical.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any questions on that?

MR PRATT: Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. You said you would have Tyburn in with Erdington, Kingstanding, Oscott and Pheasey Park?

CLLR BEAUCHAMP: Yes.

MR PRATT: You said you would have Stockland Green in the Perry Barr constituency?

CLLR BEAUCHAMP: Indeed.

MR PRATT: You then said you would retain Aston in the Perry Barr constituency but actually is not the Ladywood constituency then too light in terms of numbers? I think by mistake you said Aston in Perry Barr.

CLLR BEAUCHAMP: I am so sorry, I meant Ladywood.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That leaves in Erdington, Tyburn, Kingstanding and Oscott?

CLLR BEAUCHAMP: It does. There is a little single ward which is supposed to be Perry Common, but that was part of Erdington ward and Kingstanding ward and it has been split off into a one councillor ward. I am classing that as the big three, if you know what I mean.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response)  
Thank you very much indeed. Mr Steve McCabe, are you able to come to the podium

now? We have a couple of people who have not turned up in time for their slots, so that is useful.

MR McCABE: (MP for Selly Oak) Good afternoon. My name is Steve McCabe. I am the Member of Parliament for the current constituency of Selly Oak. My submission broadly supports the initial Boundary Commission proposals and concentrates on the plans for the new Brandwood constituency and South Birmingham. I do have to say it is my view that this review is flawed because of the two million voters excluded from the register on which it is based. I think this means that the aim of trying to create constituencies with no fewer than 71,031 and no more than 78,507 electors is unlikely to be achieved in reality despite being achieved as a mathematical exercise. I also think the Government is mistaken in reducing the number of elected members of Parliament at a time when the workload appears to be growing and the Government is responsible for hugely expanding the unelected House of Lords. It is also the case that the frequency of these reviews means that the life of a constituency is now reduced to one or two Parliaments. This makes it increasingly difficult to develop a good understanding of the constituency and build in necessary links with communities, local businesses, schools, health bodies, faith groups, voluntary, and other organisations, which I think is necessary for anyone who wishes to be a good constituency Member of Parliament. It also makes it harder for people to identify with the constituency in which they live and must contribute to a degree of apathy among voters.

I fully appreciate the difficult task with which the Boundary Commission has been presented and I recognise that working with the figures which the Government has demanded means it is necessary to reduce the number Parliamentary seats in the West Midlands from 59 to 53. In these circumstances, I believe there is a risk because the arithmetic is crucial to the decision that it could mean less emphasis on local ties, history, geography and local communities.

However, having examined the Commission's proposals, I believe the proposed Brandwood constituency, consisting of Brandwood, Billesley, Springfield and Kings Norton wards, largely respects local community ties and links and creates a balanced constituency in terms of socioeconomic factors, particularly health, employment and education. In regard to other South Birmingham constituency the proposals for the new Northfield and Edgbaston constituencies also create balanced constituencies.

It is not possible for me to be as positive about the new Selly Oak seat and the decision to include a substantial part of Halesowen which means we now have a constituency which, although quite balanced in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, requires at least two bus journeys to travel from Halesowen to Selly Oak. It is difficult to see any natural connection between these areas and I fear that the Selly Oak ward, which has a substantial student population, could lose out in this new arrangement.

However, as I conceded at the outset, this is a difficult exercise and I cannot see a different configuration which would not create similar issues elsewhere. I am particularly concerned that other models might result in very unbalanced constituencies in South Birmingham. My sources for these claims include the November 2015 DWP claimant count, the 2011 Census data and the index of deprivation 2015. I think this is particularly important in terms of demand and services like health and life opportunities for local people.

It is also the case that we cannot ignore the recent findings of Professor Ted Cantle who has warned that we must guard against creating segregated communities. I believe we need to be wary of proposals that could result in the creation of an extremely poor and segregated constituency.

It is also the case with the Boundary Commission proposals that it avoids splitting wards, which I note the Commission says should only happen in exceptional and compelling circumstances.

All four wards in the proposed Brandwood constituency are linked by a road network, which is essentially Alcester Road South, Yardley Wood Road, Bells Lane and Parsons Hill. The number 18 bus begins at Yardley Wood bus station in Billesley and follows a route through Brandwood and on to Kings Norton. The number 2 bus service links the communities of Maple, Warstock and Yardley Wood in Billesley directly to Springfield via the Stratford Road. The number 11 bus also provides a vital service for this part of Birmingham. The route includes Swanshurst School, which is attended by girls from Springfield, Billesley, Brandwood and Kings Norton. I have emphasised the bus routes because of the high dependence of some of my constituents on public transport

The wards covered by the Brandwood constituency proposals encompass distinct communities which have strong and enduring ties. The local government wards of Billesley and Brandwood have been together in a parliamentary constituency since February 1974. During the fifth periodic review the Assistant Commissioner identified Brandwood and Billesley as a pair and advised against placing each ward in different parliamentary seats. Brandwood is also very closely linked to Kings Norton and parts of the ward were parts of Brandwood prior to local government boundary changes. The residential roads of Parsons Hill and Meadow Lane in Kings Norton were also previously part of Brandwood. The community shares many local facilities and there are strong connections in terms of leisure use in the Druids Heath and Lindsworth areas of Brandwood.

The area known locally as the Vimy Triangle in Springfield ward also used to be part of the Billesley ward prior to the local government boundary changes in 2003. Residents living there consider themselves to live in Billesley and there are strong historic ties linking this area to the rest of Billesley going back to 1919. Residents in both

Springfield ward and Billesley ward make use of Swanshurst Park located in Springfield and Billesley Common in Billesley ward.

In regard to health services across the four wards, South Central Clinical Commissioning Group commission services for the majority of GP practices and health centres in these four wards. By NHS England's definition CCGs play a major role in achieving good health outcomes for the local population they serve and use localised indicators to improve the effectiveness of local commissioning. Having one MP represent these four wards will provide better representation and accountability when constituents face difficulties with the local health services and would also help in looking at the performance of the CCG because for local people it is important that they can hold their local health provider to account and work with neighbouring communities and their elected representatives to improve health outcomes across the wards.

Young people from across the four wards often attend different schools in different wards from that they live in. Children from Billesley are well represented at Baverstock School in Brandwood and some go to Moseley School in sixth form in Springfield. Swanshurst School in Billesley draws children from Billesley, Brandwood and Springfield as does Kings Heath boys in Billesley. Cadbury College, which is located in Kings Norton ward, is attended by students from all the wards making use of the 18, 27 and 49 bus routes.

In an age of parental choice it is worth acknowledging that geography and distance from home still plays a large part in the allocation of school places in Birmingham, hence these school ties and relationships are crucial to the sense of community which exists in these areas. There are strong connections between communities in Billesley and Brandwood; the Maple Shopping Centre is used by residents living in Druids Heath, Highters Heath, Maple and Warstock. It is also the case that residents and local schools in both wards make use of Cocks Moors Woods Leisure Centre. Similarly, there are enduring connections between Brandwood and Kings Norton. In fact, the parish church of St Nicholas in Kings Norton covers half of Brandwood ward and the Kings Norton British Legion is actually located on Bells Lane in Brandwood.

Many residents in Druids Heath use Walkers Heath Park in Kings Norton and are part of the Friends of Walkers Heath Park Group. Kings Norton Children's Centre and Camp Lane Children's Centre, both in Kings Norton, are part of the Primrose Hill Community Project which also runs Allens Croft Children's Centre in Brandwood. There are links between community groups and support services across the proposed Brandwood constituency. The Grendon Nursery and Children's Centre is based in Billesley but also operates from the Maple Centre in Brandwood. Wychall Children and Family Centre in Kings Norton is supported by the Malachi Community Trust in Billesley offering family support services to local communities across all four wards.

The food bank at Yardley Wood Baptist Church is a satellite of the Narthex Centre food banks Springfield and is run as a joint project of Billesley and Yardley Wood churches working together with the Narthex Centre to help those in desperate need.

As I said from the outset, I am not in favour of another change to parliamentary boundaries and I do have concerns about the proposed new Selly Oak constituency and the impact this will have on residents of Selly Oak ward. Equally, I have a strong emotional connection to Bournville ward where I have developed extensive ties with local businesses and been involved in a large number of community projects, but I do recognise that part of Bournville ward was previously in the old Northfield constituency and that there are strong ties and connections between Northfield and Bournville and that the proposed new seat of Northfield, Bournville, Longbridge, Moseley, Kings Heath and Northfield wards creates a well balanced socially cohesive constituency. I believe that the proposals for Brandwood constituency respect community ties and enduring links and offer the prospect of cooperation between organisations and services in this area. The proposal also creates a balanced constituency in terms of socioeconomic indicators, which is important in an age when voluntary and civic organisations are required to do so much more to help those in need.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. I think that was very clear. Do we have any questions, points of clarification that anybody wants to go into on that? (No response) In which case thank you very much and thank you for the support you have given for some of the plans. I would like to now call Mrs Emma Reynolds, who is the MP for Wolverhampton North East, to come and speak to us.

MRS REYNOLDS: (MP for Wolverhampton North East) Good afternoon. I would like to thank you, Assistant Commissioners Gilmore and Latham, for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Emma Reynolds and I am the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East, which I have represented since May 2010.

My message today to you is that simple, positive and brief, you may be relieved to hear. I support the Boundary Commission's proposal for the new constituency of Wednesfield and Willenhall for two reasons: first, because the proposals protect the geographical integrity of Wednesfield and, second, because they preserve the longstanding association of Wednesfield with Wolverhampton.

On the first point, the names of council wards often give a misleading impression of local geography. As you will see from the map this is certainly the case with Wednesfield, whose boundaries actually reach well beyond the wards of Wednesfield South and Wednesfield North into the wards of Fallings Park and Heath Town. Residents in Fallings Park and Heath Town regard themselves as living in Wednesfield. Wednesfield has always retained its own distinct identity. It has a long history that started with the Battle of Wodensfield in 910 and it is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon



Chronicle and Domesday Book. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was a prosperous town and from 1894 until 1966 it had its own urban district council.

In the last Parliament the Boundary Commission's revised proposals published in late 2012 would have split Wednesfield in two by separating the wards of Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South from Fallings Park and Heath Town into two different parliamentary constituencies. There was strong local opposition to this idea and I submitted a petition signed by around 1,500 residents against the proposals. In 2013 I put forward to the Boundary Commission a written submission along these lines, as did my distinguished predecessor the late Ken Purchase, who was the MP for my constituency from 1992 until 2010, and so did the local football club, Wednesfield Football Club, and Cllr Phil Bateman, who has represented Wednesfield first on the West Midlands County Council and then on Wolverhampton City Council since 1981, and he is here today to present his support for the current proposals as well.

I am pleased that the Boundary Commission has listened to the concerns that we presented in 2013 and that the integrity of Wednesfield has been preserved rather than divided and specifically the wards Wednesfield North, Wednesfield South, Fallings Park and Heath Town are all included in the new constituency of Wednesfield and Willenhall.

My second reason for supporting these proposals is that they retain the historic link between Wednesfield and Wolverhampton, a close relationship which has long been reflected in parliamentary constituency boundaries. Wednesfield has been included as part of a Wolverhampton parliamentary constituency since the Great Reform Act in 1832 with the exception of a brief period from 1950 until 1974. At a local level Wolverhampton Urban District Council and Wednesfield Urban District Council worked closely together in the post-war period. After 1966 Wednesfield became part of Wolverhampton Council.

I believe that the boundaries of the proposed new seat of Wednesfield and Willenhall reflect these historic links and for these two reasons I strongly support the Boundary Commission's proposals. I think that they are a sensible solution which respect the wishes of the local community in Wednesfield and the geographic integrity of Wednesfield as well as the historic links between Wednesfield and Wolverhampton. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. You cannot imagine how useful it is to hear when there is some support as well. It makes us think twice if somebody else comes along and says "Change it", it gives us a different dimension. It is really important in the work we are doing. Do we have any questions from the floor on this one? (No response) In which case thank you very much and we all listened very carefully. Is Mr Philip Bateman here, please?

CLLR BATEMAN: (Wednesfield North Ward) Good afternoon. I have come to speak in favour of the changes because mainly my constituents, the people I live next to and have done within Wednesfield for more than 50 years, seem to have less objection to these changes than they did in the previous changes that were put forward in 2012. There were protests on the street in relation to those changes. This time round the changes have been placed on my website and I have had a trickle of enquiries as to what it really means. I had to explain to them it did not mean a takeover by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: May I just interrupt you for one minute. Can you tell everybody exactly who you are? Thank you very much.

CLLR BATEMAN: Cllr Phil Bateman. I represent Wednesfield North on Wolverhampton City Council. I am a resident of Wednesfield. The plans as before us at the present moment seem to be drawing a great deal of support from the ordinary population in Wednesfield. As I have explained, there does not seem to be a lot of objection to it, certainly not in a written form via the website that I run and the blog and the Facebook page, or the Twitter page that I operate. That in itself is a good thing because I think people recognise that Wednesfield and Willenhall go together a bit like strawberries and cream. They were both urban district councils. They were both very close in those days when urban district councils up to 1966 sat cheek by jowl with each other and if a Martian was to land in Wednesfield High Street he would have very great difficulty in determining whether he would be in Wednesfield, Wolverhampton, or Willenhall. In that sense everything is very coterminous. It is a good place to live, I have to add. I am sure every Martian would be welcome if they did arrive.

The issues for all of us are about recognition. Wednesfield Urban District Council had a certain identity which was fashioned out back in 910 AD when the Danes from Danelaw came down and suffered a very big defeat. That is how the village got its name, it is Anglo-Saxon for Wodensfield. The Saxon god was named Woden hence we have a very great recognition in the name of the village. We are very proud of the fact that our history is so important to both Wolverhampton and indeed the country. If they had not won that particular battle some historians tell me we would all be ordering our pints in Danish, even now. It was an important battle, as such.

The parliamentary constituency, as outlined in the proposals, keep intact almost the whole of Wednesfield as would be recognised back in 910, 912. There is very little difference to the old boundary. That is really good in one sense. The other side of it is it links us with Wolverhampton. Wednesfield had a great partnership with Wolverhampton. It was taken over by Wolverhampton Borough Council back in 1966. It has been a really good partnership. I mentioned earlier that we go together with Willenhall like strawberries and cream because in Willenhall they made the locks and they made the keys in Wednesfield. It was back garden industry. We have always gone together in that sense but we also link heavily with Wolverhampton and we have

done well for our partnership in 1966. Wolverhampton built overspill homes in Wednesfield and it has made the community that we have now as prosperous as it is and as homogeneous as it is. Bus links link both Willenhall, Wednesfield and Wolverhampton; there is a good level of bus services. We all look to New Cross Hospital for our healthcare and again the links are there for everyone to see. That sits on the border.

By and large, this particular boundary change will do much in recognising some of the history but without destroying the benefits that we have had in modern days. I am quite sure that I would get majority support in my constituency, in my ward, and I represented Wednesfield North and Wednesfield South back in 1981 here, and that ward covered most of what is Heath Town ward now. We have had lots of boundary changes but this one seems to be the one that seems to be sitting nice and neatly with the population and, of course, as you know and I know, population always knows best. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any questions? We have one question.

MR ROSS: Colin Ross. Phil, I think you may be able to answer this. Because the people of Willenhall are to the west of the M6 they already look to Wolverhampton in many ways. I think there is certainly in the north a park they have in common, is that correct? You have already done some work with the Willenhall councillors and you have worked together quite closely, have you not?

CLLR BATEMAN: We work very, very closely. The boundary is very difficult for anyone to know where you start and where you finish; it is that coterminous. We work closely on a range of areas, certainly along the green corridors that make the boundary, and we work with Willenhall and Walsall Council in relation to that very, very closely. It is difficult for anybody from outside the area to know where the boundary starts and where the boundary finishes, but if you look to what we have achieved because of the links that are there, there are really good links.

Let me just explain to you. We are about to have a local nature reserve along the length of the Wyrley and Essington Canal starting right in the city centre of Wolverhampton and it will go all the way through Wednesfield, through Willenhall, Willenhall North ward and based around Willenhall South and it will carry on right the way up to Brownhills. The two local authorities are working together on that to ensure that takes place and it will be longest local nature reserve in the UK. We are in the process of having that announced. I went to a meeting this morning. The importance there is the birds do not know that they are in a different part of the canal. The people who walk along the towpath do not know they are in a different part, whether in Walsall or Wolverhampton in relation to that. I tell you what, the people know the difference between Wednesfield and Willenhall and they are able to work with the people in

Willenhall quite well. They do not call them Umpshear out of anything else but love for them. It is a really good opportunity to put two old communities together and get them represented and get the name represented and get the name check in Parliament. That is worth a lot of money.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Excellent. Thank you very much for that insight into your community. Any further questions or points of clarification? (No response) Thank you very much indeed. Could we now call Cllr Meirion Jenkins. Mr Jenkins, because you were not here earlier, just to remind you that you are being filmed and we need to know your name and address.

CLLR JENKINS: (Sutton Four Oaks Ward) I am grateful to you for squeezing me in today as your website was sold out when I looked on it this morning. I am also conscious we are racing around to a break so I will keep it fairly brief. It is Meirion Jenkins. I am a councillor on Birmingham City Council representing Sutton Coldfield Four Oaks ward.

I would like to propose a number of changes in respect of the constituencies as currently drafted in the north of the city as I think they would better represent the communities as they stand on the ground now and also bring about a number of practical advantages. The first change that I would like to request is that we move Tyburn ward from Ladywood to Erdington. The reason for this request is that Tyburn is very closely linked to Erdington at the moment and it is difficult to think of any obvious connections that it has with Ladywood. The Ladywood constituency, as currently drafted, is somewhat cumbersome and geographically awkward and would benefit from the movement of Tyburn into Erdington.

My second proposed change is that the Stockland Green ward should move from Erdington to Perry Barr. This better reflects the layout of the Witton community on the ground and also the historical links that it has with that constituency.

My third and final proposed change is that the Aston ward should move from Perry Barr to Ladywood. This is because it is currently in Ladywood and this would allow the entire city centre constituency to be contained within the inner ring road and would not split the city centre across several constituencies. It therefore has a number of obvious practical advantages.

I would like to support the Boundary Commission's proposal that Pheasey be moved into Birmingham and my reason for this is that many of the residents in Pheasey already consider themselves to be part of Birmingham. It has a Birmingham postcode and I think that is a fairly obvious and natural move.

Finally, I would like to support the boundaries as currently proposed for Sutton Coldfield. That completes my submission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions, any points of clarification? (No response) In that case thank you very much for your time. Thank you for coming here and sharing those with us. We have noted them all very clearly. We have a little bit more time before the break. If there is anybody who has come in who wants to speak now is your moment. Yes, somebody there wants to speak. Please do come down and again tell us your name and address.

MR RICHARDS: (Aldridge-Brownhills Conservatives) Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Chris Richards and I am organiser for Aldridge-Brownhills Conservative and Unionist Association, and I also undertake work on behalf of Walsall Conservative Federation. I would like to register the support of both of those bodies, the Federation and the Association, for the Boundary Commission's proposals for Walsall. It is natural that Bloxwich be included with Aldridge-Brownhills, their link with Brownhills in being south Staffordshire towns is quite obvious, historically Bloxwich, Brownhills and Pelsall were in an amalgam considering themselves south Staffordshire towns and villages.

The proposal for Pheasey Park Farm to go into the Birmingham ward of Erdington, as previous speakers have pointed out, is fairly obvious; a Birmingham postcode, Birmingham telephone dialling exchange. A previous speaker pointed out the housing stock in Kingstanding and Oscott ward really did spill over into Pheasey Park Farm, so looking at it as a whole it is more or less all of the same vintage. Many of the people in Pheasey would look to Birmingham rather than Walsall. In regard to Wednesfield and Willenhall, again really it is putting back into a configuration, as previous speakers have pointed out, what was historically the link.

I would like to register support for those proposals from the Boundary Commission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am going to stop you there for one second. Are we able to get the map the right way up so that everyone can see it differently? I do not know whether it is possible to twist it a bit. Thank you. Sorry to interrupt you, please go on.

MR RICHARDS: In relation to Walsall, I think that really sums up the obvious advantages that have been brought forward by the Boundary Commission for the reconfiguring of seats in the Walsall area. As a resident in Sutton Coldfield, could I just point out in a personal capacity that I am of a vintage that grew up thinking Sutton Coldfield always was a royal town and, in fact, when the recent campaign to get royal status came on the scene it was quite a shock to many residents that we were not actually officially a royal town. Certainly when I was born in 1954 and onwards it was always considered to be so, so I would urge a look again at the name. Thank you again for allowing me to speak.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Not at all. Thank you for speaking to us. Any questions? (No response) Thank you very much for your time. Anybody else want to say anything? (No response) For the time being we have quite a list coming up after the break. We will now adjourn until 4.30. Thank you very much.

After a short break

Time noted: 4.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to this final session of our first day, which has been very full. We have a full afternoon and evening and a pretty full day tomorrow. I do not think there are many available slots left. The first person on our list is Mike Wood. Just a reminder to everyone that we are being filmed and if you could just tell us who you are and where you come from.

MR WOOD: (MP for Dudley South) My name is Mike Wood. I am the Member of Parliament for Dudley South. Until March of this year I was a Dudley councillor and before that I was Chairman of Stourbridge Conservative Association.

In supporting the counter-proposals presented by Roger Pratt this morning I shall naturally focus on those parts that most directly affect the constituency that I represent, but I shall also be speaking on the other proposals as they relate to Dudley, Sandwell and part of West Birmingham.

Mrs Gilmore, I do not know whether you have ever been compared to Odysseus but the Commission faces a difficult task in navigating the Scylla of splitting wards and the Charybdis of breaking up communities. Sadly, I think the Commission has veered a little bit too far towards the bank of dividing natural communities. Whilst I agree that there is a need to avoid unnecessarily splitting wards, it is surely better to divide a very small number of wards than it is to break up natural communities by forcing together whole wards that have very little, if anything, in common. To do so with wards as large as the ones that we have particularly in Birmingham and in Dudley risks reducing the process to a mathematical formula instead of what should be an exercise in representation.

I suggest that we should be revisiting the possibility of just dividing a very small number of wards and from the viewpoint of my own constituency, Brierley Hill ward, which is in Dudley South, is the natural one to divide. It is bisected by the railway line to produce two very distinct communities. To the west of that line is the Glass Quarter in Aldenham which has a natural affinity with Amblecote and Wollaston wards, both of which are in Stourbridge, and also one side of Brettell Lane which, unsurprisingly, has strong natural ties with the other side of Brettell Lane, which is also in Stourbridge. Transferring those four polling districts, HO1 to HO4 in Brierley Hill, into Stourbridge constituency would reunite those communities.

On the other side, to the east of the railway line, are polling districts HO5 to HO8, covering Brierley Hill town centre and the waterfront business estate. These properly belong in the same constituency as particularly Brockmoor and Pensnett. Indeed, you would be hard pressed, if you set off on foot to work out, when you leave Brierley Hill ward and entered into Brockmoor so seamless and invisible is the boundary between those two neighbouring wards.

The Boundary Commission's initial proposal includes a new Dudley West constituency. However, whilst the constituency would return to the pre-1997 name, the boundaries would be very different to those that existed previously, whereas the counter-proposal presented by Roger Pratt this morning would create a constituency much more closely aligned to the pre-1997 boundaries but, more importantly, also more closely aligned to natural community boundaries.

I support the Boundary Commission's proposal to include Gornal in Dudley West. The ties between Gornal, Kingswinford and Pensnett are even stronger now than they were the last time those three towns shared a constituency. New development has bridged the natural boundaries that previously existed between those towns. I was speaking to residents on the new Himley View estate recently who explained to me that they shop in Kingswinford, they use a GP in Gornal and they send their children to school in Pensnett. There are really close community links.

However, whilst these will be strengthened further with the future development that has already been planned and has already been announced, there is local opposition to the Boundary Commission's proposal to split Gornal from Sedgley and, indeed, from Upper Gornal. Sedgley, Gornal and Upper Gornal form a strong natural unit, and so it makes much more sense that these three wards are kept together all in the Dudley West constituency as those communities had largely been prior to 1997. Indeed, my constituency neighbour, and constituent, Ian Austin, at the hearing for the previous aborted review did speak in favour of keeping Upper Gornal, Woodsetton and Gornal wards together. His words were that "Gornal is an area with one of the strongest identities in the Black Country". Ian and I are from different political parties but I think he is absolutely spot-on on that and it certainly makes sense to keep those together and indeed Sedgley with which they both share extremely close links.

Upper Gornal and Woodsetton is a relatively new ward. It was created since 1997 so the boundary would be different in the north of the constituency to the one that existed there previously. However, Upper Gornal and Woodsetton, the paths that they take from the Old Gornal ward that was in Dudley West means that Upper Gornal and Woodsetton fit much better in with Sedgley and Gornal in Dudley West together with Kingswinford North and Wall Heath, Kingswinford South, Wordsley and Brockmoor, Pensnett and Brierley Hill town centre than it would with Coseley East in whether we call it a Dudley East or Wolverhampton South constituency.

The same cannot be said for another ward that is in the constituency I currently represent. Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews looks much more towards Dudley town centre and even to Rowley than it does to Kingswinford, Wordsley or Gornal. I think that the counter-proposal to transfer Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews in with those wards would allow for a distinct and coherent constituency. That would create a Dudley West constituency very closely aligned to the pre-1997 boundaries going along the western edge of the West Midlands metropolitan area along the Staffordshire boundary. It would also create a logical Dudley East and Oldbury or perhaps even Dudley and Sandwell constituency that brings together most of the old pre-1997 Dudley East seat together with most of the Warley West constituency that also existed up to 1997.

Other than taking in the Glass Quarter half of Brierley Hill, the Stourbridge constituency would be left entirely with its current boundaries, so the seven wards that make up the current established constituency with just the addition of those four polling districts. Having been Association Chairman of Stourbridge, in fact I live in Stourbridge, I think the current boundaries do work well. There is no need to unnecessarily disrupt the current boundaries by moving any voters out of that constituency when we can just move those four polling districts in to bring the current constituency up within the permitted quota.

This would allow for Hayley Green and Cradley South, which the Boundary Commission had proposed should go into Stourbridge to return where it belongs as a core part of the Halesowen constituency. Hayley Green is a central Halesowen ward, it reaches most of the way into Halesowen town centre. The counter-proposals that have been presented today would avoid tearing this community away from a town with which the residents identify, with the services they use, the shopping links, the transport links, and away from a town which they have formed part of for really a thousand years going back to the Domesday Book.

I have tried to look at the Boundary Commission's initial proposals with an open mind, however surely the only way that anybody could propose linking Halesowen town centre with Selly Oak ward in a single constituency is if they have not been to Halesowen or to Selly Oak. I worked in Halesowen for a number of years as a Dudley councillor working with colleagues representing Halesowen ward. The links between Halesowen and Selly Oak, an area that despite what looks like good road links on the map actually takes a long time to travel between, there really is no movement between those two communities. There is nothing that really unites them that would make a coherent constituency.

Transferring Selly Oak to Birmingham Edgbaston would, however, allow for the creation of a sort of Birmingham University constituency which would make much more sense and actually have much more in common than Selly Oak and residual Halesowen. That



would also allow for Abbey ward to transfer back to Warley, which would make that constituency entirely comprised of Sandwell wards, avoiding a splitting of the local authority unnecessarily.

The remaining two Birmingham wards that the Boundary Commission have proposed linking with Halesowen, Weoley and Bartley Green, do have some synergy with Halesowen and so could form a coherent Halesowen and Bartley Green constituency. This would also have the benefit, compared to the Boundary Commission's proposals, that the two parts of the constituency would be much more equal between the Dudley wards and the Birmingham wards, the electorates would be much more evenly balanced rather than three much smaller Halesowen wards being linked to three very large Birmingham wards.

Whilst I support the full package presented by Roger this morning, these counter-proposals as they relate to the four Dudley seats, so Dudley West, Stourbridge, Dudley East and Oldbury, Halesowen Bartley Green, together with Warley, Wolverhampton South and Birmingham Edgbaston would be self contained. They would not have a knock-on effect to other proposals, so these can be judged separately and, of course, I would also support the proposals elsewhere in Birmingham and the Black Country.

By dividing this one ward in the Black Country it allows for much better community representation. It allows for constituency boundaries that match much more closely with natural community links on the ground. Normally, when we are considering a boundary review, we look at how we can minimise the breaking of community ties. I believe that these counter-proposals would actually go better than that; they would actually restore community ties that in many cases have been broken by previous reviews. The Dudley West constituency would go back to a rather more coherent basis around largely pre-97 boundaries. As I have said, the Stourbridge constituency would be almost entirely as it is now with only four polling districts being added. Dudley East and Warley would link almost all of two pre-1997 constituencies together, and, looking at the disruption in terms of the number of constituencies within a local authority but also the number of Local Authorities within a constituency, this counter-proposal strikes a better balance.

Looking at Dudley, not only is the counter-proposal better than the Boundary Commission's initial proposals as far as it means that Dudley borough is covered by only four parliamentary constituencies instead of the five the Boundary Commission had proposed, it is actually better than the current situation where because Coseley East is currently in Wolverhampton South East Dudley currently has five constituencies and the benefits also go across to Birmingham. By splitting this one ward in Brierley Hill, where if we did not know where the local ward boundaries were that railway track would be an entirely natural and logical place to be drawing any kind of boundary, whether it is a constituency or a local ward, certainly rather more logical than drawing a constituency boundary straight up the middle of Brettell Lane, by just dividing that one ward along a natural boundary we can have a much, much more representative set of constituencies.

Unless there are any points that you would like clarified?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I found that very clear. Thank you very much indeed. Does anyone else have any points that want to raise just for clarification? (No response) Thank you very much for coming along and for giving us that very clear view of your area. Our next speaker is Patrick Harley.

CLLR HARLEY: (Kingswinford South Ward) I am Cllr Patrick Harley, a Dudley councillor and also leader of the Conservative Group on Dudley Council.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We just need your address as well.

CLLR HARLEY: 12 Hazel Road, Kingswinford, Dudley. I am here to speak in support of the proposals put forward this morning by Roger. Having looked at these and having taken these proposals that Roger has put forward to parts of our electorate over several weeks we have consulted with the electorate through leaflets, through surveys, and the feedback that we have from some of those surveys is that the proposals put forward by the Conservative Party and by Roger fit with what local people would like. I will speak a little bit, not in as much detail as Mike, on each of the four constituencies. I will speak on Halesowen first, then Stourbridge, then Dudley West and finally Dudley East.

Reference Halesowen, the feedback that we have by going out and talking to the community in Halesowen is that the removal of Hayley Green from the Halesowen constituency just would not fit geographically or indeed it just would not wear well with the electorate. The feedback we have had is that Hayley Green is every bit a part of Halesowen as any of the other three Dudley/Halesowen wards that currently make up that constituency.

Obviously adding Bartley Green and Weoley to the existing four Dudley/Halesowen seats, it fits not only geographically, it not only goes down well with people who reside within Halesowen, but it also creates that constituency of 77,000 electorate, which is obviously exactly what the Commission is hoping to achieve. I would be fully supportive of what Roger is proposing, to retain Hayley Green within the Halesowen constituency, and obviously then there would be as little disruption as possible if you also had Weoley and Bartley Green in that constituency.

Moving on to Stourbridge, I believe, for the long established historical regions that Mike Wood has just alluded to, the four named polling districts of Brierley Hill should be part of that new Stourbridge seat. The inclusion of those four Brierley Hill polling districts and the existing wards gives us a Stourbridge constituency of just around 75,000 electorate. Again, that fits in well with what the Commission is obviously hoping to achieve with its numbers. That other side of that old railway boundary, it really does fit in well with the traditional Glass Mile and the Glass Quarter of Stourbridge. I think for

those long held historical reasons that it makes sense to split Brierley Hill across the Dudley West and the Stourbridge boundaries.

On to the Dudley West constituency, with the proposals by Roger Pratt it really does look like the old Dudley West seat pre-1997, obviously with the four named polling districts in Brierley Hill being included. By adding Sedgley and both Gornal seats, along with the other alternative proposals, you really are highlighting that common identity shared by people who live along the western fringe of Dudley. As I have said, it would be a return almost to the pre-1997 Dudley West seat.

I think it would be a mistake to split the two Gornal seats, Gornal and Upper Gornal and Woodsetton. It is not often that you get two MPs from opposing parties agreeing on changes to what the Boundary Commission has put forward, but when you have Mike and Ian Austin agreeing that it would be a mistake to split Upper Gornal from Gornal then I think the Commission have to hopefully take that proposal on board to keep the two Gornal seats together. Then to obviously not link Sedgley, the two Gornal seats, with the rest of the proposals for Dudley West from Roger, I think, would also be a mistake.

Finally, on to Dudley East. Dudley East and Oldbury would again reference those Dudley wards, it would revert to the old pre-1997 Dudley East seat which included Netherton, Woodside and St Andrew's. With a lot of these wards, such as Netherton, St Thomas's, St James's, they do naturally surround Dudley town centre, so it does make a nice fit to have them all in one constituency, obviously forming Dudley East and Oldbury.

I believe that a few people, either in person or in written submissions or in correspondence with ourselves through surveys and by going out and talking to the local community, a lot of those people will have made reference to the pre-1997 boundaries. The amended proposals offer a more traditional feel for both the Stourbridge and Halesowen seats. I think it is really key to try and ensure that Hayley Green does in fact stay in the Halesowen constituency. A lot of feedback recently from some surveys that we did in two of the Halesowen seats was that they really did feel that Hayley Green should remain part of Halesowen. 3,000 of our surveys were put out. We certainly have not had 3,000 back, but we had a fair few and the general strong feeling is that they would like Hayley Green to be retained as part of Halesowen constituency.

I think the proposals put forward by Roger provide four constituencies with the numbers that are within the Boundary Commission's figures. Obviously the historic boundaries for Dudley West would be returning those wards which previously formed parliamentary constituencies. On the Halesowen constituency it is even more pronounced that the four current wards that are in the Dudley boundaries, they stay together, therefore you get no disruption apart from two additional wards, Weoley and Bartley Green, coming in.

I think on these proposals it is important to have as little disruption as possible and certainly on the Halesowen proposals that is as little disruption as possible.

I think this is a sensible way forward that Roger has proposed and we hope that the Boundary Commission will take those proposals on board when it comes out with its revised proposals. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions? Yes, we have on here.

LORD HAYWARD: Lord Hayward. Just for clarification for the Commissioners, you have naturally raced round the geography of Dudley very well and Halesowen. Can I just ask for the map of Birmingham Selly Oak and Halesowen to be put up. Can you take the pointer which you have there somewhere? Could you on that map point out to the Commissioners where Hayley Green is, particularly in light of the word "Halesowen" actually being outside the proposed Halesowen constituency? The words "Hayley Green" are actually there on the bottom left-hand corner, there. (Indicating) It was just that you have raced over them naturally because you know the area so well, but thought for the benefit of the Commissioners you should identify where you are proposing that you should link Hayley Green as part of Halesowen and it is identified on the map as part of Halesowen.

CLLR HARLEY: You cannot quite see it because I cannot operate the gadget, but you have Belle Vale and Hayley Green very close together, then Halesowen North, South and to put in Bartley Green and Weoley, it just seems a natural fit. Whereas if you take Hayley Green and slap it right in the middle of Stourbridge that just does not fit well at all. From the residents we have spoken to they want to remain part of Halesowen, not Stourbridge.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is very clear. We actually have access on our computers to some even more detailed maps and we can zoom in and zoom out and do all sorts of exciting things, so actually it is pretty clear here, but good to point it out. It might go in, hopefully. No other questions? (No response) In that case thank you. We will move on to our next speaker, who is Sandra Jenkinson.

MS JENKINSON: (Hon Alderman, Birmingham Council) Good afternoon. My name is Sandra Jenkinson, and I am an Honorary Alderman of the City of Birmingham. I live in Billesley ward which is currently part of Selly Oak constituency. The address is 458 Brook Lane, B13 0BZ.

There are a number of issues I want to draw to your attention. The first one is that, for me, the Boundary Commission task is flawed. It is based on a lack of understanding of the role of MPs in areas like Birmingham where many people in all sections of the community need a voice to help them to be heard. We should rather be looking for

ways to help MPs to stay closer to their people, not fiddling around playing a numbers game to get a cut price scheme to fix the number of voters they will each have to support. However, I recognise that the parameters of the task are not set by the Boundary Commission and you are under orders prescribed by Government. In that context, I have a concern that your work is based on the flawed numbers of those on the electoral register at a given time when others changes were being rushed through. Those numbers have already changed, and that has certainly been the experience across the present Selly Oak constituency where I live.

The second issue for me is the sense of alienation from the democratic process which I find disturbing. At a point when so many of the electorate are feeling disenfranchised and distanced from the political process, yet another change to their representation can only push people even further away from participating in our democracy.

In addition to the parliamentary changes, both those recently implemented and these under discussion, there have been changes to local council structures and therefore to representation locally in 2004 and another planned for 2018. It is almost a catch your councillor or your MP as they go past. Establishing awareness of their councillors and their Members of Parliament takes time and energy and resources of people and funding. Developing her or his profile is important but building the trust that people should have in their elected representatives is even more important and cannot be done quickly.

A third issue is just to begin to highlight the communities that I know well. First of all a longstanding relationship that exists between Billesley and Brandwood wards dating back over 60 years. It picks up the similarities between the local authority housing that developed in both of those wards between the 1930s and 1960s on land available on the city boundaries. Into both wards people from central areas of Birmingham were moved to better housing conditions and the homes they left behind were in many cases pulled down or made available for housing newly arrived people. This was alongside the private developments as the city expanded south, developing mixed communities within local schools and churches and community facilities to the benefit of the whole community. Both wards, Brandwood and Billesley, are already having to cope with changes to their boundaries going forward and electors will have to get used to new council structures and representation in 2018.

The fourth point is that there are existing links between Billesley and Springfield wards. Until the last ward boundary changes, brought in for the 2004 local elections, a significant area of Springfield ward was part of Billesley ward for many years. Local residents were vociferous in fighting against that proposed change, which went through. Those existing links include, for example, the Swanshurst Park and its facilities, which have been enjoyed for years by Billesley people, and many of the people who found they were now living in Springfield ward were actually attached to Billesley School where many of their families have grown up in that area and children from that always

gone to Billesley School, grown up together, they saw themselves as Billesley people. The families in those roads also formed part of the catchment area of the flagship Sure Start Children's Centre at the Chinnbrook Centre. Those families still receive Children's Centre services and still from Billesley ward, so the link continues. Many of the local children also choose to take up places in secondary schools in the Billesley ward.

In the last five years, so since the last census for which there is detailed information, the makeup of the population in Billesley ward has been changing radically as people from Springfield move out of the more central areas; an historical style of movement where people come into the city centre first of all and then move towards the edges of the city as their circumstances change. That has been happening to a significant extent.

In addition, families from the Springfield ward, where there was virtually no local authority housing, have been moved for some time into Billesley ward building and then strengthening the links, although former council housing is often now owned by private landlords or being sold relatively cheaply on the open market. There are good frequent bus links between the Springfield ward communities and Billesley ward, so families can enjoy the different style of living and still be close to their extended family and where their extended family chooses to shop.

Fifth, there are links between Billesley and Brandwood and Kings Norton wards. There are clear links sociologically between the local authority housing on the three estates that are so significant in Kings Norton area and those in Billesley and Brandwood; again city developments on the edge of Birmingham. Whilst significant refurbishment and renewal has taken place, there are still areas where communities struggle to be heard and to flourish. They need voices, strong voices, to speak for them and with them. Wychall Children's Centre, for example, in Kings Norton ward has a contract from the city council for the delivery of services in an area which includes the south of Brandwood ward.

Therefore, I regret the imposed requirement for yet another set of changes and question the motivation for them. However, of the options available, and knowing the communities well, I support the proposal for Kings Norton Brandwood Billesley and Springfield to come together as a new Brandwood constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Lovely, thank you very much. I was trying to follow where you were going and now you have explained it all in that last sentence. Any questions on that one? (No response) It was very clear to me, so I am very grateful for that. Thank you. Richard Burden is our next speaker, the MP for Birmingham Northfield.

MR BURDEN: (MP Birmingham Northfield) My name is Richard Burden. I am the Member of Parliament for the Birmingham Northfield constituency. I am grateful for this opportunity to provide some observations on the Boundary Commission's provisional

recommendations for the West Midlands. Unsurprisingly, I am principally going to concentrate on Birmingham and the part of Birmingham that I represent.

By way of introduction, I know, having been here this afternoon, that I am not the first to say that I think the framework in which the Commission is required to draw up its recommendations this time is both unreasonable and unfair. Using December 2015 as the reference point for assessing the size of the electorate is perhaps the worst of all possible dates coming after the disappearance of many thousands of voters following individual registration and before the increase in voter registration that we saw in the run-up to the June 2016 European referendum. Not only the figures therefore doubly out of date, but they dramatically underestimate the size of the electorate not in the future but they underestimate what it is now. Across the country we know that the numbers missing through the use of a December 2015 date runs into millions.

Second, whilst I know that Parliament did approve the overall framework for this review, it did so before the EU referendum. The decision to cut the number of MPs by 50 was made before that referendum and at the time it was assumed that there would be a European Parliament that would adopt some of the responsibilities that would deal with a number of issues covered at European level. Brexit will mean the workload of MPs will go up, not down, and, as my colleague Steve McCabe said, that is happening even without Brexit.

Thirdly, and again I accept this is in the legislation, by curtailing the flexibility that the Commission has to determine parliamentary constituencies by five per cent above or below quota arithmetic ends up coming first. I know the Commission has and will try to continue to reflect community ties and commonsense in its proposals and it is through no fault of the Commission that at the end of the day arithmetic will trump all of those things.

All these things are to be regretted and that is why I and many of my colleagues will be seeking every parliamentary opportunity that we have to get the whole process stopped and rethought. In the meantime, we are bluntly stuck with it as it is. I recognise in relation to Birmingham the Commission has done its best to produce a configuration of boundaries that can work. I recognise that because of the primacy of arithmetic in all of this the Boundary Commission has had to look at a very different way of configuring constituencies. Up until now constituencies in Birmingham have mainly been configured as kind of blocks in and around the city; some of those blocks have principally been inner city blocks, some principally outer city blocks, Hodge Hill has been a blend of the two. Under the proposals that we have before us the Commission recommends that we move to a new model of longer thinner constituencies stretching from outer city areas to areas closer to the city centre. This is a different way of doing it and in the case of my Birmingham constituency my immediate thought was one of disappointment at potentially losing Weoley ward from Birmingham Northfield, which has been part of Northfield the whole 24 years I have been an MP, and also Kings

Norton ward, which is a bit more recently part of Northfield but I have represented it for the past six years.

Then I started to think about the proposals and one of the things that has been apparent to me throughout my time as an MP is that there really is quite a divide between inner and outer city areas that can all too often undermine community cohesion across Birmingham as a whole, something I actually raised in my maiden speech back in 1992. Sometimes it seems that has got worse, not better since. If I can just illustrate what I mean by that, its relevance to this review. Using Birmingham City Council Health and Wellbeing Board figures, 51.1 per cent of Northfield's population falls within the most deprived 20 per cent of areas in England. Life expectancy is below the English average. According to figures published by the Health and Wellbeing Board, only 14 per cent of Northfield's population is made up of black and minority ethnic groups. Across Birmingham as a whole the figure is 42 per cent.

In contrast, let us look at the current Hall Green constituency which the Boundary Commission suggests abolishing. 59.4 per cent also fall within the most deprived 20 per cent of areas in England, but 64 per cent of that constituency come from black and minority ethnic groups. Remember that in Northfield the figure was 14 per cent. In some wards it is dramatically even lower than that. The conclusion I draw from those deprivation indices is that the needs of people living in the inner areas and the outer areas are often quite similar. What worries me is for community cohesion often people who live in one area know a lot about their own needs and the issues facing their communities, but very little about the needs and pressures facing others, concluding that means that they have perhaps little sympathy and little understanding of what goes on elsewhere.

All too often as well we know that people feel that they are not listened to by policy-makers and that kind of distrust and alienation, and I know Sandra Jenkinson mentioned this, is bad for democracy. Worse than that, sometimes people tell me they are convinced that people in other areas get more attention in policy terms than they do.

When you mix into that the figures for the differences in ethnicity that I was talking about between different areas I think it will be clear how that kind of feeling can so often damage community cohesion across the city and I know, Ms Gilmore, you will well understand that from your time as a home affairs correspondent.

Thinking about it, I am not sure that reinforcing those divisions in the configuration of constituencies is actually a very good thing. Maybe we should look to MPs having a more balanced sense of the needs and hopes and fears across the city, across religions and across ethnicities. I have to say, looked at from that point of view, the Boundary Commission's proposals do have considerable merit. Looked at in that way, it is not a bad thing that the MP for Quinton ward also represents Sparkbrook, it is not a bad thing that the MP for Longbridge ward with 10.8 per cent black and minority ethnic community



living within it also represents Moseley and Kings Heath ward, which has 38 per cent representation of black and minority ethnic communities, or that the MP for Kings Norton ward also represents people in Springfield ward. When we talk to constituents, if we configure in that way we can say from our experience from our own casework, from our own surgeries that the hopes and fears that those people have for their families are actually not that different from those in families that live objectively just up the road in our city, and that all of them deserve to be listened to.

We can say that now, we do try and say that now, we do try to promote that feeling now, but that extra dimension of saying that the MP himself or herself actually represents different parts of the city and represents different people from different communities can give that argument much more force and much more grounding.

In conclusion, if the proposals do go through as they stand, and I was still the MP for the area, I would be really sorry to lose Weeley and Kings Norton wards from Northfield constituency. I have developed a relationship with them. I know the communities there. I would be very sorry to do that. If that was to happen the reason for it would be arithmetic, not my doing, not the Boundary Commission's doing, but arithmetic. I can see the community identities the Commission is trying to reflect in the wards that both Weeley and Kings Norton are being put next to in the new configuration. I know my colleague Steve McCabe and also Sandra Jenkinson just before spoke eloquently of the historic links between Kings Norton and Brandwood and moving up that part of the city.

If we are to have a new format for constituencies it seems to me that linking Longbridge and Northfield together, keeping that link, is self-evidently the right thing to do, but also then taking that further north via Bournville up to Moseley and Kings Heath could make a good degree of sense too. As you have already heard it, is the way the buses go and the new format for the city starts to resemble spokes of a wheel going into and out of town.

The Commission and you have made clear that it would be a bad idea to split wards unless there are compelling and exceptional circumstances for so doing. I think that is important and we do need to impress that. Splitting of wards here and there across the city and beyond to me does not show any compelling, and it certainly does not show exceptional reasons for splitting wards. My colleague, Mike, also asked you to think about Odysseus and Scylla and Charybdis and navigating your way through the Mediterranean. That is quite a task, but I would also ask you to think about, by splitting wards, the need to avoid Medusa, and multi-headed monsters coming up at you.

What certainly would not make sense, in my view, would be to have an overall configuration as the Boundary Commission is suggesting of spokes of a wheel going into and out of town. Then to cut off completely that logic of a proposed closer to city element when it comes to Northfield uniquely and to uniquely leave that constituency with an entirely outer city and fairly monocultural character when other constituencies

across Birmingham would be much more balanced. I think there is an argument for doing either of those things, but to say it is fine for most of Birmingham but when it comes to Birmingham we still want it as a predominantly white constituency, I think would be mistaken. I do think that the Boundary Commission's proposals have a lot of force, have a lot of merit. It is a different way of doing it. I would rather we were not in this process at all for all the reasons others have said, but we are and that means it is important to make the most of it. If we can promote greater community cohesion in Birmingham as a result of that then that has to be a good thing.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I think you have shown how tough and how emotionally difficult all these decisions are and are going to be for the next few months. Do we have any questions? We have a question here.

MR PRATT: Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. Through you, Madam Chairman, are you saying that reluctantly, although obviously you prefer if Kings Norton was within your constituency, if it had to be it would be those four wards of Longbridge, Northfield, Bournville and Moseley and Kings Heath?

MR BURDEN: Yes.

MR PRATT: With nothing else added to it?

MR BURDEN: That is what I am saying. The mathematics, the arithmetic of it means that that seems to me what you need to do unless you get into the Medusa territory of splitting wards all over the place.

MR PRATT: Nothing added to those four?

MR BURDEN: I have addressed my comments to Birmingham and I have kept them on Birmingham. I think there is an argument, and this is not my area of expertise, when you look at the configuration of Worcester and what you do there. The one bit of Worcestershire that I do know is Rubery. I know it because it is kind of joined on to Longbridge. It is an historical accident in many ways that Rubery ended up as part of Bromsgrove rather than Longbridge and the local government boundaries, there was an area called Frankley that used to be part of Worcestershire, it was brought into Birmingham and then it became part of Birmingham Northfield. A lot of people are in the Rednal area of Longbridge, which I used to live in actually, my local shops were Rubery, that is where I used to go and do my shopping. I also know that as an MP I have to deal with Bromsgrove Council because there was a thing that happened recently of a crematorium planning application, it meant I had to deal with Bromsgrove council because it affected people both on the Bromsgrove side of the border and my side of the border, so I guess there is an argument to say that you could bring Rubery into Northfield. As far as I know and, as I say, I have not looked at this in detail, but as

far as I know that would not create a problem on the arithmetic. I think with that exception I would say just leave things as the Commission propose.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. One more question at the back there.

CLLR ALDEN: Cllr Robert Alden, leader of the Conservatives, Birmingham City Council. Just as a point of clarification, if I can, you mentioned there that if you were to add Rubery it would not have an impact on the numbers that side. Does that mean if the numbers added up you would rather have Kings Norton retained because of the cross boundaries in West Heath or are you still saying that you would rather have Moseley over Kings Norton?

MR BURDEN: No, because if you started bringing Kings Norton back in, and in many ways I would like to keep Kings Norton, even though it is a fairly recent addition to Northfield, I have to say, if you started doing that it creates a knock-on effect all the way up. If there is going to be a pattern and a configuration of constituencies of those spokes in the wheel going from the outer areas to the inner areas, and if you look at where the buses go, if you look at the map of Birmingham, it makes sense to go from Kings Norton up to Springfield and it makes sense from Longbridge to go up through Bournville into Moseley and Kings Heath. I think the Rubery issue is a different one and that has no knock-on effect to Birmingham to the extent that I think Northfield would still be within the quota, near the top end of it but still within the quota, if Rubery came in.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think that is very clear. Thank you. One more question here very quickly and then we will move on to the next speaker.

MR BAILEY: Adrian Bailey from Oscott. Just thinking about the way you were justifying these strip seats in Birmingham, or attempting to, at the beginning of your talk you were talking about the problems with the process and how a lot of people have been left out. We have heard that quite often today from Labour members, and yet with the process here with the Commission saying there have to be exceptional reasons for splitting wards, do you think there is anything in law that allows the Commission to say that there have to be exceptional reasons for wards to be split?

MR BURDEN: I think that is for the Commissioner.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think it is really pretty clear what our remit is and where we can do this and we would have to justify it with a lot of reasoning why we would go down that route. I do not really think it is necessary at this point in the discussion when that is not a proposal on the table by anyone as far as I can see at the moment, right now. Any other questions? (No response) Thank you very much indeed, very useful. Our next speaker is Liz Clements please.

MS CLEMENTS: Good evening. My name is Liz Clements. I am a local resident in Bournville. I am here to speak in support of the new Northfield constituency boundaries. Like many of us in Birmingham, I am a migrant, in my case from Chelmsford in Essex where I notice where you were a Commissioner early this week holding hearings. I first came to Birmingham in the mid-1990s and I remember being bowled over by the city's vibrancy and diversity. It was a big contrast from where I had come from, proud as I am of my Essex roots.

Having lived in this city for almost 20 years now, and in Bournville since 2002, I can say with confidence that the new boundaries for Northfield capture very effectively our local traditions of industry and innovation and of diverse cultures and outlooks. I feel it is a true cross-section of south west Birmingham. Some of you may know I worked for ten years here as a council public policy adviser in this wonderful building. It is very nice to be back here. The experience I gained during that time tells me that the proposals achieve an acceptable balance in terms of socioeconomic indicators and levels of deprivation in the population. Richard Burden, I think, gave a very good exposition of that.

One thing I would say, and I think it does reflect where I came from before I came to Birmingham, I feel the new boundaries do create a disproportionately white constituency. That is not the most accurate reflection of the city as a whole. I believe that outcome is almost inevitable given the population constraints in the legislation and the composition of the communities present in the south west of Birmingham. I have to say very strongly that I would oppose any alternative proposals which would create an even larger white majority. I think it really would create a monocultural constituency, and this would be out of keeping with the city I know and now love. I think it would have a negative impact on the community cohesion, which is very serious for us in the city.

As a local resident, I particularly welcome the proposed Northfield boundaries because they form a coherent extended neighbourhood. Major housing schemes in our area, notable the Bournville Village Trust and the Masefield Estate, cross the borders of Bournville and Northfield wards. Bournville College in Longbridge attracts large numbers of students from both those wards for their post 16 education.

I am regular public transport user and a bit of a bus geek, I am afraid. I was particularly struck by the fact that the new boundaries follow the established transport connections between our communities. Putting that another way, they trace the journeys which people like me make every day for work, school, shopping and leisure in our daily lives. Imagine yourself driving along the A38, that passes through three of the wards in the proposed boundaries. Picture yourself taking a train on the Cross-City Line with its four stations which link the new constituency, or hop on to the famous buses, the 27 or the 18, which already make vital connections between Bournville, Cotteridge and Northfield.

On these journeys you will pass through Longbridge, the historic home of the car industry in Birmingham. It is now reinventing itself for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a hub for education, retail, service industries and housing. Then you will reach Northfield that is the home of St Lawrence church, which is historically a parish in the diocese of Worcester and it is home to a broad range of shops and services, including a very well used leisure centre and library. That is important because it is not just people in Northfield ward who use those services of the leisure centre and the library, they also draw a lot of people from Cotteridge, Bournville and the Masefield Estate.

In Bournville village you will find the legacy of businessman and visionary social reformer, George Cadbury, and the whiff of chocolate will remind you that manufacturing is still the lifeblood of south west Birmingham. You will pass the village green, the carillon, and then the Cadbury works on Bournville Lane. Moving through Stirchley and the Pineapple Estate you will arrive in Kings Heath, which has a very vibrant high street with an eclectic mix of churches, shops, pubs and public services, again including a very well used library, drawing people from across the wards. From there, the 50 bus takes you on to Moseley with its strong independent retail sector, numerous pubs and cafes and St Mary's, another parish which was historically in the diocese of Worcester.

All of that was to illustrate my view that the new boundaries accurately capture the real life connections between the neighbourhoods in this swathe of the city. It would be wrong to focus on transport links to the exclusion of the large number of parks and urban green spaces which shape the character of our area and also link the communities grouped together in the new Northfield boundaries.

If I start from my own home near the Cadbury factory in Bournville, I can walk a greenway through public parks right to the commercial centre of Northfield - Wilkinson's is a particular favourite. Likewise, a route through parks and along the River Rea brings me up to Kings Heath and Moseley, and it is a walk which will take in the horticultural showpiece of Kings Heath Park and the Victorian splendour of Highbury Park and Hall, the home of the Chamberlains. A hundred years ago in Bournville George Cadbury set a standard for urban development with public green space at its heart. The proposed Northfield constituency I feel provides a showcase for this visionary thinking and it creates a linked set of neighbourhoods through which ordinary people like me can walk easily and safely lessening congestion and pollution and improving health and wellbeing.

In conclusion, I would just like to reiterate my support for the Northfield proposals as they stand. As many speakers have said, the changes to the current boundaries are in many ways unwelcome because of the inevitable disruption and expense. The new boundaries for Northfield capture a group of neighbourhoods that are already strongly linked. Despite the arbitrariness of the population targets which have been set in legislation, the new constituency represents a socially cohesive whole and accurately

represents the everyday geographies and the lived experience of myself and my neighbours. Thanks very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. That was a really lovely trip through your areas. Any questions on this one? (No response) In that case let us move on to our next speaker, who is not here. Simon Hackett, please.

CLLR HACKETT: Thank you for allowing me to come today. I am coming on behalf of actually Tom Watson, who is the MP for West Bromwich East. Tom sends his apologies. He is sorry that he cannot be here but he felt it was very important that he is represented. As a local councillor, I am on the cabinet in Sandwell and I am also Chair of West Bromwich East constituency. He felt it was appropriate that I attend. He will be sending a follow-up submission separately in more detail that will come in due course.

In terms of the proposed West Bromwich borough constituency, it takes most of the current constituency of West Bromwich East which is in Sandwell into the new proposal. It adds St Paul's ward, which is also part of Sandwell in the south side of the borough and it also adds Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South which is in the north part of Sandwell. In terms of Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South, these wards are connected very closely to two current wards in West Bromwich East, those of Friar Park and Hateley Heath. They are very closely connected and many people travel from both sides of those wards.

In terms of Wednesbury town centre, by bringing Friar Park, Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South together it brings all the wards in Wednesbury under one constituency, which was not the case before, Wednesbury South was split from Friar Park. Even though Wednesbury itself is a town, many residents travel to West Bromwich town centre. In Sandwell it is very much seen as the premier town of the borough. There has been major redevelopment in recent years, so many people do regularly travel from Wednesbury to the town centre.

Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South, as I said, are very much joined with Friar Park and we do welcome the three Wednesbury wards forming part of this new proposal.

In terms of St Paul's, which is the third ward to come into the new West Bromwich borough constituency, there are excellent transport links from St Paul's into West Bromwich town centre. Many residents use the facilities of West Bromwich town centre, whether it is the shopping facilities that I have mentioned, but also for leisure purposes. We have excellent facilities in the town centre in terms of restaurants, a cinema and a leisure centre and many people who live in the St Paul's ward use those services, as do the residents of Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South might I add.

The Sandwell Hospital, which is based in the West Bromwich town centre area, is also used by many residents in St Paul's ward and also in Wednesbury North and Wednesbury South, so the bringing together of these wards into the new proposed West Bromwich constituency is welcomed.

Recently we have had built a new Sandwell College in the heart of West Bromwich town centre as well as an additional sixth form for the area. These are excellent facilities and young people and adults from across Sandwell and in particular Wednesbury South, Wednesbury North and St Paul's visit and use these facilities in the heart of the current West Bromwich East constituency.

If I could again mention the excellent transport facilities in the area, if you look at Wednesbury North you can travel from Wednesbury North all the way to St Paul's via road, the Metro facility in the area and the bus facilities in the area. People can easily travel across this whole constituency. It is well linked together in terms of transport. What is particularly pleasing for me, and I know for Tom, is West Bromwich Albion Football Club will be moving on this proposal into the new West Bromwich borough constituency. We certainly welcome that.

Just to summarise, we think this proposal for West Bromwich borough constituency meets the Commission's criteria in terms of the numbers of constituents. Whilst Tom, certainly, and myself do not welcome the reduction in the number of MPs for the West Midlands we do fully endorse and support this proposal for a new West Bromwich borough constituency.

As I said at the beginning, Tom will be submitting more detailed proposals to the website in the coming days and adding more to what I have just outlined. I know he will also mention his support for the wider proposals in the Black Country and Birmingham because he supports those as well in terms of what the Commission has recommended.

I have been made aware that today a counter-proposal has been made in terms of West Bromwich East and I cannot comment on that because I have not spoken to Tom about that. He has not seen the details of this counter-proposal. I know he would not be in favour of splitting wards, for example, so I think he would want me to reserve comment on that and he will certainly be making comment in the proposal that he puts into the consultation.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions? (No response) Again, very clear. I appreciate you coming and giving some support there to what is currently on the table. Our speaker then is James Morris MP.

MR MORRIS: (MP for Halesowen and Rowley Regis) Good evening. Firstly, I just want to say thank you for the work that you have done so as part of this boundary review and again giving us the opportunity for us to present our views at this consultation hearing.

Since your initial proposals were published in September I have spoken with various community organisations, businesses, faith groups and local constituents about these new constituency maps. The overriding theme from these discussions is that the four Halesowen wards - Halesowen North, Halesowen South, Belle Vale and Hayley Green and Cradley South - must remain together within a single parliamentary constituency.

Halesowen has a long history and rich heritage which for many years has been fiercely defended by local residents and community groups, which are rightly proud of the role their town has played in the industrial and political development of this country and this region. Halesowen was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. It is the birthplace of the great electoral reform campaigner Thomas Attwood. It was the centre of the UK's nail production during the Industrial Revolution and is home to many significant listed buildings, such as the Norman church St John the Baptist and the Abbey ruins, to name just two.

Politically, Halesowen has always been together as one town within a single parliamentary constituency. There has never been a time where it was felt necessary to split the town between two constituencies and I do not believe that should change now. Mathematically, for the purposes of this review, it is still possible with one simple ward swap to keep the strong historical, cultural and economic ties that this town has together. The Conservative Party counter-proposals, as presented this morning, offers the Commission an alternative which removes the Selly Oak ward from the Halesowen and Birmingham Selly Oak constituency and replaced it with Hayley Green and Cradley South ward creating a Halesowen and Bartley Green constituency.

First, I believe that many of the people I have spoken with since September also believe that the Selly Oak ward has no links with Halesowen from a cultural, political, economic or social perspective. In the eyes of many local residents, both in Halesowen and within Selly Oak, it does not make sense to combine these two distinct areas within one constituency, especially when a quarter of Halesowen's population will be excluded from a Halesowen constituency. There are no existing direct public transport links between Halesowen and Selly Oak, no shared identity and no shared facilities or community organisations. Demographically they are also very different places. Selly Oak is a major settlement for Birmingham students who attend the University of Birmingham, of which I am an alumni. It would therefore make much more sense to have both Selly Oak and Edgbaston wards within the same constituency where an MP was able to represent those electors effectively.

I would like now to move on to the Hayley Green and Cradley South ward, which the Commission in its first draft is proposing to move to the Stourbridge constituency. This ward spans from within a mile of the Halesowen town centre and takes in the countryside which offers a visible boundary between Halesowen and Worcestershire and Stourbridge. There are many suburban roads within this ward which are partially



divided between Belle Vale and Halesowen South wards, which under the initial proposals would see neighbours in two separate constituencies. The proposals would lead to the constituency boundaries following a tortuous route down small residential roads and along garden fences. I do not believe this to be an effective way of drawing boundary lines. This ward shares many cultural ties with the rest of Halesowen from historical sites to modern day leisure facilities, including the Halesowen Football Club, several cricket clubs, and the athletics club and the gymnastics club.

When Halesowen was removed from Worcestershire in 1974 and placed within the Dudley borough, the new local authority authorised the plans setting out the historical suburbs of Halesowen in order to appropriately signpost the town. Both Hayley Green and Cradley were both highlighted as part of the six suburbs and that is still relevant today. Hayley Green itself is largely made up of the ancient township of Lutley, which is where Halesowen's Grade II listed mill stands and has done since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of the ward is made up of private dwellings which were built as part of the Halesowen's expansion in the 1970s, namely the Squirrels Estate based around Portsdown Road. This area is covered by one bus service which operates a direct link to Halesowen. There is no public transport link between Hayley Green and Stourbridge.

Another estate within Hayley Green and Cradley South is the Huntlands area built in the 1960s, which again has no direct link with Stourbridge. It is served by public transport for access to Halesowen town centre and was again part of the Halesowen District Council's plans for expansion.

The proposed constituency in the first draft does cross the borough boundaries between Dudley and Birmingham. My current constituency of Halesowen and Rowley Regis has been a cross-borough constituency since its creation and as a Member of Parliament for this seat for nearly seven years I have not had any difficulty with working between Local Authorities and do not believe this to be a problem. The proposed Halesowen and Birmingham Selly Oak constituency that is proposed by the Commission in its first draft is actually made up of four existing constituencies: Halesowen and Rowley Regis, Birmingham Edgbaston, Birmingham Selly Oak and Birmingham Northfield. The proposed constituency bears very little resemblance to any of its former seats and I feel the proposal for a Halesowen and Bartley Green seat would help limit the number of changes to existing constituencies. Bartley Green, although distinctly a part of Birmingham, has community ties with Halesowen with parts of the area being covered by the former Halesowen Urban District Council and the village of Illey providing a vital commuter link between the two. Bartley Green Football Club also currently sits within the Halesowen South ward.

In conclusion, I believe in order to make a constituency which importantly meets the electoral quota and respects community ties, a simple swap of Selly Oak ward with Hayley Green and Cradley South ward to create a Halesowen and Bartley Green seat

would be a sensible adjustment to the proposed Halesowen and Birmingham Selly Oak constituency. I hope that today I have been able to outline to you the strong history and modern community ties that Hayley Green and Cradley South have as part of a very proud town. I and many residents of Halesowen believe that the town should be wholly within a single parliamentary constituency in order for an MP to effectively represent the town's need. This swap, outlined in more detail with its associated effect on neighbouring constituency within the Conservative Party submission, is one which is relatively simple, does not distract from the important criteria set out and provides a constituency which electors can identify with and I believe would be good for local democracy.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any questions on that? (No response) In which case, we will move on to the next speaker. We are now moving on to Gareth Moore.

CLLR MOORE: My name is Gareth Moore. My address is Flat 7, Durbridge Court, 47 Sutton Road, Erdington. I have been a councillor for the Erdington ward in Birmingham for the last five years and I am from Kingstanding originally. A lot of my family are within the Birmingham Erdington constituency, so it is an area I know particular well. I think the strong local connections that I have gives me a good indication as to what the communities are and what the boundaries should be for that part of north Birmingham. I would like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to speak and put forward my views today.

The proposals put forward by the Commission for the most part are very good because they represent the strong links that exist between Erdington, Kingstanding, Oscott and Pheasey Park Farm. These communities coexist and integrate well and therefore would work as a parliamentary constituency in being represented by the same Member of Parliament.

Pheasey Park Farm has a Birmingham postcode. It is separated by Walsall by greenbelt and so in many ways is considered to be an add-on and an extension of Birmingham and, therefore, has much more in common with closer ties with Birmingham than it does with Walsall.

Kingstanding and Oscott have a lot of connections. These primarily are around the Kingstanding Circle and the Hawthorn Road shopping areas which sit between the two wards. The southern parts of Oscott have often identified themselves as Kingstanding itself. Oscott is often considered to be in Birmingham, an artificial creation for electoral purposes. The Local Government Boundary Commission, which has recently redrawn the ward boundaries in Birmingham, has recognised that the south part of Oscott is actually Kingstanding and has moved that within the new Kingstanding ward that is proposed to come into effect for Birmingham's local government boundaries in 2018.

A lot of people from Kingstanding also travel to Erdington to shop. On my own experience often as I lived in Kingstanding it was Erdington that we went to shop, quite often with my grandparents, and a lot of people continue to do that. Erdington High Street is the third largest local centre within Birmingham outside of the city centre and Sutton Coldfield. The strong ties that Kingstanding ward has with Erdington ward can be reflected again with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England who have created a new ward of Perry Common which takes into account the eastern part of Kingstanding ward and the western part of Erdington.

All these proposals that you have put forward can be improved and I would argue that they can be done so by simple changes as put forward, that is to remove Stockland Green ward from the proposed constituency and replace it with Tyburn ward. This would be a relatively minor change as you can just add Stockland Green to Perry Barr constituency and move Aston to Ladywood constituency in place of Tyburn. These three small changes just involve simple ward swapping, there is no ward splitting and would create far better boundaries. Tyburn ward has much more in common with Erdington as it is currently part of the constituency. That is mainly because the boundary between Tyburn and Erdington ward is much more fluid, the boundary flows up Holly Lane, it actually cuts round a social club, it then cuts across Pype Hayes, and a very small part of Pype Hayes, the Springforth estate, comes under Erdington ward and the remainder of Pype Hayes falls under Tyburn ward, and then it cuts up across the Chester Road and then skirts round the Pitts Farm Estate which serves as the border with Pype Hayes Park being the majority within Tyburn ward. That is very fluid and very much lines on a map. If you look at the boundary that Erdington has with Stockland Green ward that is very different. It is mainly key busy road, huge artificial boundaries that have been put in place and act as a barrier between the two. It is not as fluid as it is with Tyburn and, therefore, I would argue that Erdington has much stronger connections with Tyburn than it would do with Stockland Green.

Stockland Green and Perry Barr have a shared history and Witton is a part of Birmingham which is an identifiable community that was split in two, part of it being in the Perry Barr ward and part of it being in Stockland Green ward. I understand that was mainly split as a result of the M6 motorway being constructed, but actually where Witton sits it is not a physical barrier because there is a clear road that connects the two communities still and they very much see themselves as a community regardless of the motorway as obviously the motorway goes above rather than as an actual barrier that you cannot cross. The 11 bus route links the two communities very well.

A lot of people in Witton also travel to the Slade Road area, which is one of the key shopping areas within Stockland Green, and that acts very much as a local centre for Stockland Green and Witton areas as opposed to Erdington High Street, which looks more towards Kingstanding, Erdington and Tyburn.

I have not been present for most of today, but I do understand from those who have spoken there have been no real objections to Pheasey Park coming into Erdington and, indeed, that some support has been suggested for that. Therefore, I would argue that the Commission's proposals whilst good so far can be improved by putting forward the amendments I have suggested, adding Tyburn to Erdington instead of Stockland Green which has much more in common and would create a much better community boundary.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. We have had some similar outlines today. Any questions on this one? (No response) Thank you very much indeed. I just want to double check, is Joseph Walsh here, or Ken Hawkins? In that case our next speaker is due in 20 minutes time, just under, so we are going to take a short adjournment of about 15 minutes, back here at 6.10. Thank you very much indeed.

After a short break

Timed noted: 6.10 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you again for your patience. We have a couple of people who are either late or are not showing, but we do have a couple of speakers also in the room. I would like to re-remind everybody that we are being filmed and that everybody who comes to the podium is required to give their name and their address. Our first speaker now will be Timothy Huxtable.

CLLR HUXTABLE: (Bournville Ward) Good evening. Cllr Timothy Huxtable, 76 Tixall Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0RR. I come here to speak as the ward councillor for Bournville ward on Birmingham City Council, where I have been the ward councillor for 14 years. Just to say how close the links are between my ward of Bournville and both Northfield ward and Kings Norton ward. The evidence I am going to give hopefully will demonstrate this.

A large part of my ward of Bournville did not exist as a ward until 1982 and most of Bournville before that, especially the local centres of Stirchley and Cotteridge, were actually in the old Kings Norton ward. Indeed, a large part of my current ward still regard themselves as either Kings Norton or Northfield. If you look there you can just see Kings Norton railway station along the Cross-City south line. You can just see Kings Norton railway station is where the red pointer is along the Cross-City south line, so that is Kings Norton station. As you can see half of it, the intercity side, is in Bournville ward and towards Longbridge side out of city is in Kings Norton ward. Again, that is another good reason why Kings Norton and Bournville should be linked together and indeed were linked together in the previous parliamentary constituency of Birmingham Selly Oak up until 2010.

Just a variation on a theme, if I use the pointer all this part of Bournville ward consider themselves to be Kings Norton. (Indicating) My daughters go to school just there at St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School, which is badged as Kings Norton but very much in the middle of what is known as Bournville ward. When I ask residents where they come from in my ward a lot of them in this section say Kings Norton. They really do consider themselves to be part of Kings Norton, which is not surprising given all the historic links.

Again, all the people in my ward along this side, along the western side, consider themselves to be Northfield and indeed they have a B31 postcode, which is postally Northfield. A lot of Bournville is people who really consider themselves, not in local government terms but in a community neighbourhood sense, to be either Kings Norton or Northfield even though they are within Bournville ward.

That is what I want to give evidence on. Of course, I have worked very closely over the last 14 years on a lot of cross-ward issues with my colleagues from Kings Norton ward and on a cross-party basis obviously and on a cross-party basis with colleagues from Northfield ward. The links are very close.

If you ask me the same question about Moseley and Kings Heath ward, which is proposed to be in the new Kings Norton, I have very little to do and have had very little to do with councillors from that ward. They are essentially seen as two very different elements. Highbury Park acts as a real barrier between the two, so much more looking south and looking west in terms of joint work in natural neighbourhoods, natural communities. One of the key projects I worked on very early on was Victoria Common, which is just there, because between 2002 and 2004 when Bournville ward just looped round Victoria Common the ward boundary changes and then the subsequent parliamentary changes changed that. All this section of the current Northfield ward used to be the Bournville ward between 1982 and 2004.

I hope that demonstrates a lot of cross-party cross-ward working with those links in terms of neighbourhoods and communities. Could you bring up the proposed Birmingham Brandwood, please? Thank you. When I gave my address I currently live in Hall Green, I currently live just by the Shakespeare line, just there, and just wanted to emphasise the close links between Hall Green and Billesley ward because I stood in Hall Green ward as the Conservative candidate in 1999 and 2000, worked again very closely with colleagues from Billesley ward. Hall Green and Billesley have always been very closely allied to each other and they only found themselves in different constituencies from 2010 onwards. Again, I grew up here, I went to school in Billesley. Just there is Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Primary School, go to church there. The local library we use is Yardley Wood library which is just there. (Indicating) Indeed, if you look at the map you can see that railway station is Yardley Wood railway station used by everyone from that side of Billesley, that side of Hall Green ward. Again, some

very close natural links between Hall Green and Billesley, very easy to get across, as I say has always been in the same constituency as long as anyone can remember right up until 2010. I remember arguing in this Chamber in front of a very similar Boundary Commission hearing why Hall Green and Billesley and indeed Brandwood should be linked together in some format and kept as a unit last time. I am nothing but consistent in terms of saying again that Hall Green and Billesley have very, very close links together and should be within the same parliamentary constituency.

I think that is my allotted time. Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Before you go, just a couple of things. What you are saying is that although Hall Green and Billesley at the moment are in two separate constituencies you think they should be brought back into one?

CLLR HUXTABLE: Correct.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are you making a similar point about the other two, about Kings Norton?

CLLR HUXTABLE: That Kings Norton, Bournville and Northfield wards should all be in the same parliamentary constituency from a natural neighbourhood and community basis. The same argument applies for both my propositions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any questions from the floor on these? (No response) Thank you very much for your time, very useful. Is Joseph Welch here? No. Is Ken Hawkins? No. Malcolm Glass? No. I know Eddie Hughes is here. Are you happy to speak now? I know it is a little bit earlier than your slot and we are still expecting one or two others who we hope will turn up. Thank you. A reminder again we are being filmed, if you could tell us who you are and your address. Thank you.

CLLR HUGHES: (Streetly Ward) Eddie Hughes, councillor for Streetly ward in Aldridge-Brownhills constituency, but I am also the Chair of the Board of Walsall Housing Group, which is a 20,000 house housing association that covers largely Walsall. I am also employed as a Director of YMCA Birmingham Charity for the Homeless that covers Birmingham and Solihull, speaking with regard to those three points.

First of all, predominantly I am here because you have got it right, because with the previous proposal when we had the idea of Streetly being taken out of the Aldridge-Brownhills constituency we had meetings with local residents who were up in arms and could not accept that possibly predominantly because the previous MP, Richard Shepherd, had been there for a good time and had done a great job of making Aldridge-Brownhills constituency feel like an entity, feel like something people could associate

with. So many people do not understand ward boundaries, constituency boundaries, borough boundaries, but over time people in Streetly understood that they belonged to Aldridge-Brownhills and I think that is what will happen now with the Bloxwich wards. I think there is a natural affiliation with that part of the constituency and people in those wards will not consider that to be an unusual change in terms of the social housing element and my understanding of how communities move within that area. It will not be alien to them to now be bound to the Aldridge-Brownhills and Bloxwich constituency although I perhaps wish you had come up with a catchier title for it.

Talking of catchier titles, although I am a Walsall person now I am a Brummie by birth and just wanted to make a very brief pitch on behalf of Sutton Coldfield and say surely talking of catchy constituency titles, the “royal” constituency of Sutton Coldfield would be no bad thing for you to grant, which is an easy stroke of the pen for you. I do not think you even need to talk about it, you could probably agree it right now.

Just finally I wanted to say because the organisation I work for has a big base in Erdington so I am frequently crossing the area of Erdington and Tyburn and if you asked people to delineate between these areas they would not know where one area starts and another stops, so in terms of bounding those two areas together I think that is something you should consider in your proposals as well.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I am not the Queen, so I am not sure I can confer royal titles, but certainly we are looking at it and it has been raised before. Any questions about what we have just heard? (No response) It is interesting to hear what you have said about your constituency and thank you for the support that you have given to the plans on the table. I am sure the people who have drawn them up will be pleased to hear that. We are always keen to hear what the local people think about it. If you are happy speak, Bill McComish, we would love you to speak now if you are able to. You have just arrived, just to let you know you are being filmed and we need to know your name and your address, please.

MR McCOMISH: (Dudley Green Party) My name is Bill McComish. My address is 18 Ben Nevis Way, as in the mountain, in Stourbridge, DY8 4 UF. I am here representing the Dudley Green Party. I just want to mention a couple of the proposed effects on the borough of Dudley.

The town of Halesowen, which is in the Black Country obviously and has long been in the historic county of Worcestershire, and probably even longer than that has regarded itself as distinct from the city of Birmingham, is now proposed to be in a joint constituency with the Selly Oak ward of Birmingham City Council. To my mind, that is rather like asking Carlisle and Gretna Green to be in the same constituency or possibly the two warring halves of my home town, Belfast, or possibly Hinckley and Nuneaton. All these places cross boundaries of one sort or another. There is a similar, possibly

more distinct, boundary between Halesowen and Birmingham, and I think that should be respected.

Secondly, I work regularly in the ancient city of Wolverhampton, a place that has long been at the forefront of British industry and commerce, and other economic activity and which obviously at the moment is trying to market itself globally. The city of Wolverhampton obviously does not have quite enough quotas to have a full three constituencies as at present. In fact, at present part of the borough of Dudley is included in one of the Wolverhampton constituencies. The plan with us at the moment is that Wolverhampton will still be included in a number of different constituencies but only two of them will have the name "Wolverhampton" included therein. The centre of the city, which is in many ways its focus, will be in a constituency named after two smaller towns that, with the best will in the world, most people outside the Black Country have never heard of, and that will not to my mind be an advantage to the city of Wolverhampton in trying to market itself and boost its economy elsewhere.

I would just like to say one further thing. I mentioned, and it is obviously fairly clear that I am originally from Belfast. The electoral system there in some ways differs from that in England, Scotland and Wales. Belfast North, where I come from, has the highest incidence of child poverty in the United Kingdom at the moment but I can guarantee to anybody that the number of electoral errors, people who fill in the forms wrongly there, will be less than almost anywhere in England when it comes to the next election. All that shows it that people will accept electoral change, they will accept electoral reform, proportional representation. All you need to do is explain it to them and give it a little while to bed in and then it works perfectly. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, very clear on the points that you are making and we will consider them all of course. Any comments from anybody in the room? (No response) Otherwise thank you very much indeed.

MR McCOMISH: Everybody agrees with me!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We said we would listen. Thank you very much indeed, very useful. We have got other speakers arriving but I think we will take a five minute adjournment while we make sure people are happy to speak a little bit earlier than their slot, so literally five minutes. We will start again at 7 o'clock. Thank you.

After a short break

Time noted 7.00 pm



THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen. We will call our next speaker, Mrs Shabana Mahmood, who is the MP for Birmingham Ladywood.

MS MAHMOOD: (MP for Birmingham Ladywood) Thank you very much. If I could just correct the record, I am “Ms” not “Mrs”, just for the sake of clarity. As you said, I am the Member of Parliament for Birmingham Ladywood. I have been the Member since 2010 when I was first elected.

Just to say a brief word about the proposals overall before dealing with the specifics. I personally think that this is the wrong process. I am very disappointed by the Government’s decision to bring us down from 650 to 600 MPs and the room for manoeuvre given to the Boundary Commission I think should have at least reflected what was the previous position where you could go plus or minus ten per cent and possibly further with more discretion to give some more strength to local ties. I think it is a real mistake that your current rules that you are having to work to are plus or minus five per cent. Given the constraints that you are working within, and I will of course vote against the whole proposal on 18 November when it comes up for debate in the House of Commons, accepting that is the legal position, that is the room for manoeuvre that the Boundary Commission have, I think actually the scheme that the Boundary Commission have come up with for Birmingham as a whole is effectively making the best of a bad job. I think that given the very tight room for manoeuvre, particularly on plus or minus five per cent from the main number of electors I think that this scheme is the best that could be hoped for.

I particularly am pleased that we do not see the splitting of wards. I feel very strongly that the Boundary Commission should stick with its decision not to split wards in the city. Certainly I have seen other proposals that envisage the splitting of all of the wards in my own constituency, for example. I think that would be to the detriment not just of the overall scheme for the city but actually for the capacity of my constituents to be able to play their full part in the democratic process. It will cause confusion and chaos and an administrative burden of communicating all of those changes, and we already know that in the most deprived areas of the city that is where our turnout is at its lowest and if we were to split wards then in a constituency such as mine I would expect turnout to take a big hit and I think that would be an unconscionable impact of changes that involve the splitting of wards. If I do not want it in my own patch I also do not want to see splitting of wards in other parts of the city either. I think the Boundary Commission should absolutely hold firm to the proposal of non split wards. That, of course, limits room for manoeuvre if you use our current wards as the building blocks of the new constituencies. Whilst it is a wrench for me to envisage change to my own constituency, and losing Aston, in particular it does make sense in terms of what the Boundaries Commissions are proposing with Ladywood for the joining up of Soho ward from Birmingham and then Soho and Victoria from over the boundary into Smethwick. There are lots of family ties. There are many places of worship right on the boundary

which are in Soho and Victoria which are where my own constituents go for worship, whether that is the Sikh community or the Muslim community. It makes sense that if you are going to see some change that those two areas can be brought together.

The other change in my own constituency, so the bringing together of Nechells and Tyburn, I accept that that is probably just a numbers based decision, again working within the constraints that the Boundary Commission have to work with. There are family ties and there is a pattern of migration out of the inner city into outer Birmingham which I think does connect Nechells and Tyburn, but clearly Tyburn could also find itself in any one of the constituencies that surround it and not just Ladywood. I think that if you are not going to split wards, given the numerical constraints that you are under, that is the best possible configuration for my own constituency.

The thing that I would add that I think could be a positive for the city, which is not necessarily something that falls foursquare within what the Boundary Commission is tasked to do, is the linking across all of the constituencies a better linkage between inner Birmingham and outer Birmingham. I think there is quite a strong community cohesion point to be made there. As somebody who currently represents four inner city wards I am very conscious that in the city sometimes it can feel like that is a big divide between the inner city and outer Birmingham and actually the chance to have Members of Parliament who can speak to the wider city and bring inner and outer Birmingham into more of a whole is actually a strong opportunity for cohesion in the city. I think there are some proposals which are based on an argument that suggests that people do not move out of their own areas. I think there is a worry that that slightly ghettoises communities, particularly in the inner city, and I do not think that that should be a bar to bringing inner Birmingham and outer Birmingham together. Whilst it is a bit of a funny shape, and it is not a change that I was dreaming of for my own constituency, there is a logic here, it works in terms of the numbers and I think that actually it could be a force of good in terms of uniting inner and outer Birmingham, which is certainly something that I would welcome.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. May I ask you a question? Tyburn ward, you do not feel strongly about the fact that it has come into Birmingham Ladywood at this stage?

MS MAHMOOD: I welcome it being here so there are links between Nechells and Tyburn. There is a pattern of migration in my constituency, which is home to many immigrant communities, where people are moving into outer Birmingham, so it is not unusual for people on the east side of my constituency to be moving into different parts of Erdington. That is a migration pattern of second and third generation BME communities in particular, so it would make sense. I suppose what I am saying is the case over on the other side of my constituency, the links between Soho and Soho and Victoria, are possibly more developed than the links between North Nechells and Tyburn, but there is a logic there still in terms of linking those two parts of the city

together to reflect emerging migration patterns of settled communities moving into outer Birmingham and then newly arrived communities making their home in inner Birmingham. I would say that that is a link which will probably get stronger over time, but at the moment it is probably not as strong as Soho and Soho and Victoria being together.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any questions? Yes, there is question here. This is for points of clarification only.

MR PRATT: Through you, Madam Chairman, I wonder if you could clarify the links between the Aston ward, the Ladywood ward and the Nechells ward, all of which obviously you currently represent?

MS MAHMOOD: At the moment, under these proposals I lose Aston to the new Perry Barr constituency. There are very strong links between all of the four current constituent wards of my constituency and I have done a lot of work in Aston building community links with the rest of the constituency, so I am not happy to be losing part of my constituency. I accept the constraints within which the Boundary Commission have to operate, that is the legislative framework, and once you accept that legislative framework and accept the fact that you are not going to split wards that does limit the room for manoeuvre. I understand that there have been proposals put forward today that would actually keep the whole of my constituency and just add Soho and Victoria, but my understanding is that in order to make that scheme work within the legislative framework it involves splitting of wards in the south of the city.

I am not going to say that my constituency should not have any split wards and then accept that they should happen in other parts of the city. I am Ladywood first and foremost but I am a Brummie as well and I do believe that splitting wards is going to create chaos when it comes to elections. It will hit turnout, it takes a long time to communicate those sorts of changes to the electorate and I think it should be avoided wherever possible. In my dream scenario, the whole of my constituency, like Hodge Hill, stays exactly the same as it is and all of the ties that I have helped to build up remain strong, but accepting the framework I think that the changes that the Boundary Commission are proposing are the best that can be. It will be a wrench to lose Aston. I am not happy about it, but I accept that it might be unavoidable and I definitely do not want to see any split wards in the city. I do not think that is in the best interests of anybody in this city, least of all in my own constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any further questions? We have one here.

MR ROSS: Colin Ross, I am actually one of your constituents randomly. I was going to ask about Aston but you have dealt with that point. I just wonder if you could explain

how splitting wards will reduce turnout because I do not really understand the logic behind that?

MS MAHMOOD: That is based on my own experience of six years of trying to increase the turnout in my constituency which has one of the lowest turnouts in the country. There are people that I still find having to explain to that the old boundaries that Clare Short fought the election on back in 2005 do not exist, particularly in areas where I have my largest BME populations that is still a hurdle I have to get over. I find myself always having to leaflet particular areas in my current constituency reminding people where their polling station is, reminding people in the old bit of Aston that used to be in Perry Barr that they are not in Perry Barr anymore and that they are in Aston and that brings them within Ladywood. When I campaign that is still actually a core part of my campaigning, unfortunately, that I continually have to remind people that the old boundaries do not exist. That teaches me that there is still a lot of confusion about boundaries. It is very hard with a very deprived community, and we have the highest rate of unemployment in the whole country, all of the evidence suggests that in areas of high deprivation, large BME populations, these kinds of administrative changes to boundaries take a long time to communicate. I found myself after six years as an MP still communicating that the old boundaries have changed and the current boundaries are the same, so I do feel very strongly that if you get into split wards and then you have family groups who go to vote together and half of them are going to one polling and the other half are going elsewhere that is going to be something that is difficult to communicate.

The other thing that I would also point out is I have seen a huge change in my electoral register, so the move over to individual voter registration. When I campaign now in Nechells, as it currently is, there are lots of households that do not appear on my sheets to knock on because there is nobody registered anymore. All of these changes have a knock-on effect when it comes to the levels of registration and the levels of turnout and I do not want to see changes that I know already will build in another systemic problem that will hit turnout in my patch, that will hit turnout in terms of BME communities and the poorest communities in our city.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR RILEY: My name is Ian Riley. I am from the Labour Party and my address is 98 Kidderminster Road, Bromsgrove. Shabana, many people today argue that the Tyburn ward has very strong links to the Erdington constituency and you said that you felt that Tyburn ward would be attached to constituencies literally all around it, and that is the case for many Birmingham wards of course. Could you have a look at Stockland Green ward? You will be familiar with Erdington and Stockland Green. If there was a choice between Stockland Green and Tyburn ward being in the Erdington constituency, which do you think would have the strongest claim?

MS MAHMOOD: As a non-Erdington person, but just as a Brummie, for me it is kind of ridiculous to separate Stockland Green and Erdington. Just as a born and bred Brummie those two things go together in my mind; that is Erdington. Erdington and Stockland Green is the heart of Erdington. I am sure if Jack was here today he would probably say the same thing. To put Tyburn in with Erdington but remove Stockland Green I think is kind of fatal to the identity of Erdington. It would make more sense, I think, to keep Erdington and Stockland Green together and I am sure people in Stockland Green feel very much like they are Erdington people. I have family who are moving out to Erdington and they very much consider that to be a whole area; that is what Erdington to them represents. I do not think myself, from my own perspective, that you can take Erdington and Tyburn and say that is part of a new constituency but somehow say Stockland Green has no call upon that new constituency. I would say those two wards need to stay together.

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

LORD HAYWARD: Lord Hayward. Just a quick question. The Birmingham City Council is to be divided into 69 wards as against the current 40 with effect from 2018, in other words even before the new boundaries, whatever they may be, would come in for parliamentary seats. How many of those 69 wards will actually be within what is your current constituency? Forget the proposed ones, the wards that make up your current constituency. How many of those will actually cover parts of your existing constituency?

MS MAHMOOD: I do not have that to hand off the top of my head, but I am very happy to provide that in written evidence to the Commission. If I may say about the other boundary changes that are coming into the city, my political view has been since they were proposed it is just going to be a disaster for the city. I fully expect the Secretary of State to be having to look again at the whole issue of the re-warding of the city. I think there is the capacity for chaos across the inner city for greater sectarian politics and all sorts of community issues to be causing chaos in this city. I do not support those proposals. I will keep on making submissions in the strongest way I can to the Secretary of State that the changes that have come about as a result of the Kerslake proposal are the wrong answer to the wrong question for what this city needs for the city to come out of its current administrative difficulties. I think that those changes are going to cause a huge amount of problems. That is not a matter for this Commission and it is not something that this Commission should take into account. In any case, I am going to try my level best until they happen to stop from happening.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? (No response) Thank you very much indeed. Is there anybody who is in here who is expecting to speak or would like to speak? (No response) In that case, again we have a gap until our next speaker of about 20 minutes. What I suggest we do is adjourn for about 15 minutes.

After a short break

Time noted: 7.35pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we are ready to reconvene if that is all right with everyone. Is everyone here, no-one expecting anyone else? The next speaker we have on the list of Cllr Seb Gran, is that correct? Would you like to come and speak. A reminder to those speaking in this last session you are being filmed and we need your name and your address.

CLLR GRAN: (Slough Ward) Hello, everyone. My name is Seb Gran. I am a borough councillor on Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council for Slough ward in the town of Bedworth. I will be speaking on the North Warwickshire boundary proposals and the Nuneaton boundary proposals.

Can we get North Warwickshire up on the screen, please? As you can see, what the Boundary Commission is proposing is all of the North Warwickshire Borough area and the town of Bedworth from Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council. That is a natural progression from the 2010 to 2015 boundaries that I would support since it adds in Arley and Whitacre from Hartshill, which was previously in the Nuneaton constituency. Both of those areas are part of North Warwickshire Borough and have strong community ties to Aveston and Baddesley, Fillongley and surrounding areas and the people of that area are used to being in the North Warwickshire constituency as from 1983 to 2010. Arley and Whitacre and Hartshill were both in the North Warwickshire parliamentary constituency and it came as a surprise to a lot of residents when those two wards were moved into Nuneaton, which it has less ties with.

With regards to Nuneaton, which we can get up on the screen, what would happen with Nuneaton is Bulkington, which is a Nuneaton and Bedworth ward, which used to be in Rugby constituency is added back into Nuneaton, which it has strong community ties with. It has been in the Nuneaton constituency again from 1983 to 2010 and it also has Wolvey, Shilton and the other two rural wards from Rugby District Council which have a lot stronger links to the town of Nuneaton and are geographically economically closer to Rugby than Rugby itself, which it shares a council with. By having these areas we have a Nuneaton constituency which I believe makes a lot of sense. A lot of these people from Rugby used to be in the Nuneaton constituency as well and will be quite used to being served by an MP for Nuneaton.

In summary, what the Boundary Commission has proposed for the Nuneaton constituencies and the North Warwickshire constituency makes a lot of sense and I would completely support that. Residents have even said they would support that. I have also had comments that the North Warwickshire constituency should be renamed to North Warwickshire and Bedworth to take into account that the town of Bedworth has

its own unique sort of identity to the North Warwickshire Borough and also to say that this is the North Warwickshire Borough as a constituency with the town of Bedworth included and it would put the town on the map in that regard to differentiate it from the rest of North Warwickshire Borough. That is all I really have to say on those two.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. That is really useful. Just to point out, it is always useful to hear when people like what they see so that we can get everything in proportion. We really appreciate you speaking. Are there any questions?

MR PRATT: Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. I wonder if you could clarify the ties of the wards in Bedworth. I think there are five wards in Bedworth. I wonder if you could point out the ties with those five wards?

CLLR GRAN: The five wards of Bedworth make up the old Bedworth Urban District Council area which joined with Nuneaton in 1974. You have in Exhall ward the areas of Keresley End and Ash Green which connected to the Bedworth Heath area and are part of the county division of Bedworth West. Bedworth West, like all the other Bedworth county divisions, know themselves to be Bedworth. A lot of people from Ash Green, Keresley and Exhall refer to the area they live in as Bedworth rather than Coventry. They know that they pay their rates to Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and, along with Poplar and Exhall, the Exhall area is connected to the Bedworth area geographically. It is very difficult for people who have not lived in the area for a very long time to distinguish what is Exhall, what is Bedworth, so most people in Exhall refer to where they live as Bedworth and the Exhall area is divided between Exhall and Poplar, which again is part of the Bedworth area. All of these areas, be it Exhall Heath, Poplar, Slough, identify themselves as Bedworth and have a particular community spirit that unites all five wards which have a separate identity to the wards in Nuneaton and Bulkington, which are more closely tied than they are to Bedworth.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any further questions? One here.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley from the Labour Party. Seb, you said that Bedworth has a unique identity to North Warwickshire. Could you tell us why it has a unique identity as opposed to North Warwickshire, please?

CLLR GRAN: Bedworth and Nuneaton are two very different towns. They used to be two different council areas until they were merged and the perception among residents is that was for economic reasons rather than community ties. A lot of people who live in Bedworth have relatives and family in areas like Coleshill, Atherstone. There are a lot of people who go to Atherstone for their shopping who prefer it to the sort of atmosphere that you get in Nuneaton town centre. This whole area has been united for a very long time, as I said since 1983. A lot of people in Bedworth are used to calling

themselves part of the North Warwickshire area and vice versa for people in the north Warwickshire sort of council area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Our next speaker is Barnett Plant.

MR PLANT: I am just an ordinary bloke.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We love you being an ordinary bloke. We need to know your name and your address and are very keen.

MR PLANT: Barnett Plant, 4 Newfields Lane. Halesowen. I am not going to talk too much detail, but basically I am from the constituency of Halesowen and Rowley Regis. I just want to say to people that it does mean a lot to people, breaking up the actual constituency. Cradley is going to Stourbridge and Cradley is in the Black Country, Stourbridge is in the Black Country. You have got the back end, which is Rowley Regis, which comprises of Old Hill, Cradley Heath, Black Heath, which will go to Oldbury, which is still in the Black Country. Then you have Halesowen, which is in the Black Country. It might not mean anything to anybody but it is going to Selly Oak.

To be honest, you have to have a link between these towns and I think this is --- I am not saying it is a bridge too far, and I have nothing against Brummies, but I think people want me to say how I feel about the way a local community is. You cannot beat the Black Country. We can all talk about shires and things like that, but there is a special bond between the Black Country than anywhere else. You only have to hear me speak and you probably know where I have come from. The main thing is I just want you to go back to the Boundary Commission, down to the south - I am not knocking the south - back to London. It is not just about lines, it is not just about lines. Draw a line and Bob's your uncle and that is it – it is more than that. People might say, "It's just a line, it's just a line". It is not just a line. We will become part of Birmingham. To a lot of Black Country folk it just does not work. It does not work. I am coming across as a heartfelt person. I am not a councillor. To be honest ,I do not vote at all but I am a local person and I just want to put a plea to the Boundary Commission, have a think, go back, look at the sort of the history of the Black Country and make a decision because we are proud to be separate, independent, be part of Rowley, you have a connection.

Selly Oak, again, the only connection we have that I can think of is the Lapal Tunnel. That is the only connection I can think of. To be honest, that is it really. It is a heartfelt plea.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Before you go I have a question. You clearly feel that your communities around Halesowen and not linked to Selly Oak across there, and I can see exactly why you have explained that



very clearly. Looking at that map there which are the areas that you that you feel closer to as a community?

MR PLANT: Belle Vale, Halesowen North, Halesowen South. You cross the motorway in Birmingham. It is clear-cut. The Black Country is very defined. Many people round here probably know summat, they know maps. Just Google it, Google the Black Country and you will get a defined area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You feel they are a separate identity as well?

MR PLANT: Oh yes, there is a very, very definite identity. They always say Albion Wolves, it is not, it is the Albion Villa. That is a light-hearted comment. Basically, Selly Oak - no, there is absolutely no chance. Weoley Castle - no. If I want a compromise, part of Bartley Green. You have the motorway running through. Yes, if I want to compromise. It is still Birmingham but if I have to. I would rather sort of go into the true Black Country. There has to be a way of sort of looking at the population. I know people move, but there has to be a way to keep that identity, that link. I was expecting Mr Morris to be here but he was not here. Was he? I am sorry. I did have a word with him a bit ago. I just want to get as much out as I can. I only have ten minutes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think you have made your point very strongly. Thank you very much indeed. Do we have any questions of clarification? (No response) I think you have been very, very clear and we really appreciate your input.

MR PLANT: Do you mind if I get off straightaway?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, you are very welcome. I think that is it. Do we have any more speakers expecting to talk this evening? (No response) In which case thank you so much for sticking it out to the very end and hopefully see you tomorrow when we will reconvene at 9.00 am.

At 7.50 pm the hearing adjourned until 9.00 am on Friday 4 November 2016

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