

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL, MAIDSTONE, KENT, ME14 1XQ

ON

FRIDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY TWO

Before:

Mr Colin Byrne, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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83 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0HW
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Time Noted: 9.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Good morning again, welcome to Maidstone and to the second day of our hearing here in Maidstone. My name is Colin Byrne, I am the Assistant Commissioner chairing these hearings and also with two other commissioners responsible for reviewing all the responses to the Boundary Commission's initial proposals and recommending any changes that might need to be made.

The way it works is everything is recorded and videoed for the purpose of public record and they will be transcribed and put on the internet in due course so that people can comment in the second stage of the consultation process on what everybody has said in response to the initial proposals.

When it is your slot you come up to the lectern, you say who you are and what address you are, that is for the public record, then you have ten minutes to make whatever representations you want. At the end of the ten minutes we may ask you for any points of clarification or, indeed, members of the audience if there were many of them, could ask you for points of clarification but it is not meant to be a debate, it is just meant if you said something that somebody does not understand then they can ask you to amplify it.

The first speaker is due at 9.10 but if you want to start earlier that is fine by us or if you prefer you can wait, it is entirely up to you.

MRS BRIGITA AMEY: Good morning. I am Brigita Amey, 14 Magdalen Close, Hempstead, ME7 3TA and I am in the constituency of Gillingham and Rainham. I am speaking here in support of the Boundary Commission's proposals.

The purpose of the Boundary Commission's proposals are twofold. One is to equalise the value of votes so that each person's vote is broadly equivalent to each other's and the other is to reduce the number of MPs and therefore to reduce the cost of government. I am pleased to say that this proposal achieves both with minimal disruption to our constituency by keeping the changes within the unitary authority of Medway and therefore they can be easily absorbed by us.

The Conservative Party has already spoken in support of these proposals and I have consulted with my colleagues and with councillors in the Association; they, too, are supportive and we have passed this on to the party centrally. There are common links between us and the neighbouring ward which is due to be transferred to us, or proposed to be transferred to us. The most common is the Capstone Valley. This is contentious and over the previous 20 years there have been assaults by various developers who wish to build anything from 10,250 houses across the valley to a more modest proposal recently of 250 houses. This is the only green area in a heavily built-up area and is of great value to the local people, therefore we have constantly made common cause and joint presentations to oppose the development. By bringing the two wards together under

one MP it will be easier to co-ordinate and to continue in protecting this valued part of our heritage.

Lordswood and Capstone have two large business parks which are of enormous importance to us and something that we cannot replicate in our own part of the constituency. These are used by people from Gillingham and provide valuable assets and facilities for them. They also have a number of social and hobby groups including groups like the WI that cross across both constituencies and we are also in the same parish which is the parish of South Gillingham so we also bring together across parish boundaries.

Finally, although I fought against the proposal in 2011 and I was really pleased that the Boundary Commission took into account our opposition, I am equally pleased that on this occasion they seem to have remembered what we did last time and put together a proposal that we can all support. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I will just ask: does any member of the audience have a point of clarification that they want to ask our speaker? No. Thank you very much indeed.

MRS BRIGITA AMEY: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker, then, is Mr John Amey.

MR JOHN AMEY: Thank you. Good morning. My name is John Amey, I am the Deputy Chairman of the Gillingham and Rainham Conservative Association. My address is 14 Magdalen Close, Hempstead, Kent.

I am here simply to support the Boundary Commission proposals for the Gillingham and Rainham Constituency. There is no perfect fit in finding the additional number of electors needed to meet the government's required numbers of voters in our constituency. By this I mean there is no conveniently whole ward containing only voters living in Gillingham and Rainham because they are already within our constituency. The Boundary Commission's proposals to transfer the Lordswood and Capstone ward from the existing Chatham and Aylesford constituency into Gillingham and Rainham is the most straightforward option available; the proposals cause minimal disruption to the constituency boundaries within the Medway unitary area.

I would think that Lordswood and Capstone ward was itself originally created as a compromise solution in order to meet some previous numerical requirement because it has within its borders voters who live within both the old Gillingham and Chatham borough boundaries. It straddles an area of open countryside, Capstone Valley, with Lordswood situated on the western side of the valley and Capstone on the eastern side. Capstone is a long and fairly narrow stretch of land which is adjacent to Hempstead which is part of

Gillingham and Rainham. The boundary of the two, Hempstead and Wigmore and Lordswood and Capstone wards meanders along Capstone Road with no visible logic discernible for its twists and turns. Without a ward map or local knowledge it is impossible to know which house is in which ward as the boundary wanders back and forth across the road, nor indeed within which constituency as this is also the constituency boundary.

The Boundary Commission's proposal will, if nothing else, have the merit of rationalising this confusing situation, everyone's neighbour will be within the Gillingham and Rainham constituency. This, of course, has the merit of recognising them as a single community bringing them together with other voters on their side of the valley.

The situation in Lordswood is not so straightforward. Moving Lordswood into Gillingham and Rainham is the compromise required to get the numbers right that I mentioned earlier. It cannot be denied that Lordswood is part of Chatham, albeit on its outer edge and near to Gillingham and Rainham's Hempstead. However, given that Lordswood is next to Hempstead there are of course matters of commonality and mutual interest between these two communities. They are both next to Capstone Valley. This is green, mostly agricultural land, which developers have for many years tried to obtain planning permission to build a large number of houses on. Both communities are in common cause to try and prevent this happening. Lordswood and Hempstead look at each other across the valley and wish to be able to continue doing so.

Both communities travel along each other's roads and have common cause in trying to improve the Westfield Sole Road that connects us. Unfortunately, although both Lordswood and Hempstead come within the boundaries of the Medway Unitary Authority, Westfield Sole Road is across the border in Maidstone Borough Council and thus Kent County Council, neither of whom seem to be very interested in spending money to improve the infrastructure in this distant part of their area even though they have allowed two small business parks to be built along it. Westfield Sole Road is a heavily used narrow country lane which impossibly now has lorries on it serving two new business premises.

Lordswood comes within the boundary of the Medway Unitary Authority. By joining Gillingham and Rainham they will become part of a constituency whose voters are all Medway Council ratepayers; this is not their situation at present. Chatham and Aylesford constituency, which includes ratepayers in Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Medway councils and Kent County Council. Lordswood constituents will no longer be part of a constituency that may be distracted by the concerns of other councils.

I strongly support the Boundary Commission in their proposal to transfer Lordswood and Capstone into our Gillingham and Rainham constituency and I hope I have been able to add a little local knowledge to help encourage the Commission not to be diverted from its plan. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Would anybody like to ask a point of clarification.

CLLR MAPLE: Can I just ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Hold on. You will have to speak into the microphone.

CLLR MAPLE: Why the microphone?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Everything is being recorded and you need to give your name and address.

CLLR MAPLE: (Chatham Central) Very happy to do so, thank you. My name is Vince Maple, I live at 29 Chalkpit Hill. The point of clarification – obviously I will speak in more detail later on – the point of clarification was around Chatham and Aylesford currently I believe only has Chatham residents who live in the Medway boundary and Tonbridge and Malling, I do not believe they have any Maidstone Borough Council areas within them. There are other parts of the surrounding areas which are Maidstone Borough Council but Chatham and Aylesford solely has Medway and Tonbridge and Malling at the moment, just for that clarification. I think that is a slight inaccuracy which is easily done because it is a complex area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you want to respond to that?

MR JOHN AMEY: Thank you very much. Vince, you may well be right, I accept what you say, but I do not think it changes the point that I am making at all.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just for clarity, the Boundary Commission's proposal for Chatham and Malling's constituency contains wards from Medway and Tonbridge and Malling.

MR JOHN AMEY: Thank you, I stand corrected.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much indeed. Our next speaker is Mr Michael Payne.

MR PAYNE: Good morning, Chairman. I am Michael Payne and I live at 37 Maltings Close, Hadlow, Tonbridge, TN11 0EQ. I am the Chairman of Tonbridge and Malling Conservative Association.

I wrote on 13 September to object to the initial proposal for the parliamentary constituency of Tonbridge and The Weald in the South East region made by the Boundary Commission

for England and I made this objection based both upon the suggested wards to be included and the proposed name for the constituency.

The impact of the BCE proposal on Tonbridge and Malling. Under the proposal the eastern end of the existing constituency is transferred to Tunbridge Wells. This comprises five wards in the Sevenoaks South Division, including the town of Edenbridge. Also under the BCE proposals the wards, including the Mallings to the west of Tonbridge, are transferred to Chatham. In their place wards from the south and east of Maidstone are transferred to Tonbridge. The net effect of these proposals is to move the centre of the constituency from west to east. The proposed constituency takes little account of the continuation of the historic community of Tonbridge and Malling or its geographical links, transport connections and the impact that this has where people work, where children go to school. Indeed, by the Boundary Commission's own admission the existing Tonbridge and Malling constituency has been significantly reconfigured due to the changes elsewhere.

Turning to the considerations: whilst we understand the suggestion to link together communities in the Low Weald along the River Medway, we feel that those villages to the east of Maidstone have very little in common with the town of Tonbridge either historically or geographically. Certainly wards such as North Downs and Leeds have no special affinity to the town of Tonbridge over Maidstone and major transport links from east to west within that part of the proposed constituency are effectively non-existent. Moreover, local ties would be broken by these changes in constituencies. Furthermore, the shape and accessibility of the constituency should also be taken into consideration by the Commission.

Turning to the proposed constituency wards: we believe that the wards of Leeds and North Downs should be returned to Maidstone from Tonbridge and in exchange Borough Green and Long Mill together with Downs and Mereworth should be returned to Tonbridge from Sevenoaks. The result of these changes would restore local ties between Borough Green and Long Mill together with Downs and Mereworth with the town of Tonbridge. Similarly, it would restore local ties between Leeds and North Downs Wards with the town of Maidstone from which they are divided by the Commission's proposal.

Accordingly, we support the Conservative Party proposal for the wards in our constituency as we believe this is an improvement on the Boundary Commission England proposal.

I turn now to the proposed constituency name change. We believe that the new constituency should simply be called Tonbridge rather than Tonbridge and The Weald. The reason for this are threefold. Firstly, historic. The Lowy of Tonbridge was created back in Norman times with the building of the castle to defend the crossing of the River Medway. It remained one of the Hundreds of Kent and within the Lathe of Aylesford from medieval times. Secondly, geographical. The Low Weald extends around the High Weald beyond the proposed constituency. Accordingly, it is an anomaly and a misleading

term. Thirdly, future proofing. Under the proposed future reviews there may well be even further changes to constituencies in the region depending on population growth and migration. Accordingly, it makes sense to simplify constituency name at this juncture.

In conclusion, we believe that in taking a realistic and pragmatic approach to communities and their relationships – and we wish to work with the Boundary Commission to achieve these aims by 2018 – hence we believe that this proposal makes a better case for some of the local ties and special geographical considerations affecting some of the communities served by Tonbridge and Maidstone.

Finally, I reserve the right to comment on all other representations once they have been published next spring. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Would anybody like to ask a point of clarification? No. Thank you very much for coming in and making that presentation.

Our next speaker is Mr Henry Rayner. Just to recap, you come up to the lectern, everything is being recorded and videoed for the public record and a transcript will be made in due course. You should start by saying who you are and where you live, then you have ten minutes to make your presentation and should anybody want a point of clarification they can ask you at the end.

MR RAYNER: Good morning. My name is Henry Rayner, known as 'Harry'. I am from Borough Green Road, Wrotham. I am going to make this really short. I support the proposals put forward by the previous speaker but with particular reference to the boundary amendments put forward by the Conservative Party in the way of Borough Green and Long Mill remaining with Tonbridge, the Tonbridge constituency, and the ward of Wrotham, Ightham and Stansted remaining with the boundary proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission, the initial proposals for that particular ward to be transferred to Sevenoaks because that is the direction in which it looks to for most of its commercial and other related transactions and is also well supported by the road network in that direction in preference to the existing arrangements with Tonbridge.

There is nothing more that I would wish to add at this stage other than to be able to reserve the position for the final proposals coming forward in the spring of next year. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Anybody got any points? No. Okay, thank you very much indeed.

Our next speaker I think is not here yet. We are running a little ahead of time due to the brevity of our speakers which is much to be admired. We do have two speakers from

much later on; I can give you the choice if you so desire to speak now or if you prefer to wait until your slot.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I shall pause until later.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is fine. Then since we do not have another speaker we will adjourn until ten to ten. We will resume at ten to ten. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 9.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Shall we resume since it is now 9.50. Mrs Sue Alexander. If you would come to the lectern and just say who you are and the address for the record because everything is being recorded, then you have ten minutes to make your presentation.

MRS ALEXANDER: Hi. My name is Sue Alexander, I live at 3 Albion Road, Lordswood, Chatham, Kent, ME5 8SS. I have owned a property via mortgage or shared ownership in Lordswood since February 1980, hence I feel that I have a fair knowledge of the area.

The major points I would like to make are: one, Lordswood has no connection with Gillingham; and, two, Lordswood, Walderslade and Princes Park are very much intertwined. First, the Boundary Commission plans to put Lordswood in with Gillingham and in all the years I have been in Lordswood there has never been a link with Gillingham; there are no buses to Gillingham and those children from Lordswood never get into Gillingham schools even though some have fought hard on appeal. Gillingham shops are too far away and we have better closer. In fact, once I ordered a bed from a shop in Gillingham and was told that there would be a delivery charge as Lordswood was not local. Even parking in Gillingham is a non-starter because many roads require a Gillingham resident's parking permit and Lordswood does not qualify.

Secondly, Lordswood is very much linked with the surrounding wards, Walderslade and Princes Park. There is no supermarket in Lordswood, just a couple of handy stores and takeaways, consequently people shop at the nearest supermarket which is Morrison's in Princes Park. Here the parking is free and there is a bus stop outside where the bus to Lordswood stops. It is a five to ten-minute trip on the bus so very convenient for people in Lordswood. In good weather people walk through to a footpath to Hempstead Valley shopping centre but this takes longer and unless people have cars they rely on Princes Park.

Then there are the doctors. Lordswood Health Centre has been built in a pedestrianised area. Once in the building it is a long walk to get to the reception desk, it is far too far for

many disabled people to walk. There are a couple of disabled parking bays at the back of the building, but they fill very quickly, and I was round there this morning and there is actually a skip in one of those bays, so people use the main surgery which is in Walderslade village. If we are cut off from Walderslade we are cut off from our doctors as well.

Another point is the senior school. Those which have not passed the 11-plus go to Ely Greenacre, which is the boys, or Walderslade for girls, which are both in Walderslade and within walking distance of Lordswood. Those who do not want these schools catch a school bus to Aylesford; as mentioned previously, they cannot get into Gillingham schools.

I feel very concerned that, by moving the boundary, it would exclude Lordswood from any real say in their local facilities and I therefore ask that the Boundary Commission to consider leaving Lordswood, Walderslade and Princes Park in the same constituency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anybody have any points of clarification? No. Thank you very much indeed.

MRS ALEXANDER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is Mr Derek Munton.

MR MUNTON: Thank you for letting me speak, Mr Chairman. I would like to say first of all I think we are all here today and we all ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you just give us your name and address.

MR MUNTON: I am terribly sorry. My name is Derek Munton, I live at 318 City Way, Rochester.

We stand, I think, in awe of the Boundary Commission when we realise when they were looking at the issue in front of them they had 501 constituencies and the arithmetic had to work out such that there were 70,100 at the least and roughly 78,500 at the most so to go across the whole of the country and look at all the constituencies in that way is quite an achievement, bearing in mind of course the constraints they have trying to keep things within local authorities as far as possible so that some of the boundaries can be coterminous and trying to keep within wards so we do not split wards across the country. Taking all that into mind that is quite a thing to do and it is done in an office somewhere I suppose in the depths of Whitehall, but we live in these areas so we have to now say what are the social and economic realities of the places that we live in? Arithmetic does not solve all our problems.

We also have to think about the MPs who are representing these different areas and we have to consider the work that they are doing in representing us and if that becomes difficult because of the nature of the constituency then perhaps we have to look at some of those constituencies again.

I just make a few points, Mr Chairman. The first is that, when we look at the three constituencies that we have suggested, I see that, taken from the Boundary Commission's recommendations, the constituency that they refer to as 'Chatham and the Mallings' constituency, the wards of Wateringbury and East Malling, these are, as I heard someone this morning talking about, the Garden of England. These are the Garden of England, people take coach trips around East Malling and Wateringbury in the spring to look at the apple blossom. HE Bates would have recognised this as the sort of place he was writing about when he wrote about the *Darling Buds of May* and it has not changed all that much. Combining that with inner Chatham where a house that Dickens lived in as a boy still remains, surrounded by mean back streets that Dickens would have recognised, it makes it very, very difficult for any representative who is trying to represent both these places; they have, Mr Chairman, quite frankly, nothing in common.

Chatham is part of an industrial area that is the core of the Medway towns. The Medway towns is one of those places like Tyneside that people recognise. If you go to other parts of the country and say I come from Medway, the Medway towns, people know what you are talking about, it is a place that does have an identity. I think we should be conscious of that. There is in Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham a local authority which is the Medway authority and it works very hard to promote the idea of Medway. It has tried very hard to get Medway designated as a city. Rochester used to be a city and that, we feel, should be transferred to the Medway sub-region.

If you look perhaps at the history, traditions, the naval, military traditions, industrial history, the social history of this area then there is this core that is clearly an identifiable area, an identifiable urban area and I think we should try to keep that urban area as much as possible into one area. I would refer to the last Boundary Commission who in fact were persuaded in their recommendations that there would be a constituency that be called Rochester and Chatham. This emphasises what we feel about Medway.

When you look at the transport patterns in the south east one of the main roads from London to the coast, the main road from London to Canterbury, the main road from London to Dover, a road that was originally set by the Romans, it is a matter of history, a matter of people understanding their history. It is a straight line as far as possible, the A2 and the A2 runs through the centre of the Medway towns. One of the reasons that the Medway towns exist and houses factories, industry have built up around the A2 and of course the main bus routes are on the A2 and along the Medway.

The history of the Medway towns is based on heavy industry. We have had the Brannocks an earth moving firm, an earth moving machinery firm, who made steam

rollers, earth movers; we have had the dockyard itself of course, the Chatham dockyard based very much on the borders with Gillingham; Alloy Wheels, Instro, Metal Box. We have had Short Brothers, very important engineering firms. It is an industrial area, it clings together. I think in any consideration of the whole urban area of Medway we should be trying to create constituencies that represent this, trying to provide constituencies that hang together quite normally.

Any representative who is taking on the Medway towns has a job that is made easier if all of the constituent wards are—has a much easier task if the wards have similar backgrounds. It is not just history that decides what a place should be and Medway has got more than history it is regenerating and has been regenerating itself since certainly the early nineties. Once Medway had recovered from the shock of the dockyard closing and the collapse of the engineering industries the regeneration started apace. Some of the major developments have been in Gillingham where a lot of the houses have been pulled down, large factories have gone, large tracts of land have been made available. The Riverside in Rochester: the regeneration of the Medway towns, using very best practice of the old industrial derelict sites, military installations, is one of the most thoroughgoing urban renaissances in Kent. Rochester Riverside is the next area to be developed and that is going to consolidate dwellings in the centre of Rochester.

Without digging any further into the naval and military history of the place, it is a place, it has a sense of place and that should be reflected in the constituencies that you are looking at. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. It is the third time I have heard about Charles Dickens, first in Portsmouth where the Charles Dickens Ward is prominent in the Boundary Commission's proposals; secondly, yesterday we heard ---

MR MUNTON: He had an opinion of politics which you know. I am sorry.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Secondly, we heard about Higham, I think it was, and today about Chatham so he is obviously having a big influence on the Boundary Commission's work. Anyway, thank you for your presentation. Does anybody have any points of clarification they wish to raise? No.

MR MUNTON: I am sorry, Mr Chairman, if you would indulge me a little. One of my other attributes, apart from being a citizen, is I am Chairman of the Medway Pensioners Forum. 141 pensioners receive a newsletter once a month and we meet once a month to hear interesting talks from local people, local governors. 141 members. All of them, Mr Chairman, live in Medway. They do not have to live in Medway, we are quite happy to have people from Sittingbourne or indeed from Watlingbury that they live in, they naturally cling together, and when I look at all their addresses, Mr Chairman, ME5, ME8, ME1, ME2, we have got one member from Herne Bay. This is the way things are in the Medway towns, people tend to cling together and see themselves as a constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. The next speaker who is not due to speak until 11 o'clock, Mr Geoffrey Harvey, if you wish you could speak now.

MR HARVEY: (Faversham and Mid Kent CCLP) Yes. Okay, right, thanks. My name is Geoff Harvey, I live in 35 Sutton Road, Maidstone, or maybe I should say Faversham. I am the Vice Chairman of Faversham and Mid Kent Constituency Labour Party and I am representing the members of Faversham and Mid Kent CCLP.

I am going to expand on the document which I sent before which was document BCE2000 and I have given to your lady at reception in fact a slightly modified version because I had two spelling mistakes, that is all the change.

I have two proposals. The first proposal is that the new proposed Maidstone constituency should include Park Wood. The second proposal is that we should change the names of both the new constituencies which relate to Faversham and Mid Kent.

The first thing is that the proposed Maidstone constituency is in fact essentially all the urban wards of Maidstone Borough Council except for the fact that there is one missing and that is Park Wood. If you actually look at the map, you can see obviously the urban wards are a very small area and the rural ones are a larger area, so what I propose is that Park Wood should go into Maidstone and to balance it the Barming and Detling and Thurnham should go into the new Tonbridge and The Weald constituency. The reason for that is, as I say, Park Wood is an urban ward. There is in fact a group of three former Council wards in that area; one is Shepway, the other is Senacre which in fact is part of Shepway South and the second set is Park Wood. They share everything, they share the senior school, they share the supermarket, they share the Surestart. In fact, as well as that, Park Wood is one and a half miles south of Maidstone. It is one of the most deprived areas of Maidstone, it has got the reputation for being a rather poor area so they are rather dependent on public transport; in fact, they are so dependent on it that bus intervals are every eight minutes to the town centre of Maidstone. It is eight minutes on the 82 bus and eight minutes on the 85 bus and that is the way to get to Maidstone. There is no link to Tonbridge at all, Tonbridge is 17 miles away, there is no social link and there is no transport link.

If you move Park Wood into the proposed Maidstone constituency you then end up with having to balance the numbers. Barming is an easy one, really, because Barming is to the west of Maidstone, it is actually on the Tonbridge road. It is a rural ward and as well as being on the Tonbridge road there are direct links to Tonbridge by train on the Medway Valley line and it also has a bus which goes there, the number 7 bus goes there about every 20 minutes, so that makes sense. Also, looking at the map as proposed, it fits in quite nicely to the west of Maidstone into this new area which is Tonbridge and The Weald. Detling and Thurnham is more difficult to justify. Detling and Thurnham, if you

look there that is south, Detling and Thurnham is over there to the north east and Tonbridge is 17 miles down there to the south west. What is in common? Absolutely nothing. The only thing you can say for it is it is a rural ward and the geographical situation if you look at the map it actually fits in the corner of the map as well, so in that respect it makes sense, but, besides that, it does not make any more sense, it makes no more or less sense than the North Downs or Lenham or Harrietsham, all those over there. That is my second point, really.

I think the first point is fairly easy to justify. As I say, move Park Wood into Maidstone – I will just do the figures, actually. What will happen then is if you do that change it will reduce Maidstone to 71,178 which is above the minimum and it will increase Tonbridge and The Weald to 71,681 which is way below the maximum so it still balances in numbers.

I would like, really, to talk about the second proposal which is the change of name. My proposal is that the Maidstone constituency should be named either 'Urban Maidstone' or 'Maidstone Town', and that the proposed Tonbridge and The Weald constituency should be named 'Rural Maidstone and Tonbridge'. The reason is that, once you end up moving Park Wood, which is an urban ward, into the proposed Maidstone area, then you end up with the whole of the urban part of Maidstone with a few rural ones to the north, so you end up with the urban Maidstone, if you are going to put Maidstone first then call it 'Maidstone Town' and, if you end up with the other one which is Tonbridge, at the moment it is called 'Tonbridge and The Weald'. Where the - sorry, I have to be polite - where is The Weald? Effectively what it ends up with is every single ward within the Tonbridge and The Weald, which is not in fact Tonbridge itself, which is part of Tonbridge and Malling, it is in fact part of the Maidstone Borough Council wards. At the moment with the current proposal, you end up with 11 of the 26 wards of Maidstone Borough is in fact this place called Tonbridge and something else. If you actually move Park Wood into Urban Maidstone you end up with 12 of these rural wards, so you end up with 12 rural wards in this place called 'The Weald' and at the moment, with the current proposal, you end up with 52 per cent of the electorate in Maidstone Borough Council wards, so we end up with 52 per cent and 48 per cent, or I have heard that number before somewhere. Anyway, we end up with 37,148 who will be in Tonbridge wards, which will be the Maidstone wards, whereas it will be 54,427 which will be in the Tonbridge wards. Again the obvious thing to do is call it 'Rural Maidstone and Tonbridge' because the numbers – of course, if you want to be critical, you can maybe call it 'Tonbridge and Rural Maidstone', end up with calling it that.

I would like to just give you some background of where we are at the moment because, as I say, Faversham and Mid Kent is one of the constituencies which is going to disappear; we have been in it for some considerable time, we are quite glad to see it go, it is an absolute disaster. It runs from the eastern wards of Maidstone Borough Council which is down to Headcorn. To get to Headcorn to Maidstone is eleven miles, to get from Maidstone up to Faversham is another 17 miles. When we have Labour Party meetings, you cannot get there by public transport so you have to drive. If you are going to have

meetings in Faversham or in Maidstone, when you go to Faversham you have to drive for three-quarters of an hour up and over the North Downs and anybody who has not got a car needs to cadge a lift so depending on charity to get there; as you can imagine, our meetings are busy. At the moment we have 13 of the 26 wards in this place called Mid Kent, wherever Mid Kent is. I live in a place called Shepway North and I am within a mile of Maidstone town centre, I can actually see it from my window yet we are in Faversham. That is a common situation so we will be quite glad to end up with some changes, but the argument is that Faversham can be cannibalised: the Faversham part be absorbed into the Canterbury constituency and renamed Canterbury and Faversham, the Maidstone half of Faversham can be split and half absorbed into a remodelled Maidstone and The Weald and renamed simply Maidstone, the other half be absorbed into a remodelled Tonbridge constituency and named Tonbridge and The Weald. All of the urban wards would be in the new Maidstone one except for Park Wood as mentioned before and all the wards there.

I then talk about the view of the Faversham and Mid Kent constituency Labour Party. Point one is all members are pleased that Mid Kent is disappearing because it is such a mess. Going back 15 years or so I went to a meeting similar to this in Ashford and at that point I suggested that we should change the name, we should change the name because we have got 13 wards within Maidstone and 13 wards within Mid Kent, we should call it Maidstone West and we should call the other one Maidstone East and Faversham because that made sense. Again the electorate in the Maidstone Borough wards in Faversham and Mid Kent were more than 50 per cent of the actual members there so it made that much sense there.

The Faversham part of Faversham and Mid Kent are happy with life because they are going to be linked in with Canterbury and retain their name; geographically it makes sense there. The seven wards of Mid Kent within the proposed Tonbridge and The Weald are most unhappy because most of them are to the east of Maidstone and they are going to be moved... The centre of power in Faversham has now moved 26 miles to the west and it has narrowed the centre of power in Tonbridge, so we end up with all those ones who are unhappy. The ones to the west of the Faversham and Mid Kent CLP are a little bit happier because some of those in fact have got some more links to that way; in fact some have got a train link to Tonbridge and some of the ones which are currently in the Maidstone and The Weald which will end up being in Tonbridge and The Weald also probably should be happier, I cannot speak for those, because they again have got the transport links to Tonbridge. The ones which are to the east of Maidstone and the north of Maidstone, things like North Weald, for instance, how is North Weald anywhere to do with - sorry, sir, but how is North Downs to do with The Weald because it is not even The Weald? So we end up with people unhappy with what is going on. One of the best solutions to that is to change the name again.

Now I want to go and talk about what happened ten or 15 years ago. I went to the meeting in Ashford and this is the result of it. This is the fifth periodical report and what it says I

will quote chapter and verse. On page 348, paragraph 29, it said there was universal support for the change of Maidstone and The Weald into Maidstone East and Faversham CC, because when they say universal support the meeting was not like this, the meeting was sort of a more one-off meeting and we had representatives of all the major parties there. When I proposed these changes the Chairman asked everybody who was happy about it and the Labour Party, Conservative Party, Lib Dems were all happy, that is why it says universal support for this, so we ended up with the Assistant Commissioner proposing that, page 349, paragraph 33, "to avoid confusion, Maidstone and west of The Weald should become Maidstone West". Effectively, the situation is that we have two MPs in Maidstone, we have the one which is Maidstone and The Weald and the one which is in Faversham and Mid Kent, and what we need to do is we need to end up with knowing that there are two MPs for that and the only way to do that is to ensure that everybody knows there are two MPs for Maidstone, so you need to name Maidstone twice.

When you get to the final report of this, page 351, paragraph 46, the Commission said, "We reject the recommendation because they are only slight changes. We were not changing the name because of the future, we were changing the name because of the past". We had already had 15 years of nobody knowing where Mid Kent was, nobody knowing there were two MPs for Maidstone and some of the results were quite dramatic. I call it unquantifiable damage because you cannot prove what would happen otherwise.

We have the high-speed rail link. The high-speed rail link goes straight through, no, sorry, it does not go straight through Maidstone, it goes within one mile of Maidstone town centre, but it goes in fact through Faversham and Mid Kent. If you want to get on to the high-speed rail link now, you need to get on the train for half an hour to go up to Strood and get the high-speed rail link. You can actually wave at it as it goes through Maidstone, we missed a point there. If you come to Maidstone now, you will notice where they are digging up the roads in the town centre again. That is because once again they are trying to sort out the north-south transport. All this transport for the south of Maidstone goes straight through the middle of Maidstone and in 1990 we ended up with designing the thing called the Leeds-Langley by-pass. That is in 1990. We now have the situation where we had money for it then, we have not got any money for it now and, surprise, surprise, this Langley by-pass goes through Faversham and Mid Kent.

Do you also know that the police headquarters is in Faversham? In the future it will be in Tonbridge. It happens to be one and a half miles south there. We have also got Leeds Castle in Faversham and in future it will be in Tonbridge. Mote Park is in Faversham. I mean, what we need to do is we need to change the names. Nobody knows where Mid Kent is, nobody knows where The Weald is. In the past we had Maidstone and The Weald which implied the MP was completely within Maidstone and we did not really care about The Weald because every single ward within Maidstone and The Weald was in Maidstone Borough Council and nobody really cared, but if The Weald starts as most people think it starts it should start about on the hill where the Sutton Valence drops down north

somewhere where Linton hill drops down. You might say that is The Weald. Well, it is not because Hugh Robertson, the MP for Faversham and Mid Kent, lived in Sutton Valence and therefore you would say he looked down on The Weald. No, he did not. He looked down towards Headcorn and that was Mid Kent.

Nobody knows where The Weald is, but certainly the point is that Mid Kent is going to disappear and all the places which were in Mid Kent are now going to be in The Weald. It is absolute nonsense. Everybody knows where Maidstone is, everybody knows that all the wards within Faversham and Mid Kent, that the Mid Kent part is in Maidstone, everybody knows that in the future the majority of the wards in Tonbridge and The Weald, some of which were in Mid Kent before and are now in The Weald, are going to be within Maidstone Borough Council, so let's call it 'Maidstone Urban', let's call it 'Maidstone Rural and Tonbridge', or 'Tonbridge', so everybody knows that we have two MPs for Maidstone rather than one. If Hugh Robertson is in doubt, please, please, please do not forget I am half of Maidstone because everybody knew that Ann Widdecombe was the MP for Maidstone and people say to me, "What is it like having Ann Widdecombe as your MP?" She is not my MP, she is only the MP of half of Maidstone, and half of Maidstone is in Faversham.

There are two things. I think the first is fairly simple: let's move Park Wood and the urban part into the urban part and let's get over the situation which for 25 years we have had two MPs but nobody knew that. The rejection last time was that it was minor or slight changes, we are now doing major change. We have had 25 years of not knowing two MPs, we have now got another 25 years of not knowing who the MPs are. It is a right disaster, Maidstone; I do not know what harm it has done but it has certainly done a considerable amount.

I have got another slight question which I know the answer to already. That question is if Parliament blocks these boundary changes will we have another 25 years of not knowing there are two MPs? Will I be stuck in Faversham for the next 25 years when I live one mile away from the town centre of Maidstone?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you very much indeed. Does anybody wish to ask a point of clarification? No, okay. Thank you very much indeed for that. I think now, apart from Mr Singh and Mr Maple who are coming later, do we have anybody else who is booked in to talk? Not as yet.

CLLR SWEETLAND: At 10.20.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: At what time, sorry?

CLLR SWEETLAND: At 10.20.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Excellent. Sorry, are you Mr Sweetland?

CLLR SWEETLAND: YES.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Excellent. Would you like to go now? That would be great.

CLLR SWEETLAND: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Everything is recorded and videoed for the public record so you just need to start by saying your name and your address, then you have got ten minutes to make your presentation.

CLLR SWEETLAND: Thank you very much indeed, I hope I will not take all those ten minutes. There is just a few points that I would like to make. First of all, I am Bryan Sweetland, I am here for different reasons. First of all I am the Chairman of Gravesham Conservative Party, I am also the Kent County Councillor for the rural part of Gravesham which is actually aptly called Gravesham Rural. I am the previous Gravesham Borough councillor for Higham, not currently but I have actually been the borough councillor for Higham, and I am also a member of the Kent Fire and Rescue Authority.

I have come really to object to the proposals from the Commission that have been countered by the Conservative Party for Gravesham. I very much support the Conservative Party counter-proposals.

I would like just to talk briefly in two areas. First of all, the points I think where we probably got it wrong, not the Conservative Party, I hasten to add, but the Commission, is first of all with Higham. I think there has been other speakers here as well from Higham Parish Council. I also have six parish councils, one of them is Higham, I also have Meopham and Vigo, Luddesdown, Shorne, Cobham, so it is very much a rural area and I know that Higham have been here to actually speak on their behalf already.

In particular I think one of the important things when you are looking at anything like this is to look at the sense of community. I looked under the areas where you can object and I think with Higham it probably ticks all those boxes, to be quite honest. It certainly does cut across local authority areas but it does cut across community areas as well. With regards to Higham it is very much, and has been for as long as I can remember, part of the Gravesham Borough boundary, within the boundary. It very much is part of Gravesham and if the proposals were to go ahead I think it would make things very difficult not only losing that sense of community, in certain areas you would keep some of the sense of community, but you would cut across certainly the Gravesham Borough Council boundaries, you would also cut across the Kent County Council boundaries as well. There is a difference between, as I am sure you know, most of Kent under Kent County Council is a two tier authority system and Medway is a unitary and the two are quite difficult to work between sometimes, there are distinct differences there.

It is fair to say that some of the children at Higham go to school in Rochester, Maths College there, but I would think the vast majority are actually going to school in one of the schools in Gravesend. It is a nice community, it is served by its own railway station and, as I say, it does have links into Gravesend and also links into Bluewater which is the big shopping centre. I think we would lose that sense of community, that has been built up over the years and I think that would be a great shame. It would also be just terribly confusing for people there, where do they go? The Borough Council they would go to Gravesham, for their parliamentary advice and help they would actually go off to Rochester and Strood if we were to look at the Commission's proposals, for KCC I would be cutting across both of them as well. I just think we have really got it wrong as far as Higham is concerned and I would very much ask that we look at that one again.

The second area I would like to object to and support once again the Conservative counter-proposals is for Hartley and Hodsoll Street. I think that does make sense. As I said earlier, I look after all the rural parts which is the vast majority, geographically anyway, of Gravesham and all of the ancient parishes do actually work quite well together. The areas I mention I look after which are particularly very close to Hartley and Hodsoll Street which are, frankly, down the road which is a small village lane at Meopham and Vigo. Even the churches there I think share a rotating vicar as well. So there is a lot of interaction between the two. I think demographics are actually working quite well in that rural part of Gravesham.

There is a couple of areas where, if you are in Hartley and Hodsoll Street at the moment, you would use or come back into the Gravesham area. The catchment area for Meopham school, Meopham has a primary, junior and senior school, has a very good academy and there are children from Hodsoll Street that would go there. It is rated as a good school and we are very proud of it and that actually covers those ancient villages including Hodsoll Street in particular. There is also a library there which Hodsoll Street is in the catchment area and KCC are very proud that we are actually pulling the old library down and building a brand new library and that would also service that particular area as well. There are also other clubs, amenities and shops which are shared by villagers in Meopham, in Vigo and Hodsoll Street and Hartley as well.

They are the two areas, I am not going to go on with facts and figures. Under the Conservative counter-proposals the new Gravesham, if you like under those counter-proposals, I think is 75,208 which I think is the right sort of size that we are looking for. That is all I have got to say, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Does anybody have any point of clarification? No. Thank you very much for coming in. Our next speaker is not due until ten past eleven so my suggestion is that we adjourn until eleven o'clock. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 11.20am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: To start with, I have got Michael Connolly, so if you come up to the lectern and you say who you are and where you live, then you have a few minutes and if necessary we can ask for points of clarification.

CLLR MICHAEL CONNOLLY: (Conservative Party, Dover District Council) Thank you, Chairman for letting us come in at rather short notice, we appreciate the opportunity, thank you very much. My name is Michael Connolly, I live in Wingham Well in the Little Stour and Ashstone Ward in Dover District Council but within the current South Thanet parliamentary constituency. I am a Dover district councillor.

When Dover District Council was formed in 1974 the decision was made that our ward and Sandwich would become part of the new Dover district. This has always been viewed locally as something of an anomaly because it is not the natural orientation of our part of the world and we have always felt much more comfortable being part of the existing South Thanet constituency which, as of course you are well aware, came into being in 1983 and has remained largely unchanged other than a little bit of tinkering around the edges.

As a Dover district councillor obviously I work within the current situation and we do the best that we can but it is not the natural orientation of my ward to Dover and Deal, our natural orientation is to go north to Canterbury and east to Thanet. We do not shop in Dover, we shop in Canterbury, Westwood Cross, Sandwich. We do not generally go to restaurants in Dover, we go to restaurants locally or we go to Sandwich or to Canterbury. We do not go to cinemas or theatre in Dover. Our children are not educated in Dover, they are educated certainly at secondary level in Canterbury and Sandwich. Our road links to Thanet, the 257 and the 256, are considerably better than the link to Dover which anybody who has travelled down that single carriageway section of the A2 knows what a nightmare that can be.

In short, I believe that our natural cultural links are not with Dover but with Thanet together with Sandwich and we believe that the current proposals really fly in the face of the natural orientation and inclination of our wards. We would propose that Little Stour and Ashstone, my ward, and I know those of us in Sandwich to whom I have been speaking would very much prefer to remain within whatever it is called, the South Thanet constituency, and the numbers could very readily be adjusted as I think one of the next speakers will discuss. Thank you, Chairman.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Does anybody have any questions? I just have one question. You mentioned on a number of times about schools and restaurants you look to Canterbury and Sandwich, Ramsgate, Thanet.

CLLR MICHAEL CONNOLLY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So are the links as strong with Canterbury as they are with Ramsgate?

CLLR MICHAEL CONNOLLY: Yes, they are.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much. Our next speaker is Lynne Connolly.

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: Hi, thank you very much. Lynne Connolly, I live in Wingham which is in the Little Stour and Ashstone Ward and I am Chairman of South Thanet Conservatives.

What I am going to say is much shorter than what my husband said – typical. Sorry. I just feel, with the greatest of respect, the present proposals are using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. At the moment the proposal is that to gain an extra thousand to put us in the right range five wards are going to be disturbed: Little Stour and Ashstone and Sandwich will move out and the three from North Thanet will move in. That will put us then in the highest range of the range up at around 78,000 with the result that, with the obvious demographic movements that will occur over the next few years, you are going to have to change us probably again and all of these movements take away from people's identity in the political system. In this day and age it is vital that we keep that. Whichever party you are we want people to vote and if they feel they have been taken out of what has been their natural constituency since 1983 they just feel disenfranchised disincorporated.

The other factor is that we need to keep this constituency together. It has worked well, it is in general, certainly at general elections, a reasonably high voting constituency. If you change this to do all of that movement it is very, very negative, I feel. That is all.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much. Does anybody have any questions? No. Thank you very much indeed. Mr Cooper.

MR COOPER: My name is Raymond Cooper, I live in Ash which is the Ash part of Little Stour and Ashstone. Historically Ash has been known as Ash-by-Sandwich, a connection which goes back over 100 years. Because we are on the same road as Wingham, the 257, a lot of what has been said does relate to both. We have local schools which are junior level, for the senior level we go either into the two schools in Sandwich which are the boys' grammar school or the technical school which covers a whole range of children, alternatively we go to Canterbury.

One thing which has happened recently, in the last, well, four or five years, is a brand new road on the 256 which greatly improves the connection actually into Ramsgate, we do not have the same connection south down to Dover. From the point of view of public transport the main bus services that we have available go from Canterbury at one end to

Deal at the other so again the connection does not go south beyond Deal, it does not take us into Dover at all. I do not think there is anything else I can add.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much. Any questions? No. Thank you all three for coming in. A question. I am afraid we have to go through the process again, you have to say who you are and where you are from.

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: Sorry. I was not going to say that, I was just going to ask would it be permitted for me to add something to what I said?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Of course. I am afraid you have to say your name and all that again.

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: Okay. Lynne Connolly. Do I have to say everything else?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, I think we know where you live.

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: Sorry. Because I am so overcome by the importance of the occasion I forgot to say something absolutely crucial. When I was saying that there is so massively big numbers being disturbed there is a very clear obvious solution so you get what you want, you put us in the range that should be approved. All we need to do is take Dane Valley and with that we get to the right figures, so one ward comes in, instead of five wards being disturbed only one ward is. If South Thanet takes Dane Valley we get to the numbers you want and there is not any other disturbance.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you just clarify for us where Dane Valley is.

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: The lower part of North Thanet, sort of in the mid ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What do we do with Dane Valley?

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: Link it in to South Thanet. It was the previous Boundary Commission's review, that was their proposal then, part of their proposal.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. We have found it on the map, thank you very much.

MRS LYNNE CONNOLLY: Thank you. Excuse me, do we stay or do we go?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is entirely up to you. If you are fascinated by what is going on in this room please do stay. The next person to speak is Simon Wady.

MR WADY: My name is Simon Wady, I live in Medway, Chatham Central. I have lived in Medway towns for most of my life. I thank the Commission for giving us the chance to speak before you and also recognise the difficult task you face with such a rigid criteria using local authority wards as building blocks containing constituencies with registered voters between 71,000 and 78,000 people.

I am here today to speak in support of the submission put forward by the Medway Labour group and the three Labour constituency parties affected by the changes. I will focus particularly on the constituency in which I live which is Chatham and Aylesford but I would just quickly like to address some concerns across Medway first.

The inclusion of Higham is problematic. Higham has always fallen within the Gravesham constituency, its resources and infrastructure are supplied by Gravesham Council. I have witnessed first-hand the issues of an isolated ward within a constituency because when I say I have lived most of my life in the Medway towns for a small time I lived in Norwood which you would think would be a Medway address but because of parish boundary lines is actually in the Boxley Ward which is Maidstone Council. It is a very small isolated pocket which a lot of the residents felt they were neglected by Maidstone because it was still like a good two miles away from Boxley as a town, or as a village I should say. Like I say, people felt neglected and it got to the stage where on one street one side was Medway, one side was Maidstone and you could see the difference in just like the street cleaning. I would just like to say that obviously people when they are isolated do feel forgotten and neglected.

The proposed split of Lordswood and Capstone from its neighbour in Princes Park and Walderslade should also be reconsidered. These three wards form a collective community sharing transport links, health services, education and shopping.

Now to Chatham and Aylesford. The Medway Labour submission takes into mind Medway's desire to become a city following the model set by Stoke-on-Trent with an urban centre and outlying rural areas. Now, I live in Chatham Central within the constituency and feel the creation of a Medway Central constituency makes sense and would be a cohesive constituency instead of the current situation of an urban semi-rural combination with resources supplied by two different local authorities and then now with a natural boundary supplied by the River Medway. This new constituency will bring together wards similar in demographics, development and topography. There is little scope for new housing so population numbers should remain relatively static but they all share public and local service notes.

The city centres of Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham would be brought together under one Member of Parliament. Currently Chatham High Street, for example, falls within Rochester and Strood and not Chatham and Aylesford. This is also true of wards such as River who have more closely identified with Gillingham but this also sits within Rochester and Strood. The proposal submitted by Medway Labour may appear to include

changes more than envisioned by the Boundary Commission but these changes I feel aptly reflect the area and are sympathetic to residents within. I thank you for your time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anybody have any questions? No. Okay, thank you very much for coming in. Our next speaker is Helen Whately. If you can just state your name and where you are from for the record that would be great.

MRS HELEN WHATELY: (MP for Faversham and Mid Kent) Helen Whately, Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a statement today.

I support the principles behind the reforms to make sure that all constituencies are the same size and that each person's vote carries the same weight. I appreciate the great challenges in drawing up boundaries which meet the requirement for all constituencies to have between 71,031 and 78,507 electors.

I am understandably disappointed that the Boundary Commission's proposals splits up my own constituency but I am not here to protect my own job, rather to make sure that in future my constituents will be part of constituencies which make sense to them and give them an effective voice in Parliament.

I know the challenge of representing a relatively large and diverse constituency. In Faversham and Mid Kent I have around 93,000 residents/constituents living in a largely rural area extending from Faversham and across the North Downs to rural villages around Maidstone and also into the suburbs of Maidstone itself. There are distinct communities within my constituency, I work with two borough councils and it takes about 40 minutes to drive from one side to the other. Whilst I believe you can do a good job all the same, and I hope I am proving that, it does present challenges.

The more strung-out and disconnected a constituency, the harder it can be for an MP to represent all communities and interests effectively. It is harder to be abreast of the local issues, to have good relationships with communities and organisations and it is harder for the MP to communicate to the electorate what they are doing. Local newspapers, for instance, are centred on the local town; the village on the edge of the town will read what the MP for the town is up to. If their MP is someone different, they are less likely to know what he or she is doing and all of this risks contributing to the scepticism in the sense of disconnect between MPs and voters which we know is present. It is damaging to democracy and means that some people may disengage feeling their interests are being overlooked.

Rightly, the Boundary Commission may take these sorts of factors into account, specifically geographic considerations including accessibility, local government boundaries, boundaries of existing constituencies and local ties. I am keen for the

Boundary Commission to make sure that the future electoral map gives us connected and coherent constituencies and I am making this representation in part because I think the Commission could and should do better and should take greater account of those factors.

Turning to the proposals themselves, firstly the proposed Canterbury and Faversham constituency, four wards in Faversham and surrounding wards of East Downs, Boughton and Courtenay are to become part of this new constituency. There are strong connections between Faversham and Canterbury geographically: good transport links, economically Faversham residents often work and shop in Canterbury and socially with Faversham residents using services there such as the hospital and secondary schools. Local councillors and other residents I have spoken to from Faversham and the surrounding villages are broadly supportive of the proposals and I particularly appreciate that the proposed name of the constituency includes Faversham as I know this was a great concern in the previous iteration of these boundary changes; this is right and must stay.

Secondly, the proposed Maidstone constituency: Bearsted, Detling and Thurnham, Boxley, Shepway North, Shepway South and Downswood and Otham Wards in my current constituency are proposed to be incorporated into this Maidstone constituency. I support the prospect of one constituency for Maidstone. I know some of my constituents are confused by the current boundaries and while villages themselves have distinct identities Maidstone is their local town and they naturally look to it for many of their services and facilities; they are also represented by Maidstone Borough councillors. That said, I think that some wards currently not proposed to be in this Maidstone constituency should be, which I will now come to.

Finally, the proposed the Tonbridge and The Weald constituency. North Downs, Park Wood, Leeds, Harrietsham and Lenham, Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton, Sutton Valence and Langley, and Headcorn Wards are due to become part of this new Tonbridge and The Weald constituency. I am concerned about this proposed new constituency. Referring back to the factors the Commission may take into account, firstly, on accessibility there are some long journey times between parts of this constituency, almost an hour from one side to the other and often that will be longer with traffic. Clearly there are some very rural constituencies, the north of England, Scotland, for instance, with longer journey times but it is not helpful and those journeys are longer and further than in my current constituency.

Then to the point of local ties. Most of these wards have ties with Maidstone, particularly those closer to the town, they do not tend to have links with Tonbridge and will not generally use the same services. There is little sense of being common communities with common interests across the span of this proposed constituency. For instance, if someone in Hollingbourne sees their MP campaigning on an issue in Tonbridge I doubt they would think oh, good, my MP is doing something which will make a difference to my life. Over time there is a risk they might think their MP does not really represent them, especially as the lion's share of the population is concentrated to the west. The

newspaper point mentioned earlier is relevant here. These wards are represented by Maidstone Borough councillors. I should emphasise this is not insurmountable and a hard-working MP would be able to get around the area, would be able to work on issues across it and get to know the organisations but the proposed boundaries will make it quite a challenge.

I would like the Commission to look again at their proposal for this constituency. I particularly disagree with the inclusion of North Downs and Leeds in a constituency centred on Tonbridge. Both look to Maidstone as a local town more or less and tend to use Maidstone services, there are strong local ties, they are served by Maidstone councillors and geographically they are not connected with Tonbridge. In fact, Maidstone is physically in between so you would have to go either through the town or round it when travelling from one side of the constituency to the other.

There are some similar issues for Park Wood and Lenham and Harrietsham being included in the Tonbridge constituency. My experience is that for the most part Park Wood residents feel that they are part of Maidstone and with significant deprivation in parts of that ward people there draw heavily on the support services of the town. That said, Park Wood is to the south rather than the east of Maidstone so at least not so far away from Tonbridge as Leeds and North Downs. Lenham and Harrietsham Wards are significantly further to the east but it, too, looks to Maidstone. It is a distinct rural community separate from the town.

I am also concerned about the inclusion of Headcorn, Sutton Valence and Langley, Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton in the Tonbridge and The Weald constituency. I have heard from residents in those areas who are unhappy but I recognise that parts of those wards have characteristics in common for places like Staplehurst and Yalding in that constituency and I appreciate that remodelling the constituency map in a way that meets the electorate sizes required is difficult, the boundary does have to fall somewhere.

I will just sum up. While I said it is right to move constituencies which are more evenly sized, I do not support the current proposals. I would like the Commission to look again at the proposals for Maidstone and Tonbridge and The Weald. Wards to the east and south of Maidstone should be considered whether they can go into the Maidstone constituency. Whilst I realise this affects the electorate sizes, it would be possible to make up the numbers for Tonbridge by bringing in wards from other areas as I know is proposed in the official Conservative Party submission.

I also think there is a need for more public communication on this process as a whole. I am not convinced that many people know that there may be boundary changes and what the implications might be for them and when I have spoken to people about it sometimes it is the first time that they have heard of it when I ask them what they think. On behalf of my constituents in these areas, I would urge the Commission to review and amend the proposals before the next phase of consultation. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anybody have a question? No. Thank you very much for coming in.

MRS HELEN WHATELY: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is Wayne Mallard.

MR MALLARD: My name is Wayne Mallard, I live at 48 Willowside, Snodland, Kent. I would like to thank you for the chance of speaking here.

I got involved in politics because I wanted to make a difference to the people around me. Since getting involved I have become Chairman of Snodland Labour branch and Vice Chairman of Chatham and Aylesford CLP. I have had the chance to run for town and borough elections and next year will have the chance to run for Malling North in the Co-TC elections. I have grown up and lived on both sides of the River Medway. From the age of one to twelve I lived in Wouldham, from 12 to 21 lived in Burham, from 27 to 29 in Halling and from 39 to present in Snodland and there was always an east and west divide of the river. However, where the boundaries crossed the river it sometimes added confusion. Recently Medway has been going for a city status and I believe having Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester in the same constituency gives Medway a greater chance of achieving this. One of the things we believe is essential is for Lordswood, Walderslade and Princes Park all under the same constituency and also to keep it to the east bank of the river going along Wouldham, Burham, Eccles, Aylesford. The river is a natural divide for the constituencies; with the east bank of the river covered this thing gives you a chance with the west bank from the peninsula all the way along to West Malling.

One thing in Snodland that we totally opposed was the structure of the airport so it was not just the peninsula or Snodland, it was further along than that. Another thing that we have got is the waste disposal in Cuxton which is extremely handy for us in Snodland as well. One of the things that connects us as well as the river is the Medway Valley line. It has been going, I believe, since 1840 and that is another reason why I believe that it should be called Medway Valley to coincide with the actual name. To me this makes total sense to keep it all the way along and with the housing being built in Peters Pit village which is on east bank and Holborough Lakes which is on the west bank they coincide with each other and so balances it all out. I hope that the proposals we are making helps you with the decisions, and thanks very much for the time to speak.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any questions? No. Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Mr Harinda Singh. There is a pointer on your lectern which will help me follow.

MR SINGH: Yes, it is quite a big change.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR SINGH: Hi. My name is Harinder Singh, I live at 206 Maidstone Road, Chatham. I am a Labour Party and Co-operative Party member and I am also the Secretary of Rochester and Strood CLP. I have just a brief submission. I just want to say thank you for the chance.

I was born, raised and educated in the Medway towns and I would like to suggest in my submission that the Commission use the opportunity to reflect the existing affinities of the constituents to their places of work, travel and day to day life. I think everyone who has given a submission would agree to that and pretty much has stated the same thing and has also stated it is near enough an impossible task, so good luck.

The boundaries as they are now, not as they are there but as they are now, in places, lack an internal logic to them which does not really commend themselves to stay as they are. The changes proposed so far by the Boundary Commission only tinker with the boundaries a little bit and really do not address on the issues that I am going to be raising and in the case of the addition of Higham introduces unnecessary complications. I think the member for the Kent County Council for the area has already spoken on that so I will only add a little bit where I will say that the addition of a third local authority with a ward with little connection to Medway is difficult to understand. If it is to make the numbers add up, there are other ways to do this and the submission by Medway Labour to BCE20508 highlights one way to do this which is in that form there.

In the area that we are considering, the same constituency has been named in the past simply 'Rochester', or 'Chatham with Gillingham' constituency, or sometimes 'Rochester and Chatham', and even just 'Medway'. The focus has always been on the central identity of the area or the river. The earliest reference that I can find to this – I do not how else to put it – the connectedness of this central area is by William Cobbett, his pamphlet on rural rides. I appreciate it is almost 200 years old but even then it was not lost on him, the connection between both Rochester and Chatham was not lost on him. His entry, I think reads, you go into Rochester, Rochester itself and Chatham form in fact one main street of about two miles and a half in length. He then goes on some bit to talk about the barracks on the other side near Gillingham, but the point is plain enough to anyone that walks through the Medway towns that the central part of Medway has a singular historical continuity and at present, even with the Commission's proposed boundary changes, it is still divided.

Along the Medway you have Rochester Castle, Chatham Docks, the Army barracks and the various industries and firms that set up. Many of these left a long-standing impression on the very character of the towns. As heavy industry has moved out bit by bit the area retained many of the same links for commuting and transport; an earlier submission mentioned the A2 and that does indeed run right through the constituency. A lot of these

same links for commuting, the areas around the links for commuting, was retained by the retail sector so as the industry has moved out the retail sector moved in and often many of those that were previously employed by the industry are now employed by the retail sector. New additions to this would include the universities.

The suburban and rural areas that developed from the world wars onwards are different in geography as well as character. They are often serviced by out of town establishments for shopping and transport links. I need not go into the contentions like the Kentish Man versus the Man of Kent to explain how long standing the division both, sort of, physical and cultural the River Medway has become, but it does highlight the sense with which the proposal for a Medway Valley constituency can be argued for. The A228 tracked in part by the Medway Valley train line runs through near enough the entire constituency like that (indicating). It charts the course through Strood town and the more rural and sub-rural areas of Strood which, given the natural expansion of the towns, will no doubt host new areas for growth. I mention the, well, the contentious development that has not yet gone through, the proposal for Lodge Hill which many residents in Strood will talk about, especially in the rural areas here (indicating). The character of the three constituencies as proposed by Medway Labour's submission falls much closer in line with the almost historic staccato type progression of the towns as they spread out from the centre towards the new developments. I hope that the submission highlights this to the Commission but, more than anything, thank you so much for giving me a chance to explain where I am coming from. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for coming in and making your submission. Is there anybody who would like to ask a question? No. Okay, thank you very much. Our next speaker is Ms Teresa Murray. She is not here yet, is she?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She is not due until 12.40.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. We have got the option we can either adjourn now until, say, 12.30 and wait. Is that okay with everyone? Okay. Shall we adjourn until 12.30, then.

After a short break

Time Noted: 12.40pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Welcome back. Our next speaker is Teresa Murray. Welcome.

CLLR MURRAY: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: When you are ready if you come up to the lectern and if you could just say your name and address, then you have ten minutes to make your representations.

CLLR MURRAY: Thank you. Okay, my name is Teresa Murray and I am a Labour councillor in opposition on Medway Council. I live at 318 City Way, Rochester, and that is ME1 2BL. I am speaking to the proposal for three Medway constituencies.

My essential responsibility as a councillor is health and social care and particularly adult social care and I am really wanting today to talk in relation to the way that my responsibilities in that role are directly affected by being able to have identifiable parliamentary constituencies within the Borough of Medway. One of the things that is happening now by direction from the government, and actually I think by consensus of many professionals, is the idea that for the local health economy we pool budgets and share services. This is going on across the whole of Kent, Medway is a unitary authority but I attend joint meetings with Kent County Council about the way those services are being configured.

As things stand at the moment with the three parliamentary constituencies of Medway being very clearly identifiable with that local authority area, that is useful and important to me in a number of ways. It is particularly important, when I want to get quantifiable information about the way changes will affect my constituents, that is the people I represent and people in Medway as a whole, because obviously, even in opposition, we are interested in the impact of services on people that our political party represents and indeed the ones that our political party does not at this time represent.

I will go to the parliamentary Labour Party office on very many occasions because that is an easy source of quantifiable data. Most recently, I have been looking at the number of people over 65, for example, the number of people getting adult social care who receive state benefit to help them with that. I have been thinking about the changes to the state retirement age for women and been part of the national campaign to try to get a pause in that legislation to prevent women who were born in 1955 from having a sort of shock to their finances and their preparation for later life by a sudden change to their pensionable age. That is an easy source for me. It is a way for our local party to communicate with the parliamentary party and actually to make sure that we can pursue our views, values and ideals in the local context. If I was trying to do that in a parliamentary constituency that spanned two local authority areas I think I would find that very difficult indeed.

I think the way that the wider health economy is being configured at the moment with the idea of integrating health and social care services and pooling budgets across all of the agencies including the voluntary sector that can contribute particularly to the care of older people, I think that trying to do that across two local authority areas would be very difficult indeed. Local authorities are in charge of housing benefit and although there has been a pause in the legislation for the local housing allowance we still use local housing

allowance guidance when we are trying to determine how much benefit people are able to get. We look at the infrastructure when we are planning for the future in relation to health and of course in relation to other things as well, education and housing, and we think about the way that we can provide lifetime housing that is suitable for people to downsize into, for example, over a period of time and stay within their local area so that they can still be near their family and their familiar connections and have a good quality of life. I then rely on the data that Medway Council hold. My job would be much more difficult, after all, as a voluntary public servant if I had to be in contact with two local authorities as I might do, for example, if Higham came into one of the Medway parliamentary constituencies.

So the proposal that we have made gives Medway an identity as an entity and also enables us to have a strategic and geographical set of boundaries that we know we can work within. Already we are going in the health service to large specialist units, particularly and most recently for stroke services and germane to that is transportation routes, the ability to move people quickly in an ambulance from one place to another, so my geographical area has become very important to me in determining the way that I am prepared to support or to campaign against particular proposals about sharing health services, about the building of specialist units, about the possibility of having more medical facilities in the community. If I might say that is another particularly important issue at the moment. We have got a shortage of GPs, for example, in Medway. GPs will not take people who live outside of their defined catchment area so when I am looking at whether or not my constituents can access a GP I will look to the catchment areas of the local GPs and the way that the population within that area is moving, or growing, or changing and work accordingly to try to get more GPs or a bigger service that more people can access, so I am quite surprised that there are any proposals at all to change constituency boundaries because constituency boundaries relate to parliamentary—sorry, parliamentary constituency boundaries relate to local council boundaries and I want to work within those defined geographical areas at both parliamentary and local level to make sure that these very important and actually quite fundamentally different structural changes will work for the people that I represent.

My contribution to the proposal that has come for three Medway constituencies is borne of wanting to have a defined geographical area to work in, a single local authority that we can strategically plan with and a set of data and statistics that talk to the parliamentary representatives to enable them to work with us and share information so that the people that we represent not only get what we would define as a fair crack of the whip but also that we can work together with our representatives in Parliament to make sure that when they are talking about legislation, when they are making changes, they understand the impact it will have on us as local representatives. I see no benefit in having to work across boundaries in that way, I think it will have a deleterious effect on the services that the population I serve manage to get.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Is there any point of clarification that people would ask? No, okay. Thank you very much for coming in and giving us that perspective.

CLLR MURRAY: Can I just say that everything I have been talking about is in the public domain.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR MURRAY: All health trusts are putting in new strategic plans, all of these are based on the idea of integration of health and social care and on the border of those strategic plans are representatives from local authorities.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. Okay, thank you. Our next speaker is Mr Vince Maple. Can we have the map up. Be advised to use the audio.

CLLR MAPLE: Yes, because it is here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It will help us enormously.

CLLR MAPLE: It is not that one, it is this one, which is why I am a politician and not a weather presenter. Good afternoon, my name is Vince Maple, I live at 29 Chalkpit Hill, Chatham, Medway, M4 5SU. I am currently, at the time of writing, the leader of the Labour group on Medway Council, a councillor for Chatham Central Ward and I feel obliged to point out Chatham Central Ward is the only place in Medway that Charles Dickens lived. I feel obliged to raise that having had Dickens raised earlier on. I am proud to have represented the ward for nine and a half years and I am a member of the Executive Committee of Chatham and Aylesford constituency Labour Party as well as being a very proud resident of Medway for the vast majority of my 39 years.

Can I firstly thank the Commission for allowing public meetings of this nature as it does allow for a lot of local detail which would not otherwise be available, we have heard that this morning, and in particular thank the staff here who have facilitated both yesterday and today.

Can I for the record state that I support the south east Labour proposals across our region. There is a specific but quite short reference to the Chatham and Mallings situation and we will cover that in a lot more detail as we go through the next few minutes. I am primarily speaking in favour of the proposed alternative put forward by the three Medway constituency Labour parties and the Medway Labour group, the reference of that is BCE20508. This has been emailed to the Commission, I am grateful that they have been able to get our visual aid of the map up on the screen for people to see.

As many others have said, both here in Maidstone and elsewhere, the Boundary Commission have been given an almost impossible task with the very restrictive rules on the number of electors. Put simply, this means there will need to be change within Medway. Let me look at the two issues I have particular concerns about with the existing proposals and we have heard about both of these already today: the inclusion of a third local authority with Higham being included and the separation of Lordswood from Walderslade and Princes Park.

Higham, as we have heard many times already today and yesterday, looks to Gravesham for all of its resources and infrastructure. I would be very concerned to have a constituency which had a single isolated ward from a different local authority and we heard earlier today from Mr Wady who spoke of his experience of living in Boxley which has a very similar situation. I would feel that is incredibly unfair, actually, to the residents who live there so I would urge the Commission to not include Higham in any Medway constituencies in its future iterations. Similarly, I would strongly urge the Commission to take into account the close community links between Walderslade, Princes Park and Lordswood as a collective community. We heard this morning from Mrs Alexander who is a Lordswood resident and spoke passionately about some of the practical issues that this raises. Breaking them into different constituencies does not make any sense as their links regarding public transport, health, education and shopping are critical. I would therefore ask the Boundary Commission to give serious consideration to our alternative proposal which recognises both of these points and many others.

With our alternative proposal which you can see here ([indicating](#)) very clearly we have looked into the communities we have in place now and have importantly recognised the likely areas of growth within Medway. What this will mean in practical terms is within the next 20 to 25 years with population growth which is predicted under the local plan discussions, which are ongoing across the country but specifically here in Medway, if the similar rules are applied to future Boundary Commission processes both the Medway towns and Medway Valley constituencies would ultimately be fully within the Medway boundaries as those are the areas in Medway which are most likely to have the greatest level of population growth, in particular in boundary 10 and 11 and area 33. We have already heard one reference today to the potential Lodge Hill site which will add several thousand properties there, so we believe that the logical thing longer term would be to take the non-Medway constituency wards and they will fall into other constituencies and ultimately you would end up with three Medway constituencies. That would be a proposal which, if the rules were not so restrictive on numbers, we would potentially be looking to put forward today but we know that that is simply not practically possible with the rules which have been set down to the Boundary Commission.

By the time these proposals come to reality Medway as an area will be over 20 years old as a local authority. There are strong ambitions for Medway to be a city, this is supported by the two major political parties in Medway, Labour and Conservative, as well as many other key stakeholders across the community and I think it is worth just flagging up a few

examples of where Medway is seen as the most important element in our community badging, I guess you would refer to it as. The MP for Faversham and Mid Kent earlier spoke about our local newspapers. Here in Kent we have a major newspaper group, the Kent Messenger group, they are very specific in their areas. Our local paper is the *Medway Messenger*. My colleague Councillor Teresa Murray spoke about the health provision; we have Medway Hospital. Councillor Murray also spoke around the issue of the strong campaign going on at the moment around the issue of women's inequality into pensions, the group locally are Medway WASPI. We have the Medway Trades Council, we have international sporting events happening at Medway Park and our universities, which we are all very proud of, they have a combined sporting team from the University of Kent, Canterbury Christchurch and Greenwich, that team is called Team Medway. So it is very clear that the concept, the passion, the dedication for Medway as an area to become a city is real and genuine and I would say has actually increased since the last time the Boundary Commission went through these proposals, albeit that at that time that we met back in 2011 there was an actual city status process going through which unfortunately, through no fault of Medway residents, was not successful.

I also believe it is right to highlight the model is very similar to Stoke-on-Trent and we do talk about this in our written proposal. Stoke-on-Trent, for those who are not familiar, is made up of five towns: Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke and Longton, along with Fenton which is effectively known as the sixth town. Medway is made up of five towns: Chatham, Gillingham, Rainham, Rochester and Strood along with the Hoo peninsula which again is this area here (indicating). Stoke-on-Trent's three parliamentary constituencies are named, and I do not think there is any proposals to change this in the current iterations, are Stoke-on-Trent North, Stoke-on-Trent South and Stoke-on-Trent Central. In our proposal the three Medway parliamentary constituencies are named Medway Downs, which is indicated by the orange wards; Medway Valley, which is indicated by the pink wards; and Medway Central, which is indicated by the green wards on our map. All three of those wards within Medway, very, very distinct demographics, distinct community, distinct topography, but all parts of Medway.

There are some very specific important local issues which I would want to raise and highlight as part of the submission this afternoon. Firstly is the matter of the major arterial road the A2. In what would be the city centre of Medway this road actually straddles all three existing constituencies and this shows how much technology has moved on since the last Boundary Commission because five years ago we had to stand in the road and take photos, we now have the wonders of Google maps – other maps online I am sure are available.

If I can highlight first map A which, if you look at that, that is the boundary for the two parliamentary seats. On the left hand side as you look at the map you can see Chatham and Aylesford, on the right hand side Gillingham and Rainham. If you then turn to map B, and the distance I would say between map A and map B is probably around 300 metres, it is broken up, importantly, half-way down this road by Luton Arches which is a

well-known local landmark. Again, if you look at map B, as we look at it, the left-hand side of that is Chatham and Aylesford and on the right-hand side is actually Rochester and Strood constituency. Our proposal would mean that all four of those sides of roads, the important A2 road, would come under the one constituency of Medway Central. We have seen before, and I made reference to this previously, that actually there was a tragic situation with a house fire and it was very unclear until you physically got to where the fire was as to actually who was the MP that represented the people involved, so that would tackle that issue importantly.

Secondly, I want to speak about Rochester airfield. Now, for the avoidance of doubt this is not the proposed Boris Island Thames Estuary airport. Mr Mallard made reference to the fact that actually every single one of those wards in every colour opposed that. That is not what I am talking about here. This is Rochester airfield which is in the area around here (indicating). Now, Rochester airfield is a contentious issue locally. It has already been to judicial review once and is still pending planning applications in both Medway and Tonbridge and Malling. Currently the boundaries of the constituencies run through the airfield sites covering Rochester South and Halstead in the Rochester and Strood constituency and Aylesford North and Walderslade in the Tonbridge and Malling Ward in the current Chatham and Aylesford constituency. Now, once again with our proposal this whole site which is seen to be of significant importance by our Local Enterprise Partnership, local authorities and others would again come under the remit of one single MP, in this case the MP for Medway Downs.

I then want to turn, and others have referred to this and you will hear this mentioned again no doubt throughout this process, to the issue of Capstone Valley and the surrounding area which again there is strong cross party consensus to say that we all want to defend that important green lung in our community and politicians from all sides and residents who have not got political affiliations are very strong in their views on this. But one of the issues which I think needs to be recognised is that it is currently represented by two different constituencies and even under the proposals from the Boundary Commission this would remain an issue because Princes Park, which is on the very north end of that area, would remain in a separate constituency. Under our alternative proposals this again would come under one MP, the MP in this case for Medway Downs.

I then want to turn to another infrastructure issue and that is the A228. Now, when we considered what to name constituency three which is in the pink we did think about the Kentish Man and Lady's constituency because of course that is the boundary and everybody on that side is Kentish Man, everybody on this side is a Man of Kent. We did also think about potentially the A228 constituency because actually that is a massive piece of infrastructure for these residents who live in those wards across the area. At the moment that is again split into two different constituencies: Chatham and Aylesford and Rochester and Strood. Under this situation it would come under one single representative for Medway Valley and, as already been made reference today, the train line that runs

through that area is the Medway Valley line and has been in place for a considerable period of time.

Now time does not allow for all of the other specific situations which could be raised in this short session. There will be other issues and other speakers will talk on those this afternoon, you have heard some of those already this morning, and there will be others undoubtedly highlighted in written submissions before the December deadline.

I want to conclude by saying this. I absolutely recognise that the Boundary Commission have had an impossible task both across the country but importantly, in relevance to the residents I certainly represent, to Medway. The initial proposals for the three Medway constituencies have two major areas concerned: the unnecessary inclusion of a third local authority in Gravesham with Higham and the splitting of the linked communities of Walderslade, Princes Park and Lordswood with the latter going into a separate parliamentary constituency. In the alternative proposal put forward there is a recognition of the communities within Medway and importantly due consideration given for likely growth as laid out in the requirements for Medway's local plan which will see increases in our population over the next two decades.

I want to once again thank the Commission for all the work that they have done and I know will do in their impossible job both here in Maidstone and elsewhere and of course I am happy to answer any questions and points of clarification.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much. Does anybody have any questions? I have two questions. One is could you show me on the map where the boundary of Medway Council runs.

CLLR MAPLE: Yes, if I can set it up it will just be slightly easier because my pointing will not be ideal. Basically it runs down here (indicating), it is there (indicating) that I referred to a moment ago, Rochester airfield. Actually Rochester airfield is there (indicating), so actually that little indentation there is within the Rochester airfield site. So this area (indicating) is Tonbridge and Malling and, similarly, 24 is the boundary there (indicating), everything underneath that, so 25/26 is Tonbridge and Malling, obviously Higham would be up here somewhere (indicating) and everything over here (indicating) is Medway, so this is all Medway, Medway down to that boundary there (indicating) and Medway through to that boundary there (indicating).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, thank you very much. My second question is how many of the 33 wards would be in a constituency which is fundamentally different from the ones they are in now, accepting that everything is changing, so to speak?

CLLR MAPLE: I mean, I can give you a long drawn out answer on that and perhaps we can respond in detail before December but I think that is a relevant point. Of course, the

thing to remember is the residents in this area are already used to being linked in with a non-Medway constituency, so in that sense they clearly at the moment link in here (indicating). As reference has been made to the South East proposal, that there is a recognition that the current suggestion around Chatham and the Mallings is not fit for purpose, we think this actually is the best flow for the three constituencies available. There is nobody in a non-Medway constituency who is being added to a non-Medway constituency, so the people in Aylesford, North Aylesford, South Burham and Wouldham, Larkfield, Ditton, basically 25 down to 32/33 separate because that is Medway and then 17 to 20, all of those are currently used to being linked in with a Medway constituency, that is no change to them. Everybody in Strood is used to being in Strood, that is perfectly fine, and you will hear from other residents over the next few weeks, actually many of them affiliate more with just being on this side of the river anyway so actually they will feel that is a better fit for them, but that will be for them to obviously make those representations.

I would say the issue around the Central area, and I know Mr Munton made some reference to this, is that actually historically the boundaries have been all over the place. We used to have Rochester and Chatham constituency. When I first became a councillor, and I represent Chatham Central, obviously that is the most important of the 33 wards, I am obliged to say, but actually when I first became a councillor that was a split ward so actually half of the ward very, very roughly there (indicating), so the bottom part of my ward, actually not the bottom part, but that part there (indicating), was within Rochester and Strood constituency, as it is now, although it had a different name then and the other half was in Chatham and Aylesford, so when we had split wards actually people in that Central area are pretty used to changing their constituency.

I guess one of the things which sits alongside this, and I think this is quite important and again was made reference to earlier on by I think Mr Wady, is the fact that Chatham High Street is not in Chatham and Aylesford, so if you think about all of the political situations we have had over the last few years Chatham High Street has had a lot of focus, but actually I know that, when I say to residents that is not included in Chatham and Aylesford, they are very surprised at that.

We think that this proposal will actually give an opportunity, not least, because all of the High Streets are very linear, so Chatham High Street, Gillingham High Street, Rochester High Street are very linear High Streets so actually it gives the ability to bring all of those together and that is part of the reason we think, and again others have spoken this morning about the history and that is important, but it is more about I think really where we are today. That is where in some of those wards and ward by ward that will be different so again Rochester South and Halstead some of the residents there were in Chatham and Aylesford, they are now not in Chatham and Aylesford because they effectively swapped with the Chatham Central residents. I would say most people are used to having obviously members of Parliament who represent their immediate needs; I think over the

last 20 years, particularly with younger people, there is a much greater recognition of Medway than perhaps certainly there was when it was first created.

That is a bit of a long winded answer so I apologise for that, I try not to, politicians always talk too much but I recognise in some cases there will be a real challenge to recognise that because actually it has been different over even the last couple of iterations.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Maybe in your written submission you could

CLLR MAPLE: We could clarify that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: One of the issues that the Boundary Commission have to take into account is about the impact on existing constituencies so – I am just pointing out that this, you probably need to address that in what you submit.

CLLR MAPLE: We will certainly take that away and I think that people who are, and again this will be for others, but people who are advocating the Boundary Commission proposals need to think carefully about the level of change for certainly residents in Lordswood in particular.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, I understand that. Okay, let's adjourn for lunch and come back at two o'clock. Thank you.

After the luncheon adjournment

Time Noted: 2.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, shall we start our afternoon session. Just for people who were not here this morning, when you make your presentation you go up to the lectern and the first thing you need to do is say your name and address, everything is recorded on the video camera so everything is on the public record and we will get a transcription of it which will be on our website in due course, then you will have ten minutes to make your presentation if that is as much time as you need, then at the end we may ask points of clarification or members of the audience may ask for points of clarification. Shall we start with Mr Howard Doe?

CLLR DOE: I am Cllr Howard Doe and I live at 21 Style Close, Rainham, which is ME8 9LS. I would like to thank you first for allowing me to give evidence before you today and I shall have a lot less to say on this occasion than I did before. What is now the proposal, actually shows I think the Commission has listened carefully to the views of local residents. I myself have lived in the Rainham and Gillingham constituency for nearly 50 years and have been a councillor since 1972. Just so that you know where I come from, I am currently deputy leader of Medway Council and hold the cabinet portfolio for housing

and community services. In that capacity, particularly with housing and so on, I get to meet enormous numbers of local people, therefore I like to think I am very much in touch with what goes on and how their minds work.

I think that the Medway towns really operate very successfully and I think that the present proposals recognise the level of integrity and interaction between the communities in Rainham and Gillingham whilst I think it acknowledges the strong links that exist with Lordswood and Capstone area in terms of travel, recreation and shopping. In Capstone, for example, you will regularly find large numbers of families in the Gillingham and Rainham area will enjoy the country park at Capstone. A great many residents, both Capstone and Lordswood, shop at the centre in Hempstead Valley which is very convenient to reach. So there is really a considerable synergy between the types of housing in both areas, they both have had a very large explosion, almost, in development over the last 50 years and as a result they have got quite a lot in common and character and in the type of people that live there. I think because of those similar styles and character the addition of Lordswood and Capstone does make a lot of sense and I heartily agree with it. I also think that the integrity of the three local constituencies, that is Rainham and Gillingham, Rochester and Strood, and Chatham and Aylesford, has been largely preserved and this means that there is minimum disruption to them. I think the people understand the divisions now and I am confident that these proposals will in fact be very well received by the great majority of local people. That is all I really wanted to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anybody have a question? If you could just say your name.

CLLR MAPLE: Thank you very much. My name is Vince Maple, I live at 29 Chalkpit Hill, Chatham. Thank you very much for your evidence. Can I just clarify, you spoke a lot about synergies between Rainham and Lordswood and Capstone. Could you clarify if you feel the same way between Gillingham and Lordswood and Capstone.

CLLR DOE: I do not think it is quite the same synergy in the sense that I think that Gillingham and Rainham – of course, the whole of the Rainham township was built earlier and therefore has a lot in common with Gillingham in that way, so I think you have the newer part and the older part in both cases. I think that there is quite a lot of interaction between them and, indeed, a lot of people do not recognise where the actual boundary is there but nevertheless they do see themselves as a separate community and of course they have been separate together for quite a long time. Rainham and Gillingham I think dates back to about 1928, I believe, or so I am informed, so there is a very strong bond between Rainham and Gillingham that I think is quite important as well.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much. Okay, thank you for coming in today.

CLLR DOE: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our second speaker this afternoon is Mr Barry Kemp.

CLLR KEMP: Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon and I will be brief because I know you are busy and probably have a large number of submissions to hear. I am Cllr Barry Kemp, I live at 18 Herbert Road in Rainham, ME8 9BZ. I have lived in Rainham for the best part of 70 years and I have been a councillor since 2007.

Let me say at the outset that I strongly support the proposal that incorporates Lordswood and Capstone into the constituency of Gillingham and Rainham. I recognise the need for constituencies to have similar populations and your proposal ideally fits the bill for the following reasons.

Firstly, at the end of the day it is identical to the revised proposals that were submitted some time ago and this followed widespread and full public consultation and, incidentally, was extremely well received by the residents of Gillingham and Rainham. As organist and choir master of the parish church of Rainham choir members that live in that neck of the woods expressed their 100 per cent satisfaction with the revised proposals at the time.

Secondly, whenever a change is proposed it is always advisable to effect the change as smoothly as possible. The current proposals achieve the desired objectives with just the bare minimum of fuss, bother and disruption.

Thirdly, Lordswood and Capstone already share a long boundary with the adjacent ward of Hempstead and Wigmore joined as they are by the excellent Capstone country park. Your proposals, therefore, preserve the homogenous shape of the constituency and prevents the inevitable perception that the residents might have of being isolated by any of the other proposals that may well be submitted.

Finally, of course, many parts of Lordswood and Capstone already have a Gillingham postcode of ME7. Significant numbers of children from Lordswood and Capstone attend the local schools in Hempstead, Wigmore and Rainham and, as Cllr Doe said as well, many people from Lordswood and Capstone travel to Hempstead to the shopping centre at Hempstead Valley.

In conclusion I do think the proposals to bring Lordswood and Capstone into Gillingham and Rainham constituency to be an excellent solution to the problem and I, for one, hope it is enacted as soon as possible. Thank you, that is all I have to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Has anybody got a question? If you could say your name.

CLLR MAPLE: My name is Vince Maple, I am from 29 Chalkpit Hill, Chatham, Medway. Thank you for your presentation. Could I just clarify, you have spoken about synergy between wards in your presentation and the links between communities.

CLLR KEMP: Have I?

CLLR MAPLE: You spoke about the link between Lordswood and Hempstead. I would be interested to hear your view on whether there is more synergy between Lordswood and Capstone and Gillingham South or Lordswood and Capstone and Walderslade and Princes Park.

CLLR KEMP: All I can say is really refer you to the answer given to you by Cllr Doe, I think it is more or less the same question. The Gillingham and Rainham joined in between the wars so they have got the older part of Rainham and the estates can be considered the newer parts, as is Capstone and Lordswood newer parts.

CLLR MAPLE: Mr Assistant Commissioner, clarification on that clarification: my point of clarification was around synergy between wards. He has spoken about synergy between Lordswood and Capstone and Hempstead and Wigmore, I am looking at other wards which are in the Medway area. Gillingham South would become a member of the same constituency and my point of clarification, because it is not clear from the presentation, is to whether Cllr Kemp feels that Lordswood and Capstone has more synergy with Gillingham South than it does with Princes Park and with Walderslade, its geographically neighbouring wards.

CLLR KEMP: No, I do not think so; no.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you for that. I have just got one question. You mentioned that many children from Lordswood and Capstone Ward went to school in Hempstead and Wigmore Ward.

CLLR KEMP: And Rainham.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And Rainham?

CLLR KEMP: And Rainham, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is that secondary schools?

CLLR KEMP: Secondary schools, mainly, yes; yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you for that. Let's move on, then, and our next speaker is Cllr Rodney Chambers.

CLLR CHAMBERS: Good afternoon. I am Cllr Rodney Chambers, I live at 6 Mansion Row, Gillingham, ME7 5SE, and I am the former leader of Medway Council and was in that post for 15 years. I attended the Commission's hearing in 2011 at that time to speak very vehemently against the Commission's initial proposals as they affected the Gillingham and Rainham constituency; indeed, at that time I put forward proposals which I am pleased to say that the Commission has adopted as far as its consultation document that it has now produced and which we are all here today to make comment on.

First of all I would like to say that I do not disagree with anything that has been said by the previous two speakers but I would just like, as the councillor for the Hempstead and Wigmore Ward, to say perhaps I have more direct knowledge of the synergy between the neighbouring Lordswood and Capstone Ward. I have been the councillor there for some 20-odd years and, indeed, my fellow councillor in that ward who I happen to be married to has been the councillor for Hempstead and Wigmore for the last 40 years.

Some of the points I would just like to make as far as the synergy which seems to be in question between the two wards. I can tell you that there has been on numerous occasions controversial planning applications straddling the two wards and I can tell you that the constituents of Lordswood and Capstone have always looked towards the Gillingham representation on the Council to help them in their opposition to those planning applications. The previous speaker talked about the schools. He referred, I think, more to the secondary level schools but indeed I have knowledge of the movement of young people to the two junior schools in Hempstead and indeed the junior and infant school in Wigmore. I can tell you the community of Lordswood and Capstone do look in that direction. They not only look at Hempstead as being part of the area that they look at for their shopping, which has already been identified as in the Hempstead Valley shopping centre, but they also look to it for other community activities which take place in Hempstead. As far as Capstone part of the Lordswood and Capstone ward, I would say that is somewhat more sparsely populated but that is indeed closer as the boundary runs between the wards between the Hempstead and Wigmore and Lordswood and Capstone but the Capstone residents – and, indeed, I as the councillor for Hempstead and Wigmore are continually called in because people do not understand that they do not live in the Hempstead and Wigmore ward when they have problems to be dealt with and I am always happy to take them on and help them whatever they may be. So there is what I would call a community of interest which of course I believe is one of the criteria that the Commission will look at.

Lastly, I would say this means that there is minimum of change that will be required, which is part of the exercise is to bring the numbers of electors up in the Gillingham and Rainham constituency. Can I just say, being involved in local government for years, the Medway area is signified by five principle towns and I would urge that there be no changes to the names of the parliamentary constituencies because, by and large, the names of those constituencies reflect the local large communities that there are within the Medway towns, but that is a general comment, so all in all I think that the proposal that is in the

document for consultation is the right one and it means a minimum of change and there is community of interest. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Cllr Maple.

CLLR MAPLE: Thank you very much. I am still Cllr Vince Maple, I still live where I live. Cllr Chambers was not here this morning so he would not have had the benefit of hearing from other representations so I will ask him a very direct question. It is on that last point that you raised for clarification. You mentioned the five towns which are named in the current proposals. Is Lordswood in Gillingham or Rainham?

CLLR CHAMBERS: I do not identify that, I think Lordswood has, as I have said, more synergy with the Gillingham and Rainham parliamentary constituency than it does where it is at the moment.

CLLR MAPLE: Just in the interests of fairness, because Cllr Chambers was not here and I was in the room, the Vice Chairman of Gillingham and Rainham Conservative Association said Lordswood was in Chatham.

CLLR CHAMBERS: Well, it is in the Chatham and Aylesford constituency, that cannot be denied, okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I wonder if I might just ask one point of clarification. You mentioned that primary school children from Lordswood go to school in ---

CLLR CHAMBERS: They have the opportunity and many of them take up that opportunity.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I was just looking at the map here and it does not tell me all the information. For instance, there is Holmewood school. Is that a primary or secondary, in Lordswood?

CLLR CHAMBERS: There is no secondary school I think in Lordswood, that would be a primary school.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: There is a Lordsworth school as well?

CLLR CHAMBERS: Lordswood.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is that a primary school as well, then?

CLLR CHAMBERS: Yes, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

CLLR CHAMBERS: But of course you know that the schools now are not obliged to take children from their own catchment if they have spaces available and therefore it depends on the quality of the ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I was just trying to establish where the majority of children go to primary school from the Lordswood Ward.

CLLR CHAMBERS: Well, I suspect they go to local schools but there are a number of children – because there is this free movement, parents choose to bring them over to the schools in Hempstead and in Wigmore and that is parental choice.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So are you saying, just for clarification, that the majority of children from Lordswood go over to the school in the other...

CLLR CHAMBERS: No, I am saying the majority of them probably go to the local schools but there is a significant number ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, I understand. One more question?

MR MALLARD: Hello. Wayne Mallard.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Can you just say your address as well, just for the record.

MR MALLARD: 48 Willowside, Snodland. My daughters actually live in Lordswood themselves. They went to Lordswood Primary School which was close by, because they lived in Darnley Road, and then they went to Swingate School which is also in Lordswood. After that they went to Walderslade Girls' School. All their friends from the primary schools went to Walderslade Girls' School. Also you have got Greenvale so the majority of the boys went there as well which is in Walderslade.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is there a question in this? A question of clarification.

MR MALLARD: I was wondering how you were saying about the majority or had the choice.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think those were my words which Cllr Rodney ---

MR MALLARD: How you feel about this.

CLLR CHAMBERS: I can also say that there are a number of children who live in Lordswood who went to the Hempstead schools that actually go to the secondary schools in Rainham such as the Howard school and the Rainham Mark Grammar School so, you know, it comes back to parental choice.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

CLLR CHAMBERS: Those schools are available to the parents in Lordswood.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. All right, thank you very much for coming in and making that presentation. Our next speaker is Rehman Chishti MP.

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: (MP for Gillingham and Rainham) Yes, thank you. Good afternoon, Mr Commissioner. Can I firstly thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to you today; like Cllr Chambers and others, I gave evidence to the Boundary Commission hearing in 2011. At the very outset, I say in 2011 in those proposals and the revised proposals for 2013 around 2,000 constituents from my constituency gave evidence to the Boundary Commission and the overwhelming majority of those constituents supported the revised proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission in 2013 which are also now the 2018 proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission.

I have been very fortunate and very privileged to be the Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham since 2010 and prior to that Gillingham is my home town. I grew up in Gillingham since I was the age of six, went to local schools, served on the local authority as councillor in Gillingham North and in Rainham Central and also on the local authority Medway Council as a cabinet member. In comparison to knowing the local communities and the ties of the area I would say I have a reasonably good knowledge of having grown up in that area.

I am giving evidence to fully support the Boundary Commission's 2018 proposals for the Gillingham and Rainham constituency for the following reasons. One, it best preserves and respects existing boundary constituencies for the Gillingham and Rainham constituency because it respects them by preserving Gillingham and Rainham 100 per cent and simply adds on Lordswood and Capstone to that. It best preserves, secondly, the local community ties. Three, it best preserves the shape and size of the constituency with minimum disruption.

Further, I would say it is a best possible scenario for the Medway sub-region overall and the reason I say that, the Medway sub-region and the Medway Unitary Authority, as eloquently put forward by Cllr Chambers, comprises five historic towns: Gillingham, Rainham, Rochester, Strood, Chatham. They are identifiable, people can relate to them and their Members of Parliament. In previous submissions before, before I was a Member of Parliament, I know the then Labour Member of Parliament for Gillingham had urged

the Commission to ensure that Rainham was incorporated into the name of Gillingham and Rainham to identify with the two towns that we have.

In relation to the sub-region overall and why I say it is very good for that, because the proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission preserve Rochester and Strood from the Medway Unitary Authority area 100 per cent. They preserve Chatham, also part of Medway, 90 per cent. So for the sub-region, in comparison to any other proposals put forward, they bring about minimal change in relation to the criteria put forward by the Boundary Commission. In relation to the Medway Unitary Authority it has 22 wards, 22 wards in Medway, and under the Commission proposals under criteria of minimum change there is only one change, one ward out of 22 wards changes and that is in relation to Lordswood and Capstone coming into Gillingham and Rainham. One ward out of 22 changes which means there is minimum disruption in relation to community ties and best preserves local areas and constituencies as they are.

If I may now turn to the issue of Lordswood and Capstone, there are, as already put forward by Cllr Chambers who knows the area very well having served on the local authority as a representative for Hempstead and Wigmore for nearly as long as old as I am but not wanting to push that too further, I would say he knows his local area. The point I want to add further to that: part of Capstone, Lordswood and Capstone, there has been some suggestion – and there has been questions and no doubt I will get another question later – Lordswood and Capstone, part of Capstone is already in Gillingham and Rainham. Part of Capstone, so part of Capstone is already in Gillingham and Rainham constituency. Policing: the PCSO Andrews is the same PCSO for Hempstead and Wigmore and the same PCSO for Lordswood and Capstone. At the last Boundary Commission hearing the area commander gave evidence in relation to the policing outlay for the area and I would say on this occasion the policing PCSO for Lordswood and Capstone, Hempstead and Wigmore, is the same.

The point I make in relation to Capstone, and I want to touch on that, road safety. Being the Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham I get constituents in my constituency say to me can we have road safety measures. There has been petitions gone in in relation to road safety for Capstone Road. I can only campaign for half of it then I am concerned with parliamentary protocol, you have to go to the MP for Chatham and Aylesford to do it; I cannot do it. Therefore if that part was in Gillingham and Rainham constituency one Member of Parliament working with the local councillors can address that issue rather than the anomaly that we have at the moment.

Sir, you touched upon the issue about schooling. If I split this into two: Capstone, majority, overwhelming majority of those students go to school in Hempstead Juniors and Hempstead Infants and from that they go on to Rainham Mark Grammar School, they go to Howard and the Rainham School for Girls. I would say in relation to Lordswood it may be a different matter but I am touching upon Lordswood and Capstone as a ward and part of the Capstone issue which I say has strong links already with Gillingham and Rainham.

Faith perspective: People from Capstone would go to All Saints Church in Hempstead which is the nearest church there for worship. All Saints Church is part of the Gillingham South parish and the Gillingham South parish comprises St Matthew's Church in Wigmore and St Paul's in Park Wood, so you have the same faith community ties and I understand on that basis at the last public hearing there was written evidence given by the former Bishop of Rochester, the Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali in terms of faith perspective and communities when he supported the proposals then in 2013 put forward by the Boundary Commission having listened to constituents, community groups and sporting groups at the time.

Sporting-wise: Hempstead used to have a cricket club. I used to play for Hempstead Cricket Club in my younger days, I have lived in Gillingham all my life, but I played for Lordswood. The club closed, I went to Lordswood. Gillingham has a cricket club in Rainham but also you have students and people from Hempstead and Wigmore who go and play in Lordswood. So in terms of sporting connection between the two it is very much there and I give that from my own experience when I played there, they had the brilliant David Masters who I was at school with who now ended up playing for Essex, so there was movement there, in terms of sporting connection was very much there.

Green spaces touched on by Cllr Chambers, the Capstone Valley. At the moment, sir, you have the issue of development in the area. Part of the development at the moment is taking place on the other side of the Hempstead area, application for 450 houses, that is part of the green-lung area. Therefore, when residents in my area say, "We want you to stand up and object to that", I cannot because I am not the Member of Parliament for that part of Capstone which goes into Lordswood, so the Member for Chatham has to then take over, but, if that area was to go under one Member of Parliament, they can work with residents on both sides in relation to the interests on green spaces in that area and I think that would be far better than having one Member of Parliament dealing with a bit over here, another Member of Parliament dealing with the bit over there.

The voluntary sector: You will hear evidence, or no doubt there will be, you know, from charity organisations. The Women's Institute for Wigmore is the same federation for Lordswood.

In conclusion, sir, what I would like to see, although these are new proposals and fresh consultations I would urge the Commission to take into account the 2013 Boundary Commission revised proposals after full consultation in which over 2,000 people from my constituency of Gillingham and Rainham who passionately cared – and I thank the Boundary Commission because they listened and they took that view on board, they came forward with the revised proposals in 2013 in which there was evidence from faith groups, organisations, churches, everyone came together predominantly, overwhelmingly, from Gillingham and Rainham to support that.

I would say this as I finish: I refer the Boundary Commission to the 2013 report, page 19, recommendations for Medway, Gillingham, Rainham, Rochester, Strood, Chatham, Aylesford, AC56. "We have reached these conclusions having regard in particular to the fact that this configuration avoids the breaking up of community ties and best respects existing constituency boundaries." That was at the time and I ask you this, sir: what has changed from 2013 to now? Nothing factually has changed. The numbers are the same. The people gave evidence at the last time and therefore I would say if that was the view taken by the Commission looking at the evidence and now I would say it makes sense with one minimal change.

This is what they said on Lordswood and Capstone in the Commission's own report which they published in 2013. On Lordswood and Capstone, transfer to Gillingham and Rainham, AC58: "We have concluded that the transfer leads to best configuration for the sub-region as a whole. The Gillingham and Rainham constituency that we recommend is accordingly the existing constituency with the addition of the single Lordswood and Capstone Ward." That was the view of the Commission then and I would say in my view that should be the view of the Commission now which it is under these initial proposals for 2018 and I say that should be the view going forward because nothing factually has changed from when the Commission took the evidence, looked at all the facts, the public gave their views and I would say looking at the criteria as I finish: minimal change. 22 wards in the Medway towns, one out of all that changes. Gillingham and Rainham preserved 100 per cent with one addition. Rochester and Strood in the Medway part preserved 100 per cent. Chatham and Aylesford 90 per cent. Put politics aside, look at the community ties on the evidence and what we have before us and on that one minimal change in relation to what the Commission has to achieve, looking at throughout the country I would say is the best, best possible scenario we could possibly get and I thank the Commission for it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Inevitably, Cllr Maple.

CLLR MAPLE: I have had lunch, so I feel ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Remember it is for clarification purposes.

CLLR MAPLE: Absolutely. Obviously my name is on the record previously: Vince Maple from Chalkpit Hill. It is just two points of clarification, really.

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: Sure.

CLLR MAPLE: One Mr Chishti MP referred to in Capstone Road and the fact that that crosses boundaries. In my presentation, I have got a copy of the map. If I refer to 'Chatham Hill and Rainham Road', I am sure Mr Chishti will understand the point I am making. Currently on my map, as it was earlier on, there is clearly a much larger road, the A2, where opposite sides of the A2 are represented by different parliamentarians, in

one case Gillingham and Rainham and Chatham and Aylesford, in another Chatham and Aylesford and Rochester and Strood. Would Mr Chishti think it would be ideal to have a situation where that whole stretch of the A2 is represented by one MP? Then my second point is around again a similar question I have asked other colleagues ---

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: Can I take it in turns one at a time?

CLLR MAPLE: Of course, yes.

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: I am grateful to Cllr Maple for that and I would answer it in this way. From what I hear, sir, in relation to the change that has been put forward by Mr Maple and what he says in relation to that part of the road, looking at the proposals put forward by his party, it means many, many wards have to change across the Medway towns and therefore the proposal put forward by the Boundary Commission in relation to the anomaly of one part of the road being in one area to the other, I would say, in configuration, which is what you want and what I want, the best interests of Medway. It would mean only one area changes rather than under your proposal where you would say how many wards would have to be changed across the three parliamentary constituencies - about eight? Am I right on that or not?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I do not want to get into a debate ---

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: Sure, sorry.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: --- because this is about points of clarification. I think the point that Cllr Maple was asking was essentially there is a main road, the A2, which has constituencies on either side but I do not think you are asking for a point of clarification, I think you are just making a point.

CLLR MAPLE: A point.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So if I can ask you to go on to your second point of clarification.

CLLR MAPLE: Thank you very much, I will do. Mr Chishti, like myself and every politician who has spoken for Medway today, supports the Medway city status. I have made reference to that and others have made reference to that both now and actually back in 2011 as well. Does Mr Chishti agree that having one constituency dealing with what would effectively be the Medway city centre – which I appreciate is now within the current Gillingham and Rainham constituency but obviously Medway becoming a city would have a huge impact – would that be to greater advantage to any further city status bid? At the moment, as was made clear earlier on, the effective Medway city centre is covered by two different parliamentary constituencies.

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: Sir, if I can clarify that. I referred yourself and Mr Maple to my maiden speech in Parliament which is where I said the city status was based on the Medway having five unique separate identifiable towns and it is on that basis that I supported the vision for a city status based on preserving its historic five separate towns which have its five separate train stations and are identifiable, always have been and will be, and I think it best reflects the towns which, if I say, sir, there was a point made by the previous Labour Member of Parliament that Gillingham should be called Gillingham and Rainham to best reflect the area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. I just have one question, if I may. Could you tell me the relative population sizes between Lordswood and Capstone. I mean not in absolute but the areas.

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: Yes. I would say in relation to two thirds in my understanding would be from Lordswood and a third would be from Capstone.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much and thank you for your presentation today.

MR REHMAN CHISHTI: I was going to give you a picture from a roundabout, sir, which says Hempstead and Capstone right underneath it which is what you would get on the layout on the area that – I think I have covered that in my presentation.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you. Now Ms Janice Aldous, for whom I believe there are congratulations.

CLLR ALDOUS: Thank you. Hello, I am Janice Aldous, I live at 166 Bredhurst Road and thank you for your congratulations, I am now a councillor for Rainham Central as of last night.

I, along with many of my constituents, support the revised Boundary Commission proposal for Gillingham and Rainham. The way it has been reconfigured after a full public consultation in 2013 makes sense with minimal changes to the existing boundaries and complies with the proposed increase in numbers. The addition of Lordswood and Capstone Ward would be welcomed. The WIs of Gillingham, Rainham, Wigmore and Lordswood are part of the same federation showing how strong the ties are. I am on the St Matthew's Church DCC which is part of the parish of South Gillingham and many of the people from Capstone area worship in our diocese. We all share local amenities like the Hempstead Valley shopping centre. Thank you for listening to local input. As with any constituency changes it is essential we understand the area, community and transport links. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Does anybody have a question? Julian.

MR WALDEN: (Conservative Party) Good afternoon. Julian Walden, Conservative Party. First of all many congratulations on your excellent result yesterday and, to the Boundary Commission officials, would you be kind enough to remove the Labour Party's presentation and put up your own, please. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: A fair enough point.

CLLR ALDOUS: Is that it?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any other questions to Cllr Aldous? Okay, thank you very much indeed for coming in. The next speaker is Emma Dalley.

MRS DALLEY: Good afternoon. Firstly, I would like to thank you for allowing me to give evidence at the hearing here today. My name is Emma Dalley and I would like to give evidence in support of the Commission's proposal for the Gillingham and Rainham constituency. I have lived in Rainham for my entire life, I have a very wide network of family and friends living within this area and I have been running my business here for the past 22 years. This community is a very important part of my day to day work and social life.

My reasons for supporting the Commission's proposal for Gillingham and Rainham are the community ties within the constituency will be preserved as the proposal maintains the existing Gillingham and Rainham boundaries and simply adds Lordswood and Capstone, both areas with which we already have very strong links. Part of Capstone is already part of Gillingham and children within this area already use the schools in Gillingham and many residents use the public facilities within Gillingham and Rainham constituency; for example, our shopping centre, our train station and a lot of our social facilities.

The proposal to maintain Gillingham and Rainham with the addition of Lordswood and Capstone are the same as those that were put forward by the Boundary Commission in the 2013 revised proposal put forward after a full public hearing. My late husband, John Dalley, gave evidence at the last public hearing on these matters as protecting the community in which we both lived and worked was something he was very committed to and very passionate about. I thank the Commission for taking our views as residents into account on that last occasion and again now.

When these proposals were previously made, they were very well received by all residents around us and my husband and I spoke to them. The feeling is very much the same now. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions? No. Thank you very much for coming in and making that presentation. Our next speaker is Ms Tina Venus-Coppard.

MS VENUS-COPPARD: Good afternoon, and I thank you very much for allowing me to come back again to have the opportunity to give evidence and I would like to say that I am here today to support the changes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry, I just ask you to say your name and address for the record.

MS VENUS-COPPARD: Oh, I do beg your pardon. Yes, certainly.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am sorry to interrupt.

MS VENUS-COPPARD: My name is Tina Venus-Coppard, my address is 49 Lamplighters Close, Hempstead. I have been a resident of Medway all my life, born and bred in Gillingham and Rainham.

I am here to give evidence today in support of this proposal. Lordswood and Capstone look out upon Hempstead and Hempstead looks across to Lordswood and Capstone. We have some beautiful greenery between the pair of us and both times we have often supported each other when there has been threat of development on these areas. It would make much more sense if we were able to speak as one voice with a common MP rather as two separate voices with two separate MPs, it would be stronger together.

Also, the reasons why I support this proposal is that we are a community and even though we are Hempstead and Wigmore that border it, Lordswood and Capstone are very much part of that community. As we have heard previously, the schools are used, Hempstead village shopping centre is used, and also as a resident of Hempstead I was part of a team that brought back the Hempstead village fair and I know from many people that I know that live in Lordswood they came and enjoyed that event as much as the people from Hempstead and even Rainham that came up and Wigmore.

As Mr Chishti said earlier, we have the same PCSO for both areas at the moment so that is a very good link to have because she would have a very good understanding of the problems of both areas and also if there is any link that could cross over the boundaries, so that is a very good positive thing to have in that area.

I live on the edge of South Wood which I did not know until a little while ago was actually part of Lordswood and Capstone. I was proud of it as a Hempstead resident and every year go and enjoy the bluebells so it would be nice that it would be part of Hempstead and the whole constituency.

As a member of the public I only see it on lay terms but I see it makes much more sense to have minimal changes than to have several different changes that go ahead and I would like to see that the area is united, that we do have the one constituency and that we will all be much better off together. I thank you for hearing my comments today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Cllr Maple, for clarification.

CLLR MAPLE: A point of clarification and it is great to hear Ms Venus-Coppard talking about community events. I just wondered, I know you will not have exact numbers, but the Hempstead village fair, could you give a feeling of perhaps how many residents were there from Lordswood as perhaps how many residents were there from central Gillingham, for example.

MS VENUS-COPPARD: I have a dreadful time remembering what I did yesterday with regards to numbers now, unfortunately, but we had a good footfall. Obviously the main footfall was from the locals of Hempstead and Wigmore but I had a lot of colleagues at work who lived in Lordswood and Capstone and they all went – under pain of death they all went but they enjoyed it – and they got their friends and their families to go as well, so much so that they actually asked us when the next one was coming, so that was in 2009. I now am no longer a member of the committee so I cannot say how the footfall has increased but in the four years that I dealt with it year on year we had increased and we were advertising it further afield and people were coming across to us but I cannot give you, I am afraid, Mr Maple, the exact figures.

CLLR MAPLE: Thank you very much for that clarification and great stuff in the community.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Thank you very much for coming in.

MS VENUS-COPPARD: You are welcome.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mr Kingswood, are you ready to give us your presentation?

MR KINGSWOOD: I was going to start with Berkshire but --- I will deal with Berkshire first and then the East Sussex and then stray towards Ashford in Kent. While that is being put together and, taking an overview, I commend the Commission is using the nine regions of the country of England and that does give integrity to the Commission's proposals. Please resist any attempts to move a district or a constituency, it just would cause too much muddle. We know that if logic applied to English counties Milton Keynes would be in Bedfordshire but logic does not apply with English counties so let's stick with the regions.

Also the other building block, the basic building block is the ward and please stick with that. Do not be tempted to go for polling districts. Wards are changed normally on a not less than a dozen years unless there has been a population movement. Sometimes a local authority's ward will exist for a score of years so there is a continuity, whereas legislation requires local authorities to review their polling districts every four years, if my memory is correct, so if a local authority so wished a district they could change their polling district identities quite frequently. The other very important point about wards is that wards are used for so many, many statistical purposes; for example, each ten years the census, the statistics are based on wards which is why when there is an electoral review, currently called further electoral review, it is so important to make sure that the wards do have integrity.

Okay, we have got Berkshire, thank you very much. I spoke at Guildford about Berkshire and also about East Sussex into Kent. Berkshire, since Guildford I have looked at the document, added the existing figures together and one finds that the eight constituencies in New Berkshire fit together neatly four plus four and one is minus 2 per cent, the other is minus 3 per cent, do not ask me which, whether it is the eastern or the western, but they are so close which means that the area where I reside and therefore have an interest and an awareness of, the eastern which is – right, in alphabetical order, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Slough and Windsor. Mr Pratt has put forward reasons for keeping the integrity of Maidenhead and he stressed that if Bray returns to Windsor there would be a knock-on effect. I take that point.

Slough: There has been evidence regarding the integrity of Slough and that integrity is identified very, very clearly with the Anglican parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey. I pronounce it Charvey but phonetically it would be Chalvey. Certainly the Upton-cum-Chalvey parish spans three of the Slough wards. It has been identified and it was mentioned at Guildford that Bracknell has a generous amount of electors and that a ward could be taken out of Bracknell and given to Windsor to boost up the numbers. On paper that sounds fine but the ward that was mentioned is Crowthorne. Crowthorne, its parish is in two wards so that did prompt me to push the numbers and hence that after pushing the numbers for about an hour I was able to say that to solve that question and to minimise knock-on effect just have the existing Windsor, the existing Bracknell within this four constituency eastern, let's call it a petty sub-region if you will pardon the royal naval comparison. I have explained if one moves a block of wards from Windsor into Bracknell and a block of wards from Bracknell into Windsor, into Windsor it would be Crowthorne and the four Sandhurst because they are a cohesive area and they are separated from Bracknell town by Forest, whereas the area north of—in Bracknell Forest there is an area called the northern parishes, it is used in town and country planning in BFC.

When you look at the map you find that Binfield, Warfield and Winkfield, the suburbs have spilled over out of Bracknell New Town and trying to find the boundary between those northern parishes and Bracknell town needs a very careful study. So those northern

parishes do have very close ties into Bracknell town and they have been reinforced by the suburban expansions. In the 1990s it was encouraged by Heseltine, there was the eastern expansion into Winkfield and at the turn of the century there was the northern expansion into Warfield, the area called Quelm and Warfield. There is also a more spontaneously and still going on expansion into the Binfield parish. On a recent visit to Bracknell coming in from Reading through Wokingham one saw a sign at the Amen Corner something like a thousand new houses. Okay, that is outside of the terms of a parliamentary review, it is more a local government review matter if it is within six years, but certainly it is an indication that the population pressure is on the north side of Bracknell and so to do a musical chairs would certainly help greatly to improve the integrity of Bracknell. I mean, okay, in the case of Windsor one can poo-poo it but what I would offer as evidence of local ties, it may be some may say tenuous, but in Sandhurst there is the Royal Military Academy and in Windsor there is the castle which is anecdotal evidence, the favourite residence in the south of Her Majesty the Queen, certainly the amount of times during the week that the Royal Standard is flying at Windsor Castle compared to Buckingham Palace. I think that wraps up on Berkshire, so you can ask.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just to be clear on Berkshire, you are suggesting that Sandhurst moves into Windsor?

MR KINGSWOOD: Yes, there are four wards.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You mean Little Sandhurst, Central Sandhurst and College Town?

MR KINGSWOOD: Certainly those, I am just going to look for the other one for you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is that Elsmore?

MR KINGSWOOD: I think you have got it, you have got it. Elsmore, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So your proposal is to move those into Windsor and Eton and ---

MR KINGSWOOD: Well, into Windsor County constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR KINGSWOOD: So it is the four. I am going to call them the 'five Crowthorne with Sandhurst wards'.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

MR KINGSWOOD: I do it that way because you have identified Little Sandhurst and Wellington and you are aware that Wellington is a piece of Crowthorne parish.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just so that we can move on to the other part of the south east...

MR KINGSWOOD: Yes, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: ...your proposal then is to move four wards from Windsor into Bracknell?

MR KINGSWOOD: No, three.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Three. Those three are?

MR KINGSWOOD: Binfield with Warfield.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR KINGSWOOD: Warfield Harvest Ride.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR KINGSWOOD: And Winkfield and Cranborne.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

MR KINGSWOOD: Those are what the town planners call the northern parishes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Lovely. So where are we moving to next?

MR KINGSWOOD: East Sussex and Kent. Yes, that is fine. So we have got West Sussex, Mid-Sussex constituency, okay. No comment on Brighton and Hove because it is logical building upon five years ago and commends the Commission for managing to get the whole of Newhaven within that trio of urban coastal constituencies. The Commission recommends Lewes and Uckfield and it sprawls right up to the Kent boundary. The geography is not longitudinal, the geography is latitudinal along the Vale of Sussex so one has Lewes and Hailsham. I mean, the Commission's IP is to have Hailsham with Bexhill. Hailsham is quite a significant population centre. Both Lewes and Hailsham are linked by a trunk road, the A27, and to keep the numbers, the quantity of electors one just goes to the Pevensey Levels area. Right, I pause for a moment. Currently in Lewes is Polegate, Polegate relates very much to Hailsham so that leaves in the north of East Sussex instead of the Commission's proposal – is it called The Weald – it would have only one settlement, urban settlement, of any significance would be

Crowborough right over in the corner whereas building upon the Lewes/Hailsham Low Weald proposal that would allow the three High Weald towns – Uckfield, Crowborough and the village of Heathfield – they are significant settlements and they are the hub. To satisfy the numbers game one needs 7,000 approximately electors from the neighbouring district Rother. There is a railway line that goes through Tunbridge Wells, Frant, Wadhurst, it goes through Robertsbridge on its way to the south coast at Hastings so ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mr Kingswood, you are going to make a written representation.

MR KINGSWOOD: Yes, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So I wonder whether we could just roughly have the main points.

MR KINGSWOOD: Yes. So basically a Low Weald constituency, Lewes and Hailsham, and a High Weald constituency containing the three towns, Uckfield, Crowborough and Heathfield.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, that gives it in précis. Have you any other points?

MR KINGSWOOD: To wrap up, it means that Bexhill would look along the coast around Hastings and would then have Tenterden area from Ashford, the Isle of Oxney, and it would have the area east of Tunbridge Wells, the eastern part of Tunbridge Wells district, Goudhurst, Crowborough—sorry, Goudhurst, Cranbrook and... Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any questions, please? Okay. Does anybody have any questions? No. Well, we look forward to your written representation and thank you very much for coming in and giving us that presentation. My suggestion is that we break for coffee now and we will return at 3.30, I think, and see if there is anybody else who wants to make a representation. Okay.

After a short break

Time Noted: 3.50 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, the much-valued Cllr Griffiths, if you would like to take the stand, so to speak, at the lectern and if you could just say who you are, your address and then you have got your ten minutes.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Thank you very much. Are you able to put up the...

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The proposal. We are, yes.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Cllr Maple's map. Thank you. I am Glyn Griffiths, I am a member of Gillingham and Rainham Labour Party, a local councillor of the Twydall area of Gillingham for 27 years across three tiers of local government: Kent County Council, Gillingham Borough Council and for the nigh last 20 years Medway Unitary Authority. I am also the Chair of Medway Labour group. I have lived in Medway towns all of my life, at various times have lived in each of its principal towns. I wish to endorse and speak on the proposal jointly submitted by the Medway constituency Labour party's and Medway Labour group as presented here.

Given the constraints on the process, to use local authority wards as building blocks and have a registered electorate between 71,000 and 78,000 it is unlikely that the perfect solution exists. Therefore this is about finding the best fit, given the constraints.

One of the key considerations is the linkages between wards both to determine which belong together in terms of community identity and demography and where they are weaker creating the opportunity for potential constituency boundaries. This proposal adopts this approach. Whilst it involves more change than that proposed by the Commission the rationale is strong and with the potential for the core of these constituencies to remain as the Medway towns grow towards three/four constituencies. The Commission's suggested inclusion of Higham into the mix is opposed. There are not strong community links from Gravesham to Medway and any population balancing benefit for the Commission would be offset by the disadvantage of introducing a third LA area into the mix of the three Medway area constituencies.

This proposal retains the three constituencies across two local authority areas albeit it does recommend that two of these should straddle the Medway, Tonbridge and Malling boundaries but for the reason of community linkages, demography and topography, we have provided maps, as you can see, to show this graphically and it warrants looking at the proposed constituencies in turn.

First of all Medway Central. I am not particularly stuck on the names, by the way, but they are helpful for definition. It incorporates the centres of Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham, demographically the population is more homogenous than with some of the more suburban wards with transport routes leading to the traditional High Street areas and public transport nodes. It has logic as a constituency, one that is likely to see only limited development such as at Rochester, Riverside and in Chatham city centre due to already largely built out. Each of the LA wards or Medway Unitary relate well to each other with the topography similarly supporting their aggregation.

The proposed constituency contains the historic centre of Medway, Rochester castle, the cathedral, Rochester High Street, the historic dockyard, Fort Amherst, the Great Lines and Royal Engineers Museum, along with the traditional shopping High Streets in

Chatham and Gillingham. In contrast, the current Chatham and Aylesford constituency does not have Chatham High Street within its boundary.

Much of the housing in Rochester East, Chatham Central, Luton, and Gillingham North and South is of similar age and style: turn of the century Coronation Street style terracing, while Twydall, Wayfield and parts of Rochester East, Chatham Central and Gillingham North saw large pre- and post-war council estates developed. You do not get significant quantities of these types of housing in the proposed Medway Downs constituency although you do see them across the river in Strood.

At the margins, while Twydall is adjacent to Rainham it is fair to say that Rainham residents in primarily private housing developments do not relate strongly with this council housing estate area even though some of the properties have been bought under right to buy and are now in private tenure. Further south, while it appears that Princes Park and Luton and Wayfield are closely linked – have we got a pointer?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes, let's have a look.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: So basically here (indicating) between 5 and 15, that gives the impression of being closely linked. In reality, that is a ridge line which presents a hard boundary, so the crest of the ridge acts as that boundary, despite housing being built close to it. Looking now at Medway Downs, predominantly to the south of Medway Central, this constituency starts with the Rainham wards and swings south through Hempstead and Wigmore. Each of these relate strongly to each other and less so with Twydall as explained earlier. It is arguable, as indeed the Commission itself does, that there are links between Hempstead and Lordswood, these being Hempstead Valley shopping centre and the recognition and desire to retain the green lung of the Capstone Valley. Crucially, though, unlike the Commission proposal, it does not seek to shoehorn Lordswood into Gillingham in terms of identity. Instead it keeps Lordswood with Princes Park and Walderslade and in turn with the Dale estate component of Rochester South and Halstead, all of which relate strongly with each other in terms of identity, education, local services and shopping.

All of these wards are similar demographically, acting as suburban estates for the urban city core. In terms of the Tonbridge and Malling Ward add-ons, Walderslade village relates strongly with Walderslade while the addition of the Aylesford, Burham and Wouldham elements provide geographic contiguity and amount to 10,000 registered electors and have strong transport links via Blue Bell Hill. With the likelihood to significant growth to the east and north of Rainham over the coming years there is a potential for this constituency over time to have boundaries coterminous with Medway Unitary Authority.

Medway Valley constituency. In many respects, the river is the hardest of boundaries and is a 'natural' choice for a constituency boundary. The proposed constituency runs

along the west bank of the river from the Hoo peninsular to East Malling, is relatively evenly split between Medway Unitary and Tonbridge and Malling Borough registered electors. This constituency follows the river, particularly the A228 and the Medway Valley railway line which act as strong transport links. Predominantly rural in nature, albeit with Strood as an urban core in its middle, it is defined primarily by its relationship with the river and surrounding green space. At the local authority border maintaining the physical relationship between Snodland and Halling makes more sense than the current configuration which sets the boundary there. Longer term there is the potential that there could be significant development on the Hoo peninsula such as the proposed Lodge Hill development which is currently the subject of a planning public enquiry and around the Strood fringe. This would allow for the boundary to drift north eastwards along the A228 over time as the number of electors increased in the Medway element of the constituency.

So in conclusion, Medway as an area will soon be 20 years old. While it is true to say that residents do not all necessarily relate with Medway as an entity, the relevance of former local authority areas such as Gillingham Borough Council and Rochester upon Medway City Council has diminished. Residents do, however, relate to the specific areas where they live, such as Strood, Chatham and Rainham. This proposal seeks to work with those larger building blocks, ie multiple ward aggregations, while being sympathetic to demography, topography and public and local service delivery nodes. The result at first glance may appear more of a change than the Commission had envisaged but on reflection can be seen to be well considered, rationalistic, sympathetic to the area and, crucially, compliant in terms of overall numbers and in using local authority wards as building blocks. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do we have any questions? Could I just ask you to point out the river crossings.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Certainly. We have got the tunnel which comes across here (indicating).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Actually it might be the bridge, let's think about that. No, the tunnel would come across here (indicating).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: That is the Rochester bridge.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: We have got the motorway bridge there which has not got local access in the sense of immediate across there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Further down, we have got the new bridge going in across past Halling and then obviously we are coming down towards the crossings in the Maidstone area here (indicating) where the river is wide. So, in effect, we have got the local rural crossing, the one I have just referred to, as part of the small developments past Halling but in reality the principal crossings for the Medway are the Rochester bridge here (indicating) and then the Medway tunnel.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The second question I have particularly around the green Medway Central, where would the main secondary schools be and where would they draw their population from?

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Yes, okay. In terms of this area you have got the Hundred of Hoo school and you have got the Strood Academy here (indicating). In terms of Medway Central, you have got Medway, and you can see you have got the Victory Academy which is going to be, if I orientate myself, about there (indicating). You have got the Rochester Girls' School and the Math School, Rochester, round about here with Thomas Aveling being just up in this area (indicating). You have got Brompton Academy being about there (indicating), and in Watling Ward here (indicating) you have got – my mind has gone a blank.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just broadly, really.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Another secondary modern. In Twydall, you have got Rainham Mark Grammar School.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: So you have got a significant amount. Now, just on the point of education, if I can, just literally here (indicating), you have got the campus which is Howard School and Rainham School for Girls which are both large secondary schools, non-selective. There is a grammar selective stream in Howard but essentially non-selective. This is the A2 running along here (indicating) and you have got a pedestrian bridge going across from the ward that I represent across into that campus playing field and yet the allocations policy for those schools is that initially it will take from all of this area south of the A2, including Hempstead and Wigmore, then starting at the eastern end of Rainham and coming along and eventually getting towards Twydall such that I have had situations where people have lived literally by the pedestrian crossing, some of the closest people potentially to the school who do not get in, they have then had to go to what is now the Victory Academy in Chatham Central which would be here (indicating), yet technically you have got Hempstead and Wigmore which is much closer to that school, but they have primacy even though it involves them travelling eastward

and ours westward. That just reinforces the demographic argument actually not least enforced over the years before they became academies by the Conservative controlled local authority in terms of the nature of those population bases. There will always be blurring at the edges and there will always be, particularly in a selective education area, people travelling distances to go to Rainham Mark Grammar School, to Rochester Math, Rochester Girls and Grammar. I forgot to mention within that core area you have also got Fort Pitt Grammar, the Chatham Boys' Grammar and the Chatham Girls' Grammar, so necessarily there will be some elements of movement within those.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Julian?

MR WALDEN: Good afternoon, Julian Walden, Conservative Party. I think with the exception of the Isle of Wight no constituencies are actually an island and therefore have an effect on neighbouring constituencies. Could you tell me what effect your proposals will have on the Sevenoaks constituency as proposed by the Boundary Commission and any other neighbouring constituencies in that part of Kent. Thank you.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: No, what I have sought to do here is to provide a solution which recognises the building blocks of the three Medway constituencies as currently laid out in terms of the proposals for the constituencies as defined within the Commission's own brief.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So you are saying that it does not have any knock-on effects to any other constituencies?

CLLR GRIFFITHS: No.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is entirely self-contained.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Excuse me; a point of clarity. I think that the Downs ward which I think is your ward number 27, I think the Boundary Commission actually proposed that that is in the Sevenoaks constituency, Tonbridge and Malling ward in the Sevenoaks constituency.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: In terms of the proposals put forward, what we have sought to do is run with the significant building blocks as currently provided, so what this does is in terms of a solution. Now in terms of those wards down into the Tonbridge and Malling area it provides a solution for achieving those objectives if there is a suggestion at some stage, and very pretty it looks too and very cohesive in its approach, I do not understand that there is any proposals coming forward from the conservatives in terms of addressing the principal issues that we are seeking to do in this proposal. I have not heard that you have but actually – I am sorry, I am not looking for a discussion, what I am looking to say is

what we have sought to do here is to come up with a solution to meet the brief of the Commissions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just as a point of clarification, the Downs and Mereworth ward is currently in the initial proposals within Sevenoaks.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The proposed Sevenoaks constituency.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Yes, with a population base of ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It has got a population base of 3,305, so I guess what we will need to be clear of at some point before 5 December is whether this configuration will require changes to other constituencies. I am not asking you the question now but that we will need to ---

CLLR GRIFFITHS: No, I understand the point. I would anticipate that there is sufficient flexibility in terms of the numbers to allow that to be in or out. We have sought to work with building blocks as is in that sense.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Again, particularly in terms of the issue around community identity. Now, for the needs of the Commission elsewhere you may well be saying actually at the edges, in the same way that we have had to look in terms of this and you will have to do on the larger scale around what fits where and, indeed, the Commission's proposals related to Higham on that same basis. Essentially what we are saying is you can start your configurations from wherever, this proposal has a rationality to it you might need to consider. What I think would be worth emphasising is primarily the recognition ---

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Excuse me ---

CLLR GRIFFITHS: I am sorry, I was giving an answer. Sorry.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: --- not for further, sort of, presentation.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: I am providing context to answer the question.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are at the end of a long day, so ---

CLLR GRIFFITHS: So, essentially, if I can just say in conclusion, the principal thing is the recognition after 20 years of the ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I understand that point.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: --- Medway Unitary.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I understand that point but at the end of the day all of the numbers have to add up across the whole of Kent.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Absolutely, I recognise that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: As it is the end of a long day, just a further point of clarity for myself. Can you just confirm that you have therefore not taken into account the knock-on effect on neighbouring constituencies as proposed by the Boundary Commission? That would be helpful.

CLLR GRIFFITHS: What we have done is provided a proposal here which meets the requirement of the Boundary Commission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. I think we have sufficient information to go forward and we will check, obviously, all the numbers in due course. If there are no other questions? Thank you very much indeed. I believe Kelly Tolhurst is here. Are you happy to speak now?

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Brilliant.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Sorry, I have been ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, do not worry, I should have told you. If you stand at the lectern.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Everything is recorded and videoed for public record.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Fabulous, okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you can start by saying who you are and where you are from.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Yes, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Then you have got ten minutes and at the end we may ask questions as you have noticed.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: (MP for Rochester and Strood) Wonderful, right, thank you. I am Kelly Tolhurst, I am the Member of Parliament for the Rochester and Strood constituency as it stands at the moment but I am also a Medway councillor for Rochester West Ward.

I am here today firstly really to verbally support the Conservative Party's proposal that has been put forward that would suggest that the Rochester and Strood constituency stays as it is and I also support the element that Higham will stay with the Gravesham area. This obviously keeps within the numbers and it does make logical sense to me and many of the people that are already living in my constituency.

I would say one of the things I am here really to speak about is the suggestion of a name change. The Medway towns, which there are five of them, the people that live within those towns have a very strong emotional attachment to the places that they live and the towns they live and it is true that we are party of Medway Unitary Authority. However, there is clear support from the ground that each of those towns are different and they strongly support their names. In actual fact, the word 'Medway' does not appear in any postal addresses and, in actual fact, Medway is a river, it is not a place, even though for authority purposes it is the Medway Unitary Authority.

I am saying this really as a local person who has lived in the Rochester and Strood constituency for most of my life, a short time in Chatham and Aylesford, probably what was the old Chatham town boundary, the constituencies, and there has clearly been from my predecessor who is now, was, a UKIP Member of Parliament immediately before me who also strongly thought that we would need to keep the name Rochester and Strood as our constituency. They are very different.

One of the big things for my constituency is the historic value of Rochester and Chatham and local people have a strong emotional attachment to the fact that Rochester used to be a city but also the fact that we have so many things that are related to Rochester and how far back our history goes. The same for Chatham. Chatham is extremely well-known not just locally but nationally as their historical importance in regards to the dockyard and also a lot of the new development work that has come forward. Really I would strongly support – actually I believe the Boundary Commission's proposals are not suggesting a change in the constituency name, even of their own proposals, so therefore I would strongly object to a name change.

Fundamentally, I understand that there has been a further submission in regards to changing the wards around but I can speak from the person that needs to represent the area. The good thing about the Rochester and Strood constituency as it is and all the

wards within it are within the Medway Unitary Authority so as a Member of Parliament it is very, very easy to deal with constituents across the board because it is one unitary authority or one authority that we are dealing with at any one time. Also geographically it is actually very easy to get from one side of my constituency as it is today to the other side of the constituency even bearing in mind that we do have a large rural section obviously on the peninsula. There is a natural flow, the river is a natural boundary, of course, but the wards that make up the constituency as it is, there are no proposals to split those and, yes, really my main point is the proposals that I have just seen would split a constituency up over two different local authorities and it would incorporate some parts of other constituencies that would not necessarily be closely linked with the Medway towns or would there be any sort of rational or logical pairing, so obviously that is where I am.

Speaking completely personally as a Member of Parliament, people would probably find it very strange to see that constituency split up. I would imagine in the future we will probably lose wards due to the number of houses that will be built in the future, however at the moment I think that it works quite well and I am happy with the proposals from the Conservative Party but I also think that the main and the key thing for me around the proposals that have been put forward are that there is a solution for the rest of Kent which has taken into account the whole of the county and that obviously is something that I have a care for as well because obviously we need to make sure that Kent is stronger because of local ties and natural link-ups rather than changed around too much. The argument for, sort of, you know, change for change's sake maybe is not necessary but I absolutely understand and support the rationale behind the numbering situation. Sir, I think that is really all I want to say on that matter at this moment in time but I will be submitting a full written submission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. So points for clarification?

CLLR GRIFFITHS: Glyn Griffiths from Gillingham Labour Party and councillor of Medway which I thought was a place because I am a councillor for it. Do you recognise, Kelly, in not supporting Labour's proposal that the proposed Medway Valley constituency would still be compliant at 71,959 even if the Tonbridge and Malling Downs and Mereworth Ward was extracted to balance the Commissions' proposals in Sevenoaks?

MS KELLY TOLHURST: I cannot answer positively or negatively to that because I have not seen the numbers that have been presented with this proposal, so I could not give you that position. All I will say is that the current numbers as it stands is that I have the largest constituency within the three Medway seats and actually the proposals that have been put forward does rationalise those numbers, I think there is round about a 10,000 difference between Rochester and Strood and one of the constituencies as it stands at the moment, so the proposals that I have seen from the Conservative Party and even actually in the Boundary Commission's report does equalise those numbers.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Cllr Maple.

CLLR MAPLE: Thank you very much and thanks for your presentation, Kelly. Just two quick points. I would agree with you when you mention the fact that the river is a hard barrier and hard boundary and I think that is recognised in the proposal I spoke to earlier so I would agree with you on that. Could you just clarify as the representative for the constituency and also the Member of Parliament for the constituency, also a councillor for a neighbouring ward, the anomaly as I see it and your view on this for clarification, that in Rochester and Strood we have Chatham town centre and Chatham High Street. Many, many people came for a by-election, as we all know, and the question I was asked most and I am sure you were as well was why are you in Chatham High Street? So I just want your view on that for clarification, the fact that Chatham High Street is within Rochester and Strood constituency as is currently and is proposed under the Boundary Commission's new proposal.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Well, for clarity, the reason we support it is because there clearly is a Chatham and Aylesford constituency which takes up the residential part of the constituency. It goes back to my argument when I say that we should be celebrating the five towns that we live in, making sure that Rochester, Strood, Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham, because they are all very different and they all need to be promoted for the values that they have, therefore in my opinion to put them under one name of Medway would not be doing justice to those town centres. Chatham is well-respected, well-known and with potentially two Members of Parliament representing the whole of Chatham, two Members of Parliament that get on very well, actually do a good job in regards to making sure that Chatham can be heard, but I would not say the local people of Chatham do not believe they have been recognised. However, I do think a proposal for Medway wards or Medway constituency, should I say, sorry, would not necessarily satisfy people who firmly believe that they either live in Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham or Rainham, so I think the name is quite significant.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you for that. At that point, there are no more questions, so thank you very much indeed.

MS KELLY TOLHURST: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are now waiting for Mr Richard Selkirk who is due in ten minutes but is not here so far, so we will have a short adjournment for ten minutes.

The hearing later concluded

Time not noted

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