

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

**CHAPEL, UNITED REFORM CHURCH HALL,
20 WIDMORE ROAD, BROMLEY BR1 1RY**

ON

**FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER 2016
DAY TWO**

Before:

Mr Howard Simmons, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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Time Noted: 9.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome to the second day of the hearing in Bromley. I am Howard Simmons and I chair the meeting. My colleague will say a few words.

MR TESSIER: My name is Gerald Tessier. I am the leader of the Boundary Commission team here supporting Howard, the Assistant Commissioner. For those who were not here yesterday, I have a few words of housekeeping. If you hear that alarm again, it means there is a fire and you should converge outside Boots. If you need toilets, they are just down in that corridor (indicating). I also remind you that the proceedings are being recorded and will be published later on in the process. There are copies of our data protection policy pinned on the board and available outside for those who are interested.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I believe we have our first speaker, Mr Rennie. Would you like to come forward? Speak from the podium. If you could by way of introduction say your name and address before you tell us what you want to say, that would be helpful.

DR RENNIE: My name is Dr Joseph Rennie. I am resident at 32 Stanger Road, SE25 5JZ.

I live currently in Woodside ward in what is the Croydon Central constituency. For several reasons, I believe that Woodside is more appropriate in Croydon Central than Croydon North. The first point I raise is that there is a natural demarcation or delineation as a consequence of the presence of a railway line crossing the ward boundaries of South Norwood and Woodside. For community reasons, I also feel that Woodside is centred more towards the centre of Croydon, and it also is geographically.

In particular, there are a number of community projects with neighbouring wards in Addiscombe and Woodside related to regeneration of the South Norwood country park. There is investment in ecological matters, particularly the introduction of a wetland ecological centre and investment in a scrape[?] to develop organisms that would live in the South Norwood country park and allow for birds and various other wildlife to come here that do not go there currently.

In addition, there are projects ongoing in Ashburton Park to which residents from Woodside continue to contribute. If you consider the span into Addiscombe and Ashburton, you can see why that is the case. There is real interest in development of a community centre in the former Ashburton library. Given the span of the Woodside ward, it is very common, perhaps more common, to use the shopping precinct on the Lower Addiscombe Road, so there are various other practical reasons why that is more appropriate.

I am happy to deal with any observations or comments anyone would like to make based on that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. To clarify it, your contention is that the ward's current links should be retained and not have to change?

DR RENNIE: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Have you looked at all of the implications, if that ward is retained, for Purley constituency?

DR RENNIE: I have to some extent. If Woodside goes into Croydon North, it would retain the political status quo of Croydon North constituency, but, for the reasons I have indicated in terms of delineation or demarcation as a consequence of the railway line I believe they are to some extent separate areas. Also, given the span of the Woodside ward towards Woodside Green abutting Lower Addiscombe Road at the back, if you walk from Blackhorse Lane it makes sense.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any other questions or matters to raise? Thank you very much for your evidence.

Dr Spencer, would you like to come forward and make representations? By way of introduction, please give your full name and address.

DR SPENCER: My name is Dr Benjamin Spencer. My address is 21 Chancery Lane, BR3 6NR. I am a resident of the Beckenham parliamentary constituency. I would like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to give evidence this morning. I would like to stress to the Boundary Commission that I am here today to present evidence purely in a personal capacity, but before I begin I would like to make a couple of declarations. I hold a position within the Conservative Party. I am an officer of the Beckenham Conservative Association. I am their deputy political chair. I am also public governor for Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust which covers the borough of Bromley.

I have a strong personal connection with and investment in Beckenham. I have lived in the Beckenham constituency for over a year, moving here shortly after getting married. My wife is expecting, and we are starting a family here. I have worked in the Bethlem Hospital as a psychiatric doctor, which is on the edge of Kelsey Park. I still do shifts covering the hospital as a psychiatric doctor on call.

In addition, I have worked in several other hospitals in the London Borough of Bromley in the past few years, working as an on-call psychiatrist. I previously worked for Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. In my role as their public governor for Bromley, I have met quite a few constituents.

I have also met many constituents across the Beckenham constituency and know the area and geography very well, including its local communities through my work campaigning in the area.

I am very pleased with the proposals that have been put forward by the Boundary Commission for Beckenham in the document entitled "Initial proposals for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries in London". I sincerely hope that these proposals for Beckenham are retained unchanged, are the final proposals and are approved by Parliament.

In my view, the changes put forward within these proposals make a lot of sense. The proposals seem to me to prioritise the natural communities and sense of community identity within the constituency. I would like to give you a couple of examples of this. The return of Clock House and Penge and Cator wards, both of which are within the Bromley local authority boundaries and left the constituency only in 2010, despite having been in that constituency for at least 40 years, makes a lot of sense.

Although I will be sad that Bromley Common, Keston and Hayes and Coney Hall will move back to the Bromley and Chislehurst constituency, as with Clock House and Penge and Cator, these came to Beckenham only following the 2010 changes. Notwithstanding that in the past six years they have been in this constituency, I understand that residents still feel quite strong connections with Bromley and Chislehurst. But, more than that, when you look at the Beckenham constituency as a whole and its geographical natural barriers, it does make sense for those two wards to move back into the Bromley and Chislehurst constituency.

Finally, moving on to the shape of Shirley ward with Kelsey and Eden Park and its historical links to West Wickham, that also make a welcome and sensible addition to the Beckenham constituency. The current proposals for Beckenham, which make the constituency more compact, rather than a drawn-out oval shape, are logical and facilitate and enhance the community feel. I believe that the Beckenham constituency would be far richer for it going forward. In summary, I fully support the Boundary Commission's proposals for Beckenham.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification from the floor? Thank you very much for your submission. Is Mr Stewart prepared to come forward? Perhaps you would make an introduction by way of name and address.

MR STEWART: (MP for Beckenham) My name is Bob Stewart. I have been the Member of Parliament for Beckenham since 2010. I live in Shortlands. My children go to school in the constituency. I am not that old that I cannot have children. While on the subject, I am not sure I can now, but there we are.

I think the Boundary Commission have done their job well. They were given the job of revising constituencies south of the river and have done exactly that; they have tried to match the figures with the criteria required under direction.

Personally, I am very happy with the changes. I do not particularly want to start gerrymandering. The Boundary Commission have been given a job and criteria and have done that job. After all, it was really my government that gave the direction to the Boundary Commission.

Looking at the wards in more detail, I follow Ben Spencer who I thought made an excellent presentation of the wards, I presently have six wards in the Bromley borough. I am going to lose Bromley Common, Keston and Hayes and Coney Hall. I will be sad to lose those wards. For political reasons, they are strong Conservative wards, but I understand the logic. I am going to be taking on Clock House. That makes sense because many people who live in Clock House tell me they do not understand why they are not in my constituency. That is repeated to me frequently.

With regard to Penge and Cator, that ward is less connected to Beckenham. A lot of people look north rather than south, but it is none the less within Bromley borough. Again, that makes sense. Historically, before my time it was part of the Beckenham constituency.

Shirley does cross the boundary into Croydon, but, if you look at the way it is, as Ben Spencer has said, in community terms it is very much part of West Wickham, and it makes sense for it to be connected to West Wickham for those reasons alone. Many of the people from Shirley spend a lot of time in West Wickham; they shop there and so I can understand that logic.

In short, I have six wards at the moment. I lose two of them and pick up three. That brings my numbers just about into the middle of the direction given to the Boundary Commission on which they have had to work. I do not want to waste the Commission's or public's time any more beyond saying that the Conservative Party fully supports the Boundary Commission proposals south of the river. I fully support what the Boundary Commission are doing to my constituency, and I very much hope that after 2020 I stay as the Member of Parliament for Beckenham.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification?

DR RENNIE: I am Dr Joseph Rennie from Woodside ward in Croydon Central. Presently, I understand that Shirley is in the Croydon Central constituency, and I believe the ward boundary would remain in the Croydon borough, but would there not be some confusion with the new proposal if it ends up being lumped in? Most of the proposed Beckenham constituency is in Bromley, and then you would have Shirley, which is still in the Croydon borough. I wonder whether there would be some issues with that.

MR STEWART: There might be, except that if it crosses boundaries it is easier for me to deal with one borough council. That is true, but that happens right the way across London. Given the Boundary Commission's remit, they have to cross boundaries and that is what is happening.

One of our early proposals, which did not reach you and has not been made public, was to split wards. That is unacceptable. I know that the Boundary Commission would have refused to do that sort of thing. It is a no-no. I would honestly prefer Shirley to be in Beckenham or Bromley borough. It is perfectly workable. Indeed, I rather like it because, frankly, I have Bethlem Hospital in my patch and would rather have the area around also in my patch, because it causes quite a lot of political problems for me. If somebody goes the wrong way they are not going on to my patch. I prefer to have Bethlem in my patch so I can take the flak all round. That is my answer to it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: There are a number of cross-borough constituencies, and the issue raised at a number of the public hearings is that it may cause concern, and that there are additional burdens on the Members of Parliament representing several boroughs. Therefore, it is a fair point to make, but I think you also had a fair response.

Mr Gardner, you know the format. Perhaps you would introduce yourself by name and address.

CLLR GARDNER: My name is Cllr David Gardner. I am a councillor for Woolwich Common ward in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, and cabinet member for health and social care. I live in Charlton Village, Charlton ward, and was previously a councillor for Kidbrooke with Hornfair ward and for many years chair of the Charlton Society, a local amenity society.

I am speaking broadly in support of the initial proposals in relation to the borough of Greenwich, seeking some small changes in Bexley to reduce the breakages to local ties.

The Commission have been given a very rigid statutory framework in which to work. This has necessarily severely constrained their ability to best to reflect strong community ties and, as we have just heard, borough boundaries.

I have always supported, wherever possible, uniting communities with a clear identity in a single constituency and as much of that community with a single voice in Parliament. This improves the quality of representation and the effectiveness of the local voice and people's sense of identity and is fundamental to our local democracy.

To commence with Woolwich Common ward, which I am proud to represent, the ward and common are at the heart of Greenwich borough, including the main hospital, Queen Elizabeth, the Royal Artillery barracks and 900 service personnel and the associated army estate and main civic centre, the Woolwich Centre, all of which very much serve the whole borough. About 40% of our residents would regard themselves as living in Woolwich and the remainder would say they lived in Plumstead. Indeed, 34% of my current ward was, until 2010, in the Eltham constituency where it had been for many years, including the Plumstead Common

area, the Farmfield estate and the area around Evington Road, or polling districts WC4, 5 and 6. There is a strong affinity between the south of my ward and the neighbouring Shooters Hill ward, with many roads divided—I could list them—all regarding themselves as part of Plumstead. Around the hospital there are close links with Kidbrooke with Hornfair ward, which is also in the Eltham constituency and includes part of Woolwich SE18.

Plumcroft school, Eglinton school and Notre Dame Roman Catholic school all take students from across Shooters Hill and Woolwich Common wards. While it is clearly inconvenient to break ties in Woolwich town centre, it does not actually break ties with significant communities. Given that Eltham has to expand somewhere—it is too small—and Charlton ward is too small in terms of its electorate, Woolwich Common is the most obvious ward to move in view of historical ties, transport links and shared facilities. The 122 and 161 buses, as well as many smaller buses, provide a direct link from the ward to Eltham.

I now turn to Charlton where I have lived for 22 years. That includes Charlton ward and parts of Kidbrooke with Hornfair, Peninsula and Riverside wards. Charlton has a strong sense of history, identity and pride. It has been divided between two constituencies since 2010, and the initial proposals were divided up among three constituencies. This is far from ideal. The issue of Charlton's separate and strong identity was significantly addressed at the Commission's last review, which was not implemented, where the final recommendations established the Eltham and Charlton constituency, including three of these four wards.

Sadly, in this review the sheer arithmetic does not allow for this solution, and I can see little alternative but for the community of Charlton to be split three ways with three MPs. Removing Peninsula from a Greenwich constituency would split Greenwich, and Kidbrooke with Hornfair must remain in Eltham but cannot be joined by Charlton ward as this would still leave the constituency too light in terms of voters, whereas adding Riverside, as in the last review's final recommendations, would make it too heavy.

That brings me to Blackheath, another proud and historic community which is split at the moment across two boroughs and three constituencies. As I submitted to the last review, bringing Blackheath Westcombe and Lewisham Blackheath wards together in a single constituency makes great sense. With Greenwich West ward, which includes some of the heath, this brings the famous Blackheath area and the village itself under one MP. Addressing issues around rail service, which is very important in this area, conservation issues and dealing with the many vibrant groups that bring the community together in Blackheath is much easier with a single MP covering the core of the area. That still leaves a small part of Blackheath, south of Blackheath Park, in the Eltham constituency, but that is in Middle Park and Sutcliffe ward which is principally allied with Eltham.

Greenwich is also united by the Labour Party counter-proposal. Any division of Greenwich West from Peninsula wards would be very difficult to justify, breaking

significant local ties around the town centre, local communities, Greenwich Park and the world heritage site, which benefits from having a single MP.

Moving to the east of our borough, we welcome broad restoration of the old Woolwich constituency that existed before 1997, including the Greenwich areas of Thamesmead, Abbey Wood, Plumstead and Woolwich. It would make more sense to include Woolwich Common than Charlton, but, as I said, this is not possible numerically. Charlton was part of the former Greenwich borough but sits firmly between Greenwich and Woolwich, with links to both. The Kent civil parish was actually called Charlton next Woolwich, and there are strong associations with continuous development.

There is naturally a strong argument to keep Thamesmead in one constituency, but equally there are close associations between Thamesmead and Abbey Wood and Woolwich on the Greenwich side and, on the Bexley side, with Belvedere and Erith. Thamesmead looks to Woolwich as the major shopping centre and for its transport links. With the opening of Crossrail, it will look to Abbey Wood and Woolwich Crossrail stations. On the Bexley side, people look to Belvedere for transport and work in the business parks and industrial areas.

Lesnes Abbey Wood, which the Commission propose should be in the Woolwich constituency, is largely Belvedere by postal area and local association. A small corner in the north of Lesnes Abbey Woods, above the woods themselves, is part of Thamesmead town. Another small area would regard itself as Abbey Wood, but the vast bulk of this ward is West Heath and Belvedere itself south of Lesnes Abbey Woods and, therefore, clearly should be in a constituency with Belvedere to the south.

We note that just swapping Thamesmead East for another ward proposed for inclusion in Woolwich—so putting Thamesmead in Woolwich—would leave Erith and Crayford with too many electors. I understand there is a proposal to split Lesnes Abbey ward to address this issue, but this would be unprecedented in England, and I fully agree with Bob Stewart MP, who represents a different party, that splitting wards is totally unacceptable, where it can be at all avoided. I do not believe that in this case it is at all exceptional. I would therefore argue that restoring an Erith and Crayford constituency, essentially north Bexley, makes strong sense and should include all of north Bexley rather than taking a chunk out at Lesnes Abbey.

Given that two Bexley wards must join a largely Greenwich borough constituency, I support St Michael's being included in Woolwich. Again, ideally the whole of Welling should be in a single constituency, but this does not appear feasible. Thus, separating Welling along the railway line, which is a very clear boundary, makes much more sense. Putting East Wickham from Old Bexley and Sidcup into Woolwich provides a single north Welling community, which would be a voice within the Woolwich constituency. This area is centred on Upper Wickham Lane, which is a continuation of Wickham Lane and is separated by the cemetery and parkland and from Plumstead; and Wickham Lane is also a local focal point, bringing together

people from East Wickham and St Michael's wards. Further, this area of Welling north of the railway line is easily connected to Woolwich and Plumstead through buses 96 and 422, both very regular services, the latter going to Charlton.

I would also argue that Christchurch ward, which is effectively Bexleyheath town centre, has greater association with Old Bexley and Sidcup. The boundary with Danson Park ward runs through the residential areas dividing roads and much of Bexleyheath lies within Danson Park ward. While some of the town is in Barnehurst ward as well, the vast majority of that ward is clearly a separate community, with some of Barnehurst being in neighbouring Colyers ward, all within the proposed Erith and Crayford constituency. Thus, uniting as much of Bexleyheath as possible within the Old Bexley and Sidcup constituency makes great sense. Indeed, if you look at William Morris's famous Red House, that is on Red House Lane, which itself would form the boundary of the proposed constituency if Christchurch continued to be included in Erith and Crayford. Obviously, we support the principle of limiting the number of cross-border seats, but they breach the Bexley/Greenwich border in two separate places: one between Lesnes Abbey and Abbey Wood and the other between St Michael's and Woolwich. That creates effectively two orphan wards. If you put together East Wickham and St Michael's within Woolwich, that is not ideal but, given you have to have two wards from Bexley, it creates one unit which is clearly one single community that would be a stronger, contiguous voice within a largely Greenwich-based constituency.

I would like to focus on Eltham. Eltham constituency is a very historic one; it was called Woolwich West until 1983. As a town it has always included part of Woolwich or Plumstead going back to its formation. It was always part of the old Woolwich borough before that was amalgamated into Greenwich borough, and within Eltham there is a very strong sense of identity. They have their own high street; Eltham leisure centre; library; post office and a new cinema. There is a very strong sense of civic society within the town of Eltham, which is quite distinct. There have always been connections to the north within the old Woolwich borough, now Greenwich borough, but not connections to the same extent to Bexley. As we heard at the last review, there are very strong reasons for not breaching the border between Eltham and Bexley.

Finally, to address an issue raised yesterday by Mr Evenett MP in relation to a second proposal if you did not accept his ward split, he suggested putting Belvedere into the Woolwich constituency rather than St Michael's. We would submit that Belvedere is very much at the heart of any Erith and Crayford constituency; it is aligned very much with both Erith and Thamesmead East and, to the south, with Colyers, Lesnes Abbey and so forth. It would make a very strangely-shaped Erith and Crayford constituency, but the knock-on impact in putting Danson Park within an Erith and Crayford constituency to compensate would create almost a little finger that goes around in a strange way from St Michael's through East Wickham, down through Falconwood and on to Sidcup. It would create two very strangely-shaped constituencies just to balance the numbers, which is entirely avoidable. I would commend the initial proposals in relation to Bexley and Greenwich, and I believe

they can be improved with the number of local ties that are broken being reduced and borough boundaries better respected with fewer orphan wards, with the slight anticlockwise rotation I have outlined within the borough of Bexley.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is very interesting. Are there any matters arising? Thank you very much indeed. I do not suppose you could let us have a copy of that submission.

CLLR GARDNER: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That would be helpful. The next scheduled speaker is at 10 o'clock, so I suggest we adjourn until then.

Time Noted: 9.33 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 10.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, we will reconvene. Cllr Bonavia, would you like to come forward? Would you commence by introducing yourself by way of name and address?

CLLR BONAVIA: My name is Kevin Bonavia. I am a councillor in the London Borough of Lewisham. I am also a Labour-elected councillor. I represent the ward of Blackheath. My working address is Catford Town Hall.

I have been representing the Lewisham ward of Blackheath since 2010. I can tell you from my personal experience how that interrelates with our Members of Parliament who also represent Blackheath. Blackheath in its wider sense currently has three Members of Parliament, so in a sense you could say we are well represented in Parliament. Currently, we have three MPs for Lewisham East, Greenwich and Woolwich, and Southern Blackheath is covered by the Eltham constituency. It is not so much having Blackheath's voice in Parliament; it is what Members of Parliament can do with residents in Blackheath. Because we are split between two boroughs, Lewisham and Greenwich, as I am sure has been alluded to previously, what happens is that on occasion one borough gives and another takes away. To give an example, given the funding cuts over the past six years, Lewisham closed a library in Blackheath Village, which is split between the two boroughs, but was able to reopen its library service across the boundary in Greenwich in a place called Age Exchange, which previously had been funded by both boroughs. However, at the same time Greenwich borough had decided it no longer wanted to fund that, so that caused us a problem when we tried to move there. It would have been very helpful at the time to have one Member of Parliament making the case to both boroughs. This issue was picked up very much by the Blackheath Society a few years ago when the Boundary Commission was looking at proposals at that time. The society very strongly argued for one MP with feet in both boroughs who could make the case

for general cross-Blackheath issues to both boroughs so we did not lose on the one hand when something is given elsewhere. That is my main argument for supporting the principle of the initial proposal to have at least Blackheath Westcombe and Blackheath wards kept together with one Member of Parliament resident in both. I see the Labour Party's counter-proposals. I would be very happy with those, too, but certainly from a Blackheath perspective I would strongly argue we need one Member of Parliament to cover the wider area.

I do not know whether you have ever visited Blackheath, but, to give you a feel for what it is, it is often seen by many people as not just an area but a concept. It is very green and people often see it as a very middle-class leafy area, but it is very varied. The central focus point is the village and heath itself. The borough boundary cuts across the heath on the A2, Shooters Hill Road, so south of that is currently in Lewisham East; north of that is Greenwich, which is currently the Greenwich and Woolwich parliamentary constituency. The boundary then goes south through Blackheath Village itself. That is where you have the issue; you have a lot of people who are not quite sure which borough they are in, but if they had a Member of Parliament who could speak for them that would go down very well in Blackheath locally with local businesses in Blackheath Village, many residents and community groups. I mentioned Age Exchange earlier. We have Blackheath Halls which is also on the boundary. That is in Greenwich but is funded by Lewisham council.

We also have the conservatoire which provides music lessons for the children of Blackheath. I mentioned the Blackheath Society itself. We also have faith groups in Blackheath. We have the Catholic churches on the Greenwich side; the main Church of England churches are on the Lewisham side, but we all have to work together. I accept that so far the two Members of Parliament have cordial relations; they do get on, but it would be useful to have a Member of Parliament who had a good knowledge of the councils they have to work with.

I grew up on the Ferrier council estate on the Greenwich side. It has been demolished; it is now in the Eltham constituency. I grew up with an understanding of Greenwich. Having moved, I became a Lewisham councillor. They are both Labour councils but for historical reasons they have different working cultures. I expect any Member of Parliament worth their salt to be a great advocate for causes in Parliament, but I also expect them to be great advocates for the local community. I expect a Labour or Conservative Member of Parliament, dealing with the same party in power locally, to have that arm's-length approach and be able to speak some uncomfortable truths to that borough, but it should be done from a position of knowledge and also standing. Obviously, if an MP represents the same people the borough has to cater for that person has standing. I am speaking here with my Blackheath hat on. Blackheath would certainly benefit from a strong advocate who had a locus with both boroughs.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters people wish to raise? In that case, thank you. That is helpful. We have speakers who want to

contribute. Who would like to go first? Please introduce yourself by way of name and address.

CLLR ALLEN: I am Vanessa Allen, a Labour councillor for Clock House ward in Bromley. My address is Bromley Civic Centre.

My submission is based on my belief that the Commission's proposal for the revised Beckenham constituency should retain Crystal Palace ward instead of adding Shirley ward. The figures in the initial proposals demonstrate that Bromley can accommodate three constituencies without removing Crystal Palace and adding Shirley. Crystal Palace ward's population is currently rising. Therefore, the initial proposal would result in the new Croydon North constituency exceeding the desired numbers very soon. If Crystal Palace is retained in Beckenham instead of Shirley, the resulting electorate is 72,004 which is at the lower end of the range.

Crystal Palace has many natural links to Penge. Parts of Crystal Palace are referred to as Penge or Anerley. There is no actual perceived border or cut-off point, and many local residents consider that they live in any or all of those areas.

In the interests of continuity, Crystal Palace should revert to the Beckenham constituency as it was prior to the last boundary review. Geographically, Crystal Palace is clearly bounded to the south by the railway with no link to Croydon at all. There are many community links between Crystal Palace, Penge and Clock House, the three wards in the area. Local primary schools, including James Dixon, Harris Primary, St John's, St Anthony's and Stewart Fleming, are attended by children from all three wards, and Betts Park is very much an asset shared by the three wards.

St Christopher's Hospice is located in Crystal Palace ward and receives much support, including fund raising and other activities, from the people of Beckenham and Bromley. Bromley borough has responsibility for the park and, given the proposed developments in the area, the ward would benefit from being in a Bromley constituency.

Bromley council leaders frequently refer to the three constituencies in the borough, even though there have been 3.5 constituencies since the last review. If only one ward is in a fourth constituency it will be even easier to overlook the involvement of a fourth MP.

The proposal for Crystal Palace and Shirley results in both being orphan wards for the GLA as well as parliamentary constituencies.

In terms of public transport, the links to Beckenham, Bromley and the wider borough are very clear. Most of the ward has no bus link to Croydon. The area is well served by train links in all directions. Historically, the park was called Penge Place prior to the Crystal Palace being built. It has always been part of the Beckenham and Bromley political landscape and was part of Penge urban district prior to incorporation into the London Borough of Bromley in 1965.

In conclusion, I support the plans for Bromley and Chislehurst and Orpington as well put forward in the initial proposals.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification? Thank you very much indeed.

CLLR DUNN: My name is Cllr Ian Dunn. I am a councillor for Clock House ward in Bromley, and my address is Bromley Civic Centre. I note that the electorate of the borough of Bromley at a little over 226,000 gives it a theoretical entitlement to just over three constituencies, which makes it one of the few boroughs in London that can sustain a whole number of constituencies. Because of this I am disappointed by the Commission proposal that the ward of Crystal Palace should be included in the Croydon North constituency and that the Croydon ward of Shirley should be included in the Beckenham constituency. I believe that both of these are unnecessary orphan ward proposals and that the Crystal Palace ward should be included in the new Beckenham constituency. I also believe that the Shirley ward should remain in a Croydon constituency.

As well as being orphan wards across borough boundaries, these would also be orphan wards across GLA constituencies, which would further complicate things. I believe that Crystal Palace ward should be included in Beckenham constituency for the following reasons. Crystal Palace has long-standing links with Penge town centre and Beckenham, reinforced by a number of bus routes. There are long-standing development plans for Crystal Palace Park and they may benefit from the involvement of the local MP for the wards. I believe that this involvement would be more effective if it were from an MP whose constituency was principally within Bromley rather than an MP for whom Crystal Palace was their only Bromley ward. I think that relationship is quite important.

The borders between Crystal Palace and Croydon are not very clear. I believe that the Birkbeck to Crystal Palace railway provides a good, natural boundary between the southern end of Crystal Palace Park ward and Bromley. You can see what is almost a right angle in the centre left of the map where the word "Anerley" appears. At that point the boundary between Crystal Palace and my ward of Clock House and the neighbouring ward of Penge is just across the street, with some of the boundaries actually crossing the main roads. Finally, the area to the north of Crystal Palace Park has no connections whatsoever with the remainder of the proposed Croydon North constituency; it has more connections with both Sydenham and also Penge town centre.

Additionally, given the Commission's preference for wards not to be split across constituencies, which I support, I am concerned that the proposal includes the two orphan wards: Shirley from Croydon and Crystal Palace from Bromley. I know that Bromley was considering a review of its wards internally before the 2018 election. That is not going to happen, but it may happen before 2022. I believe that what is being proposed here may constrain any future Bromley borough ward boundary

reviews. I am particularly concerned about Crystal Palace here because that is one of only four two-Member wards in Bromley; and it has the largest population of these two-Member wards with a rising population. I believe that that constraint on the future action of a Bromley ward review is important.

As far as the other constituencies in Bromley are concerned, I support the proposals for Bromley, Chislehurst and Orpington. I am particularly pleased to see that the two Cray seats end up in the same constituency, which is good for that community.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification? If not, thank you very much indeed. Would the third speaker like to come forward? Again, introduce yourself by name and address.

CLLR FRASER: My name is Clive Fraser. I am an alderman of the London Borough of Croydon. I live at 285C Homesdale Road, South Norwood. That is the ward I used to represent on the council.

My verbal representation or submission is along the lines that Croydon and Bromley are different boroughs, and that for the Boundary Commission to propose a cross-over between the two boroughs is going against historical trends. Croydon historically was in Surrey; Bromley historically—and mentally, I believe—is in Kent. Those boundaries go back to the Domesday Book and represent different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. These are quite historic boundaries.

In terms of collaboration between the two local authorities, my experience on the council is that it was fairly non-existent. I think that would probably be confirmed by members of both Labour administrations in Croydon and previous Conservative ones. It was not a political thing; it was just that the two did not get on together, and I think it is very difficult to see how they would share a boundary when it comes to constituencies crossing over.

In a second I will come back to Norbury, which is one more that is going to be moved into the new Streatham and Morden constituency. If you look at the potential for Croydon to have, if necessary, cross-overs into Sutton, the links there are far stronger in the context of both Croydon and Sutton in the same GLA constituency. Historically, the two boroughs have operated together. When I was a councillor in charge of economic development I sat on a regeneration board that crossed over into Sutton and did a joint partnership with Sutton on South Wandle Valley, looking at the industrial estate which covered an area around Benton North and, to a degree, Benton South. The two boroughs decided to co-operate to revitalise the industrial estate and how that impacted on residents. There are clear operational links between Croydon and Sutton that have not been fully recognised in the Boundary Commission proposals to date.

Going back to the other proposal that affects Croydon North, which is my constituency, that would move Norbury into a new constituency. Having spoken to leading people I know in residents' associations in Norbury, they are very concerned

that they are part of Croydon, not Streatham. Their community focus is towards Croydon. In south London people have to recognise that in many ways Croydon was always itself a contained borough; it looked inwards to the town centre and does not look necessarily northwards or eastwards. I think that is quite important.

As to how wards are distributed within Croydon, there is a proposal to move Purley up to part of the new Croydon Central constituency. Purley is very much part of the southern half of Croydon; indeed, it used to form its own district council—Purley and Coulsden District Council—which was separate until the 1964 local government organisation. Again, it is not fully connected. When people talk about south Croydon they mean Purley and Coulsden. To say that Purley would be an essential constituency does not really work.

Those are my verbal submissions and, hopefully, I have expressed them sufficiently. I will stop there, unless you have any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That was very clear. Are there any matters for clarification? Are you going to make a written submission as well?

CLLR FRASER: Probably not, but, if you want me to make a written submission to follow this up, it would have to be in the next week or so.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You have until 5 December. I would welcome it, because it is helpful to lay it out clearly. I have taken notes and it has been recorded, but a written submission would be helpful.

CLLR FRASER: I will do that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is not booked until 11.20, so we will take a recess now until 11.20.

Time Noted: 10.22 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 11.20 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We reconvene. I believe our next speaker, Cllr Alan Deadman is here. Would you like to come forward and introduce yourself by way of name and address?

CLLR DEADMAN: My name is Cllr Alan Deadman. I am a Bexley councillor and leader of the Labour group. I am a councillor for North End ward. I have lived in St Michael's ward for 32 years and have been involved in the local community for most of that time. I have been chair and treasurer of the local community centre, where a lot of local social activities are carried out and from where a large number of different community groups operate.

I am, broadly speaking, in support of the initial proposals in relation to the borough of Bexley. St Michael's ward has strong community ties with East Wickham, sharing local amenities from churches to shops. These two wards have been and are part of Welling, not Bexleyheath. Keeping these two wards together seeks in some small way to reduce the breakages of local ties. I understand that the Commission have been given a very rigid framework in which to work, and this has necessarily severely constrained our ability to reflect strong community ties with borough boundaries. I believe that keeping communities with a clear identity in a single constituency, or, where that is not possible, giving as much of that community a single parliamentary voice, improves the quality of representation, the effectiveness of local people and, once again, keeps the community's sense of identity.

Given that two Bexley wards must join the Greenwich constituency, I support St Michael's being included in Woolwich. The whole of Welling, being in a single constituency, would be preferable, but this is not feasible. They are separating Welling along the railway line, which is a very clear boundary, and makes more sense. St Michael's and East Wickham are a continuous Welling community centred on Wickham Lane, which includes a local shopping area, churches and other amenities. Wickham Lane unites north Welling with Plumstead, and there are at least two direct bus routes through it, eventually ending up in both Woolwich and Charlton.

I would also suggest that Christchurch ward, which is effectively Bexleyheath town centre, has a far greater association with Old Bexley and Sidcup, and the boundary with Danson Park ward runs through residential areas, dividing roads, and much of Bexleyheath lies within Danson Park, whereas some of the town is in Barnehurst ward as well. The vast majority of Barnehurst ward is a separate community in its own right. Some of Barnehurst is in the neighbouring Colyers ward or within the proposed Erith and Crayford constituency, thus uniting as much of Bexleyheath as possible within the Old Bexley and Sidcup constituency, and this makes far greater sense for everybody.

There is naturally a strong argument to keep Thamesmead in one constituency, but equally there are close associations between Thamesmead on the Greenwich side, with Abbey Wood and Woolwich on the Bexley side with Belvedere and Erith. Keeping Thamesmead East alongside Belvedere and Erith makes far greater sense because they are a community within their own right. People share shops, schools, transport links to London and so on.

Lesnes Abbey ward is largely Belvedere by postal area and local association. A small corner is part of Thamesmead town and another small area is Abbey Wood. The bulk of it is in West Heath, Belvedere and Lesnes Abbey Woods. Swapping Thamesmead East for another ward for proposed inclusion in Woolwich would leave Erith and Crayford with too many electors, and there is a proposal to split Lesnes Abbey ward to address this issue. Splitting wards would need to be an exceptional case, and I do not believe that is necessary in this instance.

I would therefore argue that restoring the Erith and Crayford constituency, essentially north Bexley, makes strong sense and it should include all of north Bexley.

The initial proposals breach the Greenwich/Bexley borough boundary in two places. It effectively creates two disparate orphan wards, St Michael's and Lesnes Abbey. Both are separated from their natural neighbours and communities and are tacked on to Woolwich. Placing East Wickham and St Michael's together in Woolwich still separates Welling, but not Belvedere, and at least maintains a combined voice with a Greenwich majority constituency. It also provides a clear and easily identifiable constituency boundary, with the railway line continuing in the new draft arrangements.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification? Thank you. Is it possible to get a copy of your submission?

CLLR DEADMAN: I will email it to you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

Time Noted: 11.26 am

After a short break

Time Noted: 12 noon

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mr White, would you like to introduce yourself by way of name and address?

MR WHITE: My name is David White. I currently live in Fairfield ward in Croydon Central constituency. I have lived in the area of Croydon all my life. I was born in Purley, which is part of the current Croydon South constituency. In the 1970s I was a councillor on the Greater London Council representing the then Croydon Central constituency. Until recently, I was a practising solicitor, having an office just on the boundary between Croydon Central and Croydon South. Therefore, I think I know quite a lot about the communities in Croydon and the geography and history of different parts of it.

I will start by commenting on Croydon South. The principal point I make about Croydon South is related to Purley ward, which the Commission propose should be in Croydon Central. Maybe the map could be changed to Croydon Central.

Purley ward you see at the southern tip of what is proposed to be the new Croydon Central constituency. The town of Purley and my ward is not connected in terms of links, community and history, with the centre of Croydon. The town centre of Croydon is in Fairfield ward, and you will see that Purley is a good way further south. I was born in Purley and as a young child I lived there. When I had my solicitor's

practice I had quite a lot of clients who lived there and other parts of Croydon. When I was born Purley was part of Purley and Coulsden Urban District Council, and in 1965 it became part of the London Borough of Croydon, but there are historical links between Purley and Coulsden and the other parts of the current Croydon South constituency, whereas there are not the same links with the centre of Croydon. Croydon Borough Council until 1965 was separate from the Coulsden and Purley UDC.

If Purley becomes part of the new Croydon Central constituency what you will be left with in Croydon South is a string of neighbourhoods and localities which are not really linked. Currently, Purley is very much the central town of the existing Croydon South constituency, so for all those reasons I would favour Purley remaining in the new Croydon South constituency, not joining Croydon Central.

To move on to Shirley, under the Commission's proposals that is going to go into Beckenham constituency. Could that be put up? (Pause) You will see Shirley in the south-west corner of the new proposed Beckenham constituency. Currently, Shirley is a ward in Croydon Central constituency, and it has been since 1965 or earlier. Shirley is close to Croydon town centre. I went to school in Shirley. At that time I was living in Waddon ward, which is just to the west of where I live now. There are lots of links in terms of schools and shopping. People from Shirley would tend to come to Croydon to shop. The community in Shirley obviously is part of the London Borough of Croydon now, so all the local government links are with Croydon. I do not think it would be a good idea to shunt Shirley into the Beckenham constituency, which would be mainly formed of wards in the London Borough of Bromley.

Therefore, for the two reasons I mentioned both in relation to Purley and Shirley I favour the proposals put forward by the Labour Party, which have a neat arrangement for the London Borough of Bromley. There are three constituencies, as I understand it, entirely within Bromley borough. You would not have the orphan wards of Shirley and Crystal Palace in the north. Under the Commission's proposals, they would come into the Croydon North constituency. On the Labour Party's proposals, you would not have these orphan wards. Bromley would be intact and the Croydon constituencies would respect the community links, transport links and geographic and historic links more effectively.

In conclusion, I saw the information and publicity about the Commission's proposals. I was impressed that the Commission were not trying simply to put forward a set of proposals and make sure they went through; they are genuinely opening it up to debate. Therefore, I and I am sure lots of other people are very appreciative of the opportunity to come along and put our point of view.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You are absolutely right. We are very open to suggestions about how the current arrangements can be improved or developed. Are there any matters for clarification? In that case, thank you very much indeed. We are due a speaker but it does not look as though she has arrived. Our

next scheduled speaker is at 12.50. I suggest we adjourn until 12.30 to see whether we can recommence then, if we have a speaker.

Time Noted: 12.07 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 12.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would you like to come forward to make your presentation? If you introduce yourself by way of name and address, that would be helpful.

CLLR LEAF: My name is David Leaf. I have lived in the London Borough of Bexley for over 30 years. I am currently in Norman Road, Belvedere. I have had the privilege of representing Longlands ward since 2014 and, prior to that, the Belvedere ward, where I grew up, from 2006 to 2010. As such, I am very familiar with the geography and communities of the entire borough from north to south.

In respect of the comments I shall be making shortly about the future of the constituency boundaries, I was a company director and trustee of Trust Thamesmead for two terms, totalling seven years between 2006 and 2014. At a professional level, I have also worked for two Members of Parliament over the past 12 years, so I have extensive experience of and insights into constituency boundaries and the work Members of Parliament undertake.

I am here to speak in support of the submission from the Conservative Party, of which my colleague Cllr Don Massey gave details earlier in your proceedings. While the initial proposed boundaries covering the borough of Bexley published by the Commission have many positive points, there are a modest number of provisions which I feel would maintain and enhance the established community links while still satisfying the electoral quota and statutory requirements laid down in schedule 2 to the Act.

I agree with the proposals that Cllr Massey shared with you to bring St Michael's ward and most of Lesnes Abbey ward into the proposed Erith and Crayford seat. The communities that live there have far more connections in terms of their use of facilities and service with Erith and Crayford than with the proposed Woolwich seat on the Greenwich side of the boundary. They look towards the Bexleyheath area, not towards Woolwich or Plumstead. It is also pertinent to point out that St Michael's ward simply does not fit in with the characteristics of a riparian river-based constituency which the proposed Woolwich one effectively is.

I also strongly concur with the Conservative Party's proposals to move Thamesmead East ward, Belvedere ward and polling district LA1E from Lesnes Abbey ward into the proposed Woolwich seat. I will focus the remainder of my comments on this matter, as keeping the Thamesmead community together in one constituency must be a fundamental objective of this review. Our focus needs to be to unify the town and that area, not divide it.

The Commission's proposals to split the community in Thamesmead into two constituencies breaks community ties and could have a severely detrimental impact on an area that needs unity and continuity. Thamesmead is already a town that is divided by a borough boundary, and a great deal of effort and action has taken place to develop a single Thamesmead identity.

I was proud to play a part in this work during my time as a board member of the community charity Trust Thamesmead, which is now part of the Peabody Group. They invested in services and facilities for people in all of Thamesmead, particularly covering the Thamesmead East and Thamesmead Moorings wards and polling district LA1E in the Lesnes Abbey ward. They are viewed as one community. The Link facility, which I would encourage people to visit, is a wonderful £6 million investment under the Harrow Manor Way arches right on the borough boundary. That provides amazing new facilities and services for young people. It creates a civic centre for people from that entire area to come together as one community.

Trust Thamesmead also commissioned research a number of years ago, such as the report from Professor Scase which I would commend to the Commission to review and read. It details the challenges facing Thamesmead in the years ahead; it highlights the importance of a single community champion for the area; and the role that a single Member of Parliament plays in representing the area and undertaking that work. Indeed, it cautions against further division.

I submit to you that splitting Thamesmead into two parliamentary constituencies would risk weakening community representation and go against the grain of all the work that Bexley, Greenwich and our partners, like Peabody, have undertaken to break down barriers in Thamesmead. Thamesmead's future success depends on its unity. Keeping Thamesmead united matters more now than ever before, particularly since the areas around Harrow Manor Way and Yarnton Way are undergoing a huge transformation which will more closely integrate these areas.

The area I refer to is this area over here which, as you can see, includes LA1E (indicating). There are joint regeneration plans covering those areas. Indeed, next week Bexley's planning committee will be considering four planning applications from Peabody to redevelop and transform the built environment north of the railway line along Harrow Manor Way in the east and the western side of Yarnton Way—the very area I just highlighted. It is not viewed as four separate sites but one major project. As a member of the planning committee, I cannot say anything that will prejudge the decisions that will be made, but I think it is fair to say that the development proposals will lead not only to new housing but enhanced access and an improved public realm that transcends the borough and ward boundaries in this location. It brings the people of Thamesmead East, Thamesmead Moorings, Abbey Wood and polling district LA1E of Lesnes Abbey ward closer together. It will reinforce and complement the emergence of new strong community facilities and services being developed north of Abbey Wood railway station, such as the CrossQuarter development and the new Sainsburys, which sits just the other side of the Bexley boundary in Greenwich. That is well used and is becoming a focal point

for people from LA1E as well as Thamesmead East, Thamesmead Moorings and Abbey Wood wards.

Importantly, these joint regeneration proposals that focus on bringing Thamesmead together demonstrate the clear ambition and commitment to strengthening and uniting the community in this area on both sides of the borough boundary and for all wards in that area.

You will have noted that our proposals involve the transfer of one polling district from Lesnes Abbey ward to the proposed Woolwich constituency. I ask that, in accordance with paragraphs 31, 37 and 38 of the Commission's guide to the review, you consider making an exception to permit the division of Lesnes Abbey ward in a manner that the Conservatives have proposed. First, the presence of this polling district in Lesnes Abbey ward, as opposed to being in Thamesmead East ward, is an anomaly which the current local government boundary review for Bexley looks set to address when it publishes its final recommendations next month. Indeed, there has been cross-party support to make this change happen to ensure that that section of Lesnes Abbey ward takes its rightful place as part of Thamesmead East ward. While splitting wards should be done very rarely, this is one instance when it is wholly justified.

Secondly, from a geographic perspective, it is logical to maintain all of the area north of the railway line in this location in one constituency, not only for community reasons but because it creates a clear, distinct and recognisable boundary.

Thirdly, there are strong and powerful community ties between the residents in this locality that stretch across the ward and borough boundaries north of the railway line. People living in roads like Overton Road, Lensbury Way, Rushdene, Maran Way, Alsike Road and Yarnton Way do not want to see another boundary drawn on the map. They share postal addresses and postcodes as part of Thamesmead and Abbey Wood. Indeed, I heard that yesterday a Bexley councillor gave evidence suggesting that people in that area identify as living in Belvedere. I have lived in Belvedere for many years. That is not part of Belvedere; that is part of Thamesmead and Abbey Wood. That is what they identify as. If anyone is in any doubt, they should knock on the doors at any time and they will understand that to be the case. They cross the ward and borough boundaries to shop, use public transport, go to their GP and dental surgery and go to school, like the Business Academy and St John Fisher primary school. People in polling district LA1E often go to St John Fisher school and the Business Academy, which is just the other side of the ward boundary in Thamesmead East. On the map, the part marked "College" is now the Business Academy, and St John Fisher school is over [here](#) ([indicating](#)). People use those facilities.

Likewise, people in [this](#) area, all the way down [here](#)—even into Belvedere, which is not quite on this map—use [this](#) area increasingly, especially because of the regeneration taking place alongside the station in relation to Crossrail over [here](#) ([indicating](#)). You have Sainsburys [here](#) and the regeneration projects I mentioned taking place over [here](#) ([indicating](#)). The Link, an excellent facility, is at [this](#) point [here](#)

(indicating). Therefore, it all draws towards the centre. There are further plans which enhance the links towards Thamesmead town to make that area also a focal point for the whole of Thamesmead East, Thamesmead Moorings as well as all the way down here in what is now part of Lesnes Abbey ward, and over here in Abbey Wood ward (indicating). It is all about creating a hub, a focus, a community centre, in and around that area. That is fundamental to the decisions the Commission will be making at some point in the coming months.

I believe that the residents in that area should not now have to face the prospect of a new constituency boundary imposed upon them when they are doing so much to break down existing barriers. By breaking down those barriers they are having better services and an unprecedented level of regeneration to the value of hundreds of millions of pounds.

Transferring LA1E into the Woolwich constituency does not risk breaking ties, as the guidance cautions against; it strengthens them. I also believe that by bringing Belvedere, which borders Thamesmead East to the east, into the Woolwich constituency we can keep Thamesmead together within the electoral quota without creating a domino effect that necessitates the reorganisation of another seat. It is a logical solution to ensure that Thamesmead stays together.

There are many ways you can recreate the seats to keep Thamesmead and other towns together, but I believe this is the most logical way, and it strengthens community ties. The case for keeping Thamesmead together, as defined by the area north of the railway line and Abbey Wood, within one constituency is compelling. I believe it should have cross-party support.

I was concerned to see a submission from the Labour Party that supported the unnecessary division of Thamesmead. However, it is also important to note that the Labour Party has historically supported keeping Thamesmead unified. Indeed, upon the publication of these proposals their Member of Parliament, Teresa Pearce, shared our view that the area must remain united. She stated—it is on the public record in the *News Shopper*—that her biggest concern was about changes to Thamesmead. The seat is already in two boroughs, which causes problems. If it stops being a community with a heart, without a single MP, it will be even harder to regenerate the area and it will never have a single voice; it will be a bit of a disaster. Those are the problems we have sought to avoid.

It is also pertinent to point out that in the 2013 review an individual called David Gardner, who I understood spoke at this hearing against bringing Thamesmead together, warned against the initial proposals in 2011 which suggested splitting Thamesmead. He warned against them. He said that that would split into two Thamesmead town which has been in one constituency since 1997. It splits Abbey Wood, SE2, into two constituencies, so a number of very substantial and important historic communities were divided. He went on to propose that it was important to keep Thamesmead together. He said, “It better preserves communities, particularly the new community like Thamesmead.”

Therefore, I think it is fair to say that the proposals the Conservatives have put forward have support within the community and among local Labour Party Members.

We want to defend the interests of Thamesmead and keep it united as one community under one constituency with one Member of Parliament. Our suggested changes to the Commission's proposals reflect that desire and we believe would be strongly supported locally. Our changes satisfy all of the statutory criteria listed in schedule 2 to the Act, namely to take account of the special geographical considerations, the boundaries of existing constituencies and local ties, which I have discussed at some length. Importantly, they remain within the electoral quota. I trust that your careful consideration of this matter will lead you to share our conclusion, and that a decision to keep Thamesmead together across borough boundaries and with part of Lesnes Abbey ward, LA1E, in that area will be made. It will be celebrated if it is. I am happy to take any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Earlier you made reference to a report that had been prepared by Professor Scase.

CLLR LEAF: Yes. It was a report in 2007 by a gentleman called Professor Scase at, I think, Kent University. It was commissioned by Trust Thamesmead and had the wide support of all the key partners at the time: Bexley council, Greenwich council and the entities that are now part of Peabody. It looked at the issues facing Thamesmead. Why is Thamesmead struggling? It had a great vision when it was established by the Greater London Council back in the 1950s when the plans first started, so why has it not achieved that goal? It looked at the challenges and issues it faced and mapped out a strategic plan to get Thamesmead to a better place for 2016. The economic downturn has hampered that, but all partners signed up to the principles behind it. At its core was the theme that this was a single community but it did not have a single identity or voice. It should be integrated as planned, but you have bits of land in different places; the public realm does not link up as it should. A lot of the investment has gone into keeping Thamesmead together and fulfilling the dream set out 50 or 60 years ago to make it a wonderful place to live. The really exciting regeneration plans to take that forward and implement it have had cross-party support. I do not want to make political points here, but the ward members down there are Labour; we have a Labour Member of Parliament. They are all on board with the principles of the regeneration plans. The Conservative group is. It is a really exciting time. At this crucial moment in Thamesmead's history having a new boundary placed upon it would be unnecessarily divisive and would not be welcomed by the community there. If you would like the report, I can email a copy to you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes—or reference to the actual title. That would be very helpful. Is there a copy of your submission that you could let us have?

CLLR LEAF: Indeed; I will send through the first draft with the usual check against delivery caveat.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Are there any matters for clarification?

CLLR GARDNER: I did not quite say that in relation to Thamesmead today, but you can read what I said in the transcript. Cllr Leaf, I would like to ask the following. If the Commission agree with Bob Stewart MP that the division of wards here is unacceptable, what would be your alternative, given the numbers, to keep Thamesmead united but the relevant constituencies of Woolwich and Erith and Crayford within the 5% thresholds?

CLLR LEAF: I am grateful for that question. I did not hear what Col Bob Stewart MP had to say for himself, but I understand that the Commission's remit is not to follow the views of an individual or party, whatever their position; it is to consider the whole and relate it to the legislation and guidance to make the case. In this case, as I pointed out, paragraphs 31, 37 and 38 of the guidance make quite clear that it is possible, and sometimes pertinent, to split a ward, particularly among a polling district. It makes clear that that should be done only in exceptional circumstances, but there are clearly exceptional circumstances here.

If I may elaborate further, the local government boundary view of Bexley is taking place. That is not a major consideration for the work of this Commission. Its outcome will be for the next review in five years' time when we will have, I think, better wards as building blocks, but we will come back to that in five years' time. One of the key points in that review—I think it had unanimous support from all political parties—was the moving of polling district LA1E into Thamesmead East ward, because that is where it naturally belongs. It was not put there in the 1999 review for quota and other reasons, but it naturally belongs there. Therefore, there is a clear and justifiable case to do so in this instance.

Of course, we can move lots of polling districts around to create constituencies that we think better suit communities, but it is an exceptional provision and it is one that I submit and urge you to consider in these circumstances, given the unique climate in Thamesmead. I would encourage you to walk along those areas. Walk down Yarnton Way. You will not see where the boundaries are; it comes across as one community. You will see all the effort to make it into one community. Having a ward boundary at that location is something we are addressing, and having a constituency boundary there at this moment is counter-productive. I hope that answers your question.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any other matters for clarification? If not, thank you very much indeed.

We will adjourn now until two o'clock.

Time Noted: 12.51 pm

After the luncheon adjournment

Time Noted: 2.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next timed speaker is James Brokenshire. Perhaps you would, by convention, introduce yourself by name and address.

MR BROKENSHERE: (MP for Old Bexley and Sidcup) Thank you very much for allowing me to give evidence this afternoon. I am James Brokenshire, the Member of Parliament for Old Bexley and Sidcup. My address is the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA, although I live within the constituency.

I recognise the work of the Boundary Commission in seeking to put forward their interim proposals and the way they affect the London Borough of Bexley, and equally the clear factors they take into account in relation to things like community ties, numbers of votes in each constituency and also other matters, such as existing constituency boundaries.

In making my opening remarks, can I also acknowledge the evidence you have already heard from my parliamentary colleague David Evenett and also Cllr Don Massey from the London Borough of Bexley? My evidence effectively builds on a number of points they have already made.

There are three elements that perhaps I can contribute to in terms of this session: first, proposals for my own current constituency of Old Bexley and Sidcup; other proposals set out in the initial plan in relation to the London Borough of Bexley; and, thirdly, brief comments on some of the counter-proposals I have seen from other parties.

At the outset, can I broadly welcome the initial proposals? They are broadly reflective of the existing community ties, and also seek to reflect the existing London Borough of Bexley boundary. Bexley is not big enough for three constituencies, but is too big for just two seats. Therefore, there is clearly a need to look at how to extend into other boroughs and the best way to do that.

Reflecting on the approach the Commission have taken, I think it is right to look towards the east. If you look at my own constituency, that runs hard up against the borough boundary on the western side, and then it clearly extends up further. I know this does not affect my own constituency because the proposals are largely to keep the existing Old Bexley and Sidcup constituency intact with one change, but when you consider that to the south is the borough boundary with Bromley, on this side as well you are heading into Kent and on the northern side of Bexley effectively you are abutting the River Thames, this creates a number of constraints. Therefore, it clearly makes sense, given that when you look to the south you have the A20 which forms quite a significant physical division between communities. That is why in large measure the constituency boundaries have tended to be drawn in this way.

I broadly support the plans the Commission have proposed in their interim review, but I believe there are some small changes that could be made to improve on some of the issues on community ties.

For my own constituency of Old Bexley and Sidcup, the Commission's initial proposals seek to add one ward, which is the Danson Park ward next door to Falconwood and Welling and obviously is just down from East Wickham. I think this is a sensible way of expanding the constituency to meet the broad electoral number consistent with community ties. The current constituency is largely defined by two major roads: the A20 and the borough boundary to the south. Obviously, a further quite important factor is this road here, which is the A209, and Bellegrove Road that effectively looks towards Bexleyheath in this direction (indicating). Therefore, there is a natural east-west flow in many ways defined by this, with a ribbon of shops and businesses dotted all the way down from the Bexleyheath Broadway area here towards this direction (indicating).

It is also worth noting that we have Shooters Hill, the road here, and also Oxleas Wood here, which again provides some physical and natural reasons as to why there is a separation between communities, particularly on the western boundary of my seat (indicating). When you look at the make-up, the boundaries you have established make clear sense, and, having the community that is defined in many ways by the A207 running down from Bellegrove Road into Bexleyheath, it creates a natural flow and, therefore, supports the addition of this ward as in essence a natural progression of the community of Welling, which is defined in and around this area (indicating). I certainly endorse the recommendations the Commission have made in terms of my own constituency.

When we look at the broader Bexley proposals, I broadly welcome them but believe there are some relatively small improvements which can be made to strengthen community ties in Welling and address the one weakness of the initial plan, which is the division of the community of Thamesmead to the north. At present, it is suggested that the ward of St Michael's should be included in the new cross-borough boundary constituency of Woolwich. To give you a sense of where that is, that ward is effectively just in this area here (indicating). It also runs up against the Bexley borough boundary. It has the effect of creating quite an odd-shaped constituency of Woolwich in that area, almost reaching down into Welling and leaving St Michael's surrounded on two sides by the expanded Old Bexley and Sidcup constituency here and, down on this side, by the Bexleyheath constituency (indicating). Therefore, it creates quite an odd shape, and it is surrounded almost on all sides by the new proposed seats.

It is also worth highlighting that just to the north west you see a reference to Bostall Woods and Bostall Common. I think this underlines some of the lack of obvious community connections, and that natural break defines the character of the area. When you look at the road layout here, it tends to run east-west and some of the residential roads here in essence define the area of Welling (indicating). Again, that helps to define the character of the area.

Similarly, the initial proposals divide the community of Thamesmead which is currently unified in the existing Erith and Thamesmead constituency. I believe these issues could be addressed by an exchange of wards between the proposed new Woolwich and Erith and Crayford constituencies. Moving the wards of St Michael's

and Lesnes Abbey, apart from the LA1E polling district, from Woolwich into Erith and Crayford, and moving the wards of Thamesmead East and Belvedere from Erith and Crayford into Woolwich, would significantly improve the initial proposals by reflecting community ties more strongly while continuing to satisfy the electoral requirements.

In this regard I would underline the evidence provided by Cllr Don Massey about the exceptional reasons for separating out the LA1E polling district given, as he rightly reflected, a number of topographical areas and factors in and around that areas, and also the fact that the current Lesnes Abbey ward is intended effectively to be divided as a consequence of the forthcoming local government boundary changes that have been given broad community support. Therefore, I think there are justifications for separating out LA1E on an exceptional basis, given a number of the very clear factors that Cllr Don Massey gave to you in fair detail during yesterday's evidence session. I would certainly endorse the points he made. Making this change would, I believe, enhance the proposals and create stronger community ties and links, given some of the topographical, community and physical issues. When you look at the road network in terms of those elements, I think that defines the community with some of the east-west relationships and shops and businesses naturally lending themselves to that flow, rather than looking northwards.

Finally, on some of the other proposals which I have seen from the Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties, in very short form I would observe that they would appear to lead to increased community separation. The Labour proposals for Bexley would lead to greater division of Bexleyheath. When we are looking to improve the initial proposals, it should be about how we can get greater community cohesion rather than creating separation. What they propose by adding the Christchurch ward to the new Old Bexley and Sidcup seat which would be a further ward to the east here, thus stretching the constituency downwards but, in exchange, removing the East Wickham ward from the proposals for the Old Bexley and Sidcup constituency (indicating).

There are a number of factors that do not make sense in terms of separating out East Wickham. East Wickham is very much part of Welling and, therefore, tends to look more towards Bexleyheath in terms of its view, because the most important factor here is that you have Shooters Hill which of itself provides a natural distinction and barrier which means there is a greater community look heading this way towards the east rather than westwards because of the significant topographical factor of Shooters Hill (indicating). Further, the Labour proposals would fail to reunite Thamesmead.

In relation to the Liberal Democrat proposals, they would isolate Welling in a rather oddly-shaped Eltham constituency, which again is effectively divided in half by the natural features of Shooters Hill, but also, as I have said, Oxleas Wood—this lovely green area here—provides a natural reason for keeping the linkage in the way I have suggested.

In conclusion, I endorse the Boundary Commission's initial proposals for Bexley, in particular the Old Bexley and Sidcup constituency, but in relation to these other

aspects of the borough of Bexley I would make these recommendations in relation to the treatment of the St Michael's ward and some of the issues around Thamesmead, including the treatment of the Lesnes Abbey ward as well, because I think they would better reflect community ties, would continue to meet the numerical requirements, which is a key factor for the Commission, but would, I believe, further strengthen the proposals and lead to a stronger sense of community in terms of people's representation, and enhance the proposals the Commission have already put forward. I certainly commend the Commission for their work and wish them every success as they move to the next phase.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is most helpful. Are there any matters for clarification?

CLLR GARDNER: I very much understand the case that has just been made, but I would like to explore the issue of the split ward. If the Commission took the view that it did not want to split Lesnes Abbey ward, what would be your alternative in terms of the alignment of the wards that go into a Greenwich-based constituency?

MR BROKENSHERE: I view this in a slightly different way. I think there is an exceptional case here. The Lesnes Abbey ward is due to disappear in the Local Government Boundary Commission review for the London Borough of Bexley. The final proposals are to be announced, I believe, in November, but in the draft proposals they were broadly welcomed by community and political parties within Bexley with no dissent expressed. I think the reason for that, in large measure, is topography. The LA1E polling district covers the northern part of the ward and is the area to the immediate north east of Abbey Wood station, being separated from the rest of the wards to the south by the railway line and Lesnes Abbey Woods, which is the only escarpment rising from the flood plain of the River Thames. That was a point my colleague Don Massey explained yesterday.

When we look at the housing redevelopment going on in this area, a number of constructions taking place there also lend support to the issues I have raised in the counter-proposal. Therefore, I strongly believe there are exceptional circumstances which justify the LA1E ward being treated in this way. I do not think you need to look at those alternatives because the arguments are quite compelling in terms of the emerging borough boundaries we are seeing and the support that has been given in the community. Therefore, when you look at all those factors together I think that is sufficiently strong justification to make out the exceptional case that I know other colleagues have also identified in relation to Lesnes Abbey in this way, and why I have made the points in the way that I have.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any other matters for clarification? Thank you very much indeed.

Our next scheduled speaker is at 2.30, so we will adjourn until then.

Time Noted: 2.17 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 2.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, we reconvene. Our next speaker is Cllr Angela Wilkins. Would you start by introducing yourself by way of name and address?

CLLR WILKINS: My name is Angela Wilkins. I live at 47 Selby Road, London SE20 8ST, which is in Crystal Palace but on the boundary between Bromley and Croydon. I lived formerly in Penge, but I have lived here for 20 years, so I think I can say I know the area pretty well. I shop in Penge and Crystal Palace. I think that is what most local people do. My daughters went to Royston primary and then Cator Park. Those schools are in Penge and Cator ward. We lived in Penge at the time; we now live in Crystal Palace ward.

My main points here are to do with the very sense of community and togetherness that you get with Penge and Cator, Clock House and Crystal Palace, because virtually everything you need is tied up within those three wards. You have schools and all medical facilities there and people see it very much as their community and do not really need to go outside for a great deal.

At the bottom of my garden is the railway line which branches off to Norwood Junction but then goes to Elmers End and Beckenham. For me, that is a very firm boundary; it is one that I see literally every morning but one that in many ways has a life of its own, because everything you need is on the Bromley side of it. My argument is that the numbers all support this as well. Bromley is ideally situated to have just three constituencies. I was elected in 2014 as councillor for Crystal Palace ward, and there is a whole sense that everything should stay in Bromley. There are three constituencies there. The numbers all balance up. We also have Crystal Palace Park, which is one of the major parks, if not the major park, in south London. Bromley council owns that land and is about to agree a lease to a community-based trust which will manage that park. It is a Bromley-based park that will be managed by Bromley but will serve the other four boroughs which currently border it and the people who live in those boroughs as well.

When I moved back to London in the mid-1990s I worked across Croydon. That took me across the whole of the borough. I am not going to speak for the people of Shirley, but my sense is that Shirley would see itself as part of Croydon. I do not think people from Shirley would go into Bromley for many reasons; they would be much more inclined to see themselves as part of Bromley borough.

I think those are most of the points I wanted to mention. I think the strongest argument is that Penge and Cator —nobody calls it “Cator”— Penge, Crystal Palace, Clock House wards and Clock House station are very closely aligned. It is one community, and the borough works much better in that way. Currently, we are part of Lewisham West and Penge constituency, and we feel almost orphaned from Bromley council in many ways in the sense of parliamentary boundaries. The council talks about consulting the MPs. What the council does is consult three MPs. Because Lewisham West and Penge is such a small part of Bromley borough they

do not get the full consultation, if you like, that the other constituencies do. My natural inclination is not to have orphan wards; I just do not think it works.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification? Our next speaker is Cllr Daniel Francis. Again, introduce yourself by way of name and address.

CLLR FRANCIS: I am Daniel Francis. I am a councillor for Belvedere ward in the London Borough of Bexley. I represented the ward from a by-election in 2000 until 2010. I then stood down and I have represented the ward again since May 2014. I was a resident of the ward for 39 years until April of this year. I now live elsewhere in the borough. Although I do not speak on behalf of them, I am secretary of the Belvedere Community Forum, the charity that runs community groups in the area, including Belvedere Community Centre under a 25-year lease from the London Borough of Bexley.

From 2003 until 2010 I was the office manager of John Austin, the then Member of Parliament for Erith and Thamesmead, and then I worked for a short while in 2010 for the current Member of Parliament for the constituency, Teresa Pearce. I was also John Austin's election agent in 2005 in the current constituency of Erith and Thamesmead.

My comments will be about Belvedere. Although I have not lived there for a few months—I now live further south in the borough—I have very strong links with Belvedere. I went to primary school in Belvedere. I have been heavily involved in community groups for the past 20 years. I have been a trustee of the Belvedere Community Forum for 17 years and its secretary for several years. I have been a councillor for the ward for over 12 years.

The area is at the centre of what before the 1965 Act was the Erith Urban District Council. Obviously, Thamesmead did not exist at that point, but Belvedere, Erith and parts of what are now Lesnes Abbey and Northumberland Heath have always been aligned in people's minds. It has that long heritage agenda with industries along the riparian area of the borough. There were an enormous number of jobs at that point in the Belvedere and Erith area.

I will turn to the future and why Belvedere and Erith should remain in the same parliamentary constituency. There is an Erith and Belvedere local history society. Although it plays slightly further afield now, there is Erith and Belvedere Football Club. My children have attended pre-school at Belvedere and Erith Congregational Church. The Belvedere Community Forum manages the Belvedere Community Centre in Mitchell Close. These proposals would split one side of Mitchell close with the centre. Belvedere infant and junior schools are in the Woolwich constituency and yet the houses in Belvedere are in the Erith and Crayford constituency.

It is also shown in faith groups. During the late 1960s and early 1970s we saw a large Sikh population move to our area, and the two temples clearly represent those links in the form of the Shri Guru Ravidass Cultural Association of Erith and

Belvedere and the Guru Nanak Durbar temple in Erith and Belvedere. Clearly, our local community sees those links between Erith and Belvedere as being integral.

Back in 1999 the London Borough of Bexley used some single regeneration budget funds to set up the Belvedere Community Forum. In due course, in about 2005, it became a charity. Its job is to engage and consult with local residents to assist with the regeneration of the area and run community events. In 2014 we signed a 25-year lease to manage Belvedere Community Centre. I have been at meetings with the other trustees this morning. We see our role as absolutely integral to community provision in Belvedere. The proposals in front of you would split Belvedere; equally, the Conservative proposals would split Belvedere. The Labour Party proposals would bring Belvedere together.

The Commission's proposals, by putting Lesnes Abbey into the Woolwich constituency, splits Lesnes Abbey Woods, the park itself and the parts of Belvedere which lie in Lesnes Abbey parliamentary districts 2 and 4 into the Woolwich constituency. The Conservative Party proposals would take Belvedere ward into the Woolwich constituency, but leave the parts of Belvedere which lie in Lesnes Abbey parliamentary district 2, Lesnes Abbey parliamentary district 4, Erith parliamentary district 1, Erith parliamentary district 3 and Northumberland Heath parliamentary district 1 into the Erith and Crayford constituency. While the heart of Belvedere, in what people know as Belvedere village, and the area around Belvedere train station and the former football club ground would be split into the Woolwich constituency, those other parts, such as Lesnes Abbey and Franks Park would be taken into the Erith and Crayford constituency, splitting those long links that Belvedere has. Looking at Belvedere, under whatever guise, whether it is the current Erith and Thamesmead constituency, the previous Erith and Crayford constituency, or even the old Dartford constituency, which Norman Dodds and Margaret Roberts fought, those areas of Belvedere, Erith, Northumberland Heath and the Bostall parts of Lesnes Abbey have always been in the same parliamentary constituency, and people feel they are absolutely part of the same community.

It would split school provision. Trinity school, Belvedere, would be in the Erith and Crayford constituency. The only secondary school in Belvedere would be in the Erith and Crayford constituency, while Belvedere itself would be in the Woolwich constituency. It would split those schools—Belvedere infant school, Belvedere junior school, Lesnes Heath school and the primary school I attended in the Woolwich constituency—whereas much of the school catchment area in the Erith and Northumberland Heath wards would be in the Erith and Crayford constituency.

Then there is the future, which is really important. We are not completely clear whether the Belvedere bridge proposals remain, but, if you look at that map, where the ward boundaries are between Belvedere and Erith wards is exactly where the river crossing between Bexley and Havering would run. That river road crossing and the public inquiries and so on that may follow would be landing on the boundary of two different parliamentary constituencies. We will see Crossrail opening in our borough in two years' time. The borough's agenda is absolutely centred on the extension of Crossrail from Abbey Wood, where it currently is terminating, through

Belvedere, Erith and Slade Green, and we would have that Crossrail alignment route through the borough in two different parliamentary constituencies. Therefore, there is absolutely a reason to keep that riparian area in the same constituency through Thamesmead East, Belvedere, Erith and Slade Green.

The history of that area is industry, but of much more importance is the borough's very clear growth strategy for new housing. The borough plans to build up to 20,000 new homes in the next 10 years. All of those homes are planned for six wards: Thamesmead East, Lesnes Abbey, Belvedere, Erith, North End and Crayford. There is a clear need with that growth agenda and those potential transport improvements—the extension of Crossrail, the Belvedere bridge, the potential DLR extension—for those new homes and the transport links to be in the same parliamentary constituency.

Of those 20,000 homes, 11,000 are planned for Belvedere ward. Belvedere ward is absolutely central. At the heart of that growth strategy. There will be 2,000 homes in the Thamesmead and Abbey Wood area; 11,000 in Belvedere; 2,500 in Erith; 2,000 in Slade Green; and 1,000 in Crayford.

On the Conservative proposals, the Member of Parliament for this constituency would end up with an agenda where he or she predominantly represents wards in the Royal Borough of Greenwich and yet potentially 13,000 of the new 20,000 homes would be in the Woolwich constituency. They would be expected to bang the table with the London Borough of Bexley, around two thirds of the growth strategy being delivered, and yet they would represent predominantly wards in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. It absolutely makes sense, with Belvedere at the heart of those transport improvements, the growth strategy and those new homes, for Belvedere to remain in its historic home alongside Erith, Northumberland Heath and so on.

If you go back to the time before Thamesmead was built, the houses in Lesnes Abbey polling district 1, which have been there since before the war when the gypsy encampments were there, were always in the Erith and Crayford constituency; in fact they were in Belvedere ward at the time of the original 1965 boundaries. The links there are absolutely integral.

I do not want to talk too much about Welling, but clearly there are no new homes planned in the growth strategy for Welling. We have a split borough boundary between Greenwich and Bexley, but to me and the community it makes absolute sense that the link with Belvedere and Erith remains at the heart of the growth strategy. I managed the office of the Member of Parliament for the current Erith and Thamesmead constituency for seven years, and I know the problems of representing two boroughs. I have worked for both John and Teresa and have represented the constituency in two boroughs, but to split that growth strategy between two different MPs makes no sense whatsoever.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification? Thank you very much. Next, we have Mabel Ogundayo. Again, please introduce yourself by way of name and address.

CLLR OGUNDAYO: I am Mabel Ogundayo, 2 Orchard Road, Belvedere, DA17 5BP. I have lived in Belvedere for almost 10 years, but prior to that I lived in Thamesmead East ward which is also the ward I represent in the council. When I first heard about the boundary review I was concerned that the original plan was to split Thamesmead East and Thamesmead Moorings, but, having met the residents and thinking about the links, I figured it was important to keep Thamesmead East within a Bexley constituency. Thamesmead East has a strong voice in Bexley, as well as a strong voice in Greenwich. I would know this. As I said, I lived previously in Thamesmead East. As a young person there I went to school in Belvedere in Bexley. When I had the choice of going to a school in Greenwich or Bexley, the one closest to me was Belvedere Trinity School. I think it is important that when we make decisions we look at where young people attend school. Most of the young people in Thamesmead East attend schools within the Belvedere, Erith and Bexleyheath area. It is important that they still feel part of Bexley and that they are going to a school close to their home, keeping them in a CLP in that way.

Three of my polling districts within Thamesmead East also have DA postcodes, or Erith postcodes themselves. With the current constituency of Erith and Thamesmead residents feel they are part of Bexley as well as Greenwich, but a slight majority of them have DA postcodes. It is important we make sure they still feel they are part of Bexley and that we have a constituency that represents Bexley.

On transport links, I cannot deny that a lot of residents use Abbey Wood, which falls in Greenwich, but a lot of residents also use Belvedere train station. I know this myself because I often find I pick up case work in the morning on the way to work, but it is important to recognise that a lot of residents also use Belvedere and that we keep them there.

The housing agenda has already been mentioned. The constituency makes up a large part of Bexley. The CLP has been very clear and has a good voice in Bexley representing residents. Thamesmead East is currently going through a big growth agenda. A lot more properties are being built. It is important that they have an MP who would have a voice equal to that of other MPs in Bexley.

I would like to remind us all that in the past residents of Thamesmead East and Thamesmead Moorings were given an option. They were consulted on whether to make Thamesmead East one whole area. They decided to keep Thamesmead East within Bexley because they felt that was home. Therefore, if we were to decide on the constituency that represented them most, I would have to say it would be Bexley.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification? Thank you. We will adjourn until four o'clock and see whether any more speakers turn up. We have some booked for later.

Time Noted: 2.51 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 3.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We welcome our next speaker, who is Clive Efford MP. Please come up to the stage and introduce yourself by way of name and address.

MR EFFORD: (MP for Eltham) I am Clive Efford, Member of Parliament for Eltham. I live at 169 Greenvale Road, London SE9 1PG.

Can I begin by welcoming the fact that the Boundary Commission accepted the case made by myself and others back in 2011 in regard to respecting the current eastern boundary of the Eltham constituency, which is long established and readily understood by local people?

I would also like to welcome the proposal to bring Woolwich Common into Eltham constituency. That ward includes many areas like the Woolwich Common and Barnfield estates which have been included in Eltham constituency in the past.

The Commission will remember that their initial proposals five years ago included bringing in two wards from Bexley, Falconwood and Welling and Blackfen and Lamorbey into the Eltham constituency. These proposals drew unanimous opposition from a wide range of local community groups. I know that some of them will be making representations again, most notably the South Greenwich Forum and the Eltham Society. They also drew widespread opposition from local Conservative Members of Parliament. David Evenett and James Brokenshire were quoted in the local *News Shopper* newspaper as saying, "We are very disappointed with the Boundary Commission's proposals for Bexley and are concerned about the unnecessary division of local communities."

I am, therefore, concerned that the Liberal Democrats in particular and possibly others are still proposing to change this eastern border. In contrast to the current boundaries, the changes would be confusing and pay no respect to local communities. If the Liberal Democrats' proposals were adopted, it would result in people living on the edge of Greenwich town centre in Blackheath Westcombe ward being in the same constituency with people in Kent in Danson Park. There is no coherence or logic to a constituency that stretches so far and combines communities that are so far distant from one another.

The borough boundary at the eastern side of Shooters Hill ward is another easily understood and clear boundary marked by Oxleas ancient woodland and other open spaces.

In regard to Woolwich Common, I welcome the proposal to bring the ward into the Eltham constituency. The Barnfield estate and the areas surrounding it were part of my constituency until the 2010 election, and the Woolwich Common estate was also

part of Eltham constituency in 1997. There are many connections between this ward and Eltham, including extensive bus connections and roads. Making the B210 the northern boundary of the constituency would mean that the more messy and less understood boundary between Shooters Hill ward and Woolwich Common ward would no longer be a parliamentary boundary. Currently, having the boundary divide roads like Ripon Road and Genesta Road continues to cause confusion in the minds of constituents. The B210 would make a much more understandable and coherent border.

The new north-west boundary of Woolwich Common ward to the north and west is formed by the Royal Artillery barracks, Woolwich Common and Queen Elizabeth Hospital respectively. This means the communities either side of these areas are separated by wide open spaces, making this an extremely logical location for the constituency boundary. Likewise, I welcome the Commission's recognition that the A102 is an easily understood constituency boundary between Blackheath Westcombe ward and Kidbrooke with Hornfair and Charlton wards on the eastern side.

I have also seen proposals to remove Kidbrooke with Hornfair ward from Eltham. This would result in the constituency boundary running along the centre of Bournbrook Road on the Brook estate, with one set of residents with even numbers on one side but remaining in Eltham while residents on the other side of the road would be in another constituency along with the residents of the Brook estate. This will be confusing to local people who understandably expect that the Brook estate would be represented by the same MP.

I welcome the Commission's proposals for the Eltham constituency; they reflect the strong arguments made during the previous inquiry in favour of keeping the existing historic boundary between the distinct communities of Greenwich and Bexley in the east and Lewisham to the west. Extending the constituency to the north meets the requirement to minimise constituencies that extend across borough boundaries. The Eltham constituency was known formerly as Woolwich West, and that was its name when my predecessor was first elected in 1975. Many parts of Woolwich Common ward were in Woolwich West and part of the Eltham constituency that existed before the current constituency's boundaries came into force in the 2010 general election. Therefore, overall I am strongly in favour of the recommendations put forward by the Commission, and I strongly recommend that you continue with the proposed boundaries as you have drawn them.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is most helpful. Are there any observations or comments? In that case, thank you very much indeed. Our next speaker is scheduled to appear at 4.40 pm. I suggest that we reassemble briefly at four o'clock to see whether any further people arrive who wish to speak.

Time Noted: 3.08 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 4.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, it is four o'clock. We are reconvening. I am afraid no more speakers have turned up in the slot. We still have our two timed speakers at 4.40 and 4.50. I suggest we adjourn until 4.40.

Time Noted: 4.01 pm

After a short break

Time Noted: 4.40 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We can reconvene now. We have two speakers. First, we will take Andrew Wolckenhaar. Is that right? Start by stating your name and address.

MR WOLCKENHAAR: My name is Andrew Wolckenhaar. I live at 131 Congreve Road, Eltham, SE9 1LL. I was meant to be coming here with somebody else. However, the plan slightly fell apart, so I will raise a few key issues. The reason I am here is: what could the Boundary Commission changes mean to young people? In school we are taught about how democratic things should be and the number of MPs. The key issue we had was: how many MPs should there be to represent us? What is the ideal number that could give us the best representation? That was what we were going to go on about. However, unfortunately, that did not quite take off. How many MPs do we need to represent us? That was a core point? There was a slight issue on that front.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You have seen the Boundary Commission proposals for a constituency of between 72,000 and 78,000. You understand the rationale behind that.

MR WOLCKENHAAR: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is your question to do with whether that enumeration is wrong?

MR WOLCKENHAAR: The question is: how will it affect general working? That was what it was. Are we going to lose representation through the increasing size of boundaries? That was the core question.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In essence, although there is a reduction in the number of MPs you get greater equality in the number of electors in each constituency. That is the thinking behind it. Have you had an opportunity to read through the proposals for London?

MR WOLCKENHAAR: Unfortunately, I only had regard to it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine. As I said to you before, the actual consultation is open until 5 December, so by all means take some time to

discuss it with your colleagues, read it through and then write in, because you can make written submissions and submit them.

MR WOLCKENHAAR: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We come to the next speaker? Can you introduce yourself by name and address before you speak?

CLLR WELLS: I am Cllr Stephen Wells from the London Borough of Bromley. My address is 89D Albemarle Road, Beckenham, BR3 5HP. I also happen to be the chairman of Beckenham Conservative Association.

It is my intention essentially to endorse the proposals made by the Boundary Commission in regard to the proposed boundaries for the new Beckenham constituency. We have held an executive meeting of the Beckenham Association in the past few days, at which the remarks I intend to make now have been sanctioned by that body by unanimous vote.

We are currently entirely happy with the proposals of the Boundary Commission for the new Beckenham constituency. We can see the arguments for community coming into the process. If we hark back far enough, we can see previous constituency boundaries which included a number of wards that it is proposed should come back to us and those that we are due to relinquish to Bromley and Chislehurst constituency.

The general opinion at the moment of the membership of the Beckenham Association is that we are entirely satisfied with the proposals put forward by the Commission, and we very much look forward to fighting the new Beckenham seat for the Conservatives.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any matters for clarification?

CLLR GARDNER: Mr Wells made the point that it is similar to the old constituency, pre-Lewisham West and Penge presumably.

CLLR WELLS: I was thinking further back than that to the days of the Ravensbourne constituency.

CLLR GARDNER: With his long knowledge, can he think of a time when Shirley ward and that area in Croydon—the old Surrey—had been included in a Beckenham constituency?

CLLR WELLS: It was never included in the Beckenham constituency but in a constituency called Ravensbourne, which included the Shirley ward together with West Wickham and, I believe, parts of Hayes and Coney Hall, as they then were. That was part of what was called the Ravensbourne constituency at the time—hence the community link particularly between West Wickham and Shirley. They interrelate quite closely.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

That being the last scheduled speaker, we can, perhaps with a sense of euphoria, close the proceedings. Travel well. We will see some of you in Harrow on Monday.

A

CLLR ALLEN, 12

B

CLLR BONAVIA, 10
MR JAMES BROKENSHERE MP, 25, 28

D

CLLR DEADMAN, 15, 17
CLLR DUNN, 13

E

MR CLIVE EFFORD MP, 34

F

CLLR FRANCIS, 30
CLLR FRASER, 14, 15

G

CLLR GARDNER, 6, 10, 24, 28, 37

L

CLLR LEAF, 19, 23, 24

O

CLLR OGUNDAYO, 33

R

DR RENNIE, 2, 3, 5

S

DR SPENCER, 3
MR BOB STEWART MP, 4, 5

T

MR TESSIER, 2
THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35,
36, 37, 38

W

CLLR WELLS, 37
MR WHITE, 17
CLLR WILKINS, 29
MR WOLCKENHAAR, 36, 37

