

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

Held at

THE MIDLAND HOTEL, MANCHESTER

On

WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2016
DAY TWO

Before:

Mr Neil Ward, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

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At 9.00am:

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the second day of the first public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's proposals for revised boundaries for the parliamentary constituencies for the North West of England.

My name is Neil Ward. I have been appointed as an Assistant Commissioner by the Boundary Commission to chair these hearings and also, with two fellow Assistant Commissioners, Nicholas Elliott and Graham Clark, to take on board the representations that are made over these two days and, indeed, over the other eight days of hearings across the North West, to analyse those together with any written representations and to, as necessary, offer revised proposals to the Boundary Commission on their initial proposals in the light of the public feedback. The lead Assistant Commissioners have had no say, no hand in the drafting of the initial proposals, so, like you, we are here to learn, understand and then offer feedback, as appropriate, on the hearings. To my left is Sam Hartley. Sam is the Secretary to the Commission and he has been here for the full two days as well. There is a range of staff from the Boundary Commission who have been helping us throughout.

The purpose of these hearings is to allow people to make representations to give us information and to do so in a supportive environment. There are a number of professionals who come along and make presentations here, but most of the people who make presentations are not professionals, are not used to public speaking and it is not so easy to step up and do so, so I hope we will be supportive of everyone who gives evidence today. It is not a debate and it is not an opportunity to challenge people on what they say. There will be an opportunity for questions of clarification and, if anyone has any questions, I will offer the opportunity. If anyone has any points of clarification that they wish to seek, please do so through the Chair rather than engage in a debate with the individual who is at the stand.

We have quite a lot of bookings for the day, but those who were here yesterday will know that a booking is not necessarily a confirmed seat on these flights and we may find, I suggest, that we will have some sporadic adjournments, particularly this morning as it looks as though it is more weighted to the afternoon, so please bear with us if I have to adjourn rather than simply sit here with an open mike.

Typically, everyone will have up to a ten-minute slot to make their points. Experience shows that not everyone will need ten minutes and occasionally someone will need slightly longer. I am sure we will have the flexibility to do so. Anyone can speak, whether you have booked a slot or not. If you have not booked a slot, please make it known at the desk and we will seek to accommodate you at some time during the day. I hope that everyone who wants to speak will get the opportunity to do so.

You may have noticed that we are filming and recording these hearings. This is part of the public transcript, the evidence, and the information that is given today will be published in due course alongside the written evidence and the films will be made available, and they will all be published at the same time, probably in early spring, I imagine, maybe a bit earlier. Therefore, when anyone who comes up and gives evidence, I will ask you first of all to give your name, your full address and then you will be free to carry on giving your presentation. Likewise, if you wish to ask any points of clarification, for the same reason, I will ask you to state your name and address before you ask your point of clarification.

At this point, is there any clarification required on anything I have said so far? (No response) If not, then I suggest we get on, and I wonder if I might ask Councillor Michael Young to start the day for us. Thank you.

CLLR YOUNG: (Altrincham Ward) Good morning. I am Michael Young. I live at 38 Acacia Avenue, Hale, in Altrincham. I am a Trafford councillor and I represent Altrincham Ward and today I am also representing the Altrincham and Sale West Constituency.

I do not support the Commission's proposals for Altrincham and Sale West and I agree with the alternative proposals, which were presented yesterday by the Conservative Party, for the following reasons:

Altrincham and Sale has existed as a constituency, albeit in slightly different forms, since 1945 and to take St Mary's Ward and Ashton-upon-Mersey Ward away would break this long, historic connection. There is a complete difference in character between Altrincham, which is a well-developed urban borough, and the three Cheshire East wards, which are rural. The only rural areas in the proposed constituency are the parishes of Dunham Massey and Warburton with an electorate of about 640. The large, open areas in Bucklow St Martin's are mainly brownfield, the area on the right-hand side of Bucklow St Martin's. It is mainly brownfield from the old Shell refinery and the various chemical works. It is due to be developed in the very near future as both employment land and for housing. It is not agricultural land.

The connection between Ashton-upon-Mersey and St Mary's Ward to Stretford and Urmston is tenuous. It is along only one road, the A56, and it is then divided from the rest of Stretford and Urmston by the River Mersey and the M60. The connection to Bucklow St Martin's from Ashton-upon-Mersey is very good and, indeed, a small part of Ashton-upon-Mersey is in Bucklow St Martin's Ward, which heightens the relationship. The boundary between St Mary's and Broadheath is not a clear-cut one.

The catchment areas for the following schools would be cut: the Firs Primary School catchment area covers parts of St Mary's, Broadheath and Buckler St Martin's; Woodheys Primary School and St Margaret's Roman Catholic Primary School both

cover St Mary's and Broadheath wards; and All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School in Bucklow St Martin's takes children from Ashton-upon-Mersey and St Mary's. Furthermore, there is a complete difference in school systems between Altrincham and the three Cheshire East constituencies.

The connection between Altrincham and the three Cheshire seats is along the A556 which, whilst it is a main road, does not lead directly to the population centres and side roads have to be used to reach them. A border between the three wards and the rest of Cheshire East is not clear-cut.

The proposed Altrincham and Sale West Constituency has firm boundaries. You have the Ship Canal, the River Mersey there (indicating) which of course continues along to there (indicating) and you have got the Bollin along the southern boundary. Now, the three wards there are cut off from the rest of Altrincham by both the Bollin and the M56, which runs along there (indicating). The A556, the ring road, runs down.

The proposal we are making to make Altrincham and Sale West basically the same as now is the addition of Bucklow St Martin's. It only needs an additional 6,520 electors to be moved. It will then be the same as the Commission's revised proposals for the aborted 2013 review.

Also, as a consequence of the move of the three Cheshire wards back into Cheshire East, the four Wilmslow wards, which are off the screen to the right, would now all be in the same constituency.

Our proposal is basically to keep the existing Altrincham and Sale West Ward and to add Bucklow St Martin's and Stretford and Urmston, which also means that we do not have this funny shape diving down, which is Ashton-upon-Mersey and St Mary's, aiming like a dagger into the heart of Altrincham. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Can I just ask a question of clarification? You talked about the River Bollin being a boundary. It looks like a boundary there because that is the local authority line. In practice, how big a river is that?

CLLR YOUNG: It is a river with a distinct valley running through it and very few crossing points and, of course, when you come to this end (indicating), there are the lakes at Lymm. You cannot walk across it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any other points of clarification anyone would like to ask? (No response) No, so thank you very much.

Is Iain Lindley in the room? Would you like to come up? Please introduce yourself and give your address and then carry on, please.

CLLR LINDLEY: (Walkden South Ward) Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Councillor Iain Lindley of 5 Park Court, Worsley, M28 7EU. I am one of three councillors for the Walkden South Ward in the Worsley and Eccles South Constituency. I wish to speak briefly today in support of two Commission proposals for the Worsley and Eccles South Constituency and also for the Halton Constituency, which is an area I used to work in. I stood, in the interests of full disclosure, as the Conservative parliamentary candidate for the Worsley and Eccles South Constituency in both the 2010 and the 2015 general elections.

West Salford is not an easy place to draw constituency boundaries. Barton Moss and Chat Moss make it an interesting geographical area, particularly with regard to the geographic nature of the towns of Irlam and Cadishead. However, I think that the Worsley and Eccles South Constituency, as currently formed and as proposed to continue to form under the Commission's original proposals, is as good a fit as we can get. We have towns with similar needs and interests, well-linked by transport links, particularly the M60 motorway and the local roads that go alongside it, that is, Walkden Road, Worsley Road, Barton Road and Bolton Road, depending on which bit of the constituency you are in, but, generally speaking, it is the same road. It allows for continuity, of course, with the existing constituency as well. I do not think there is a better way to draw the west of Salford than we have currently, and I was very pleased with the Commission's original proposals that it was to be retained.

The only thing I would say, in the interests again of full disclosure, is that I have never liked the name of the constituency. It is Worsley and the south of the old Eccles constituency rather than the south of Eccles, which are two very different things. However, given that the proposal is to retain the constituency as is, I think that changing the name would probably do more harm and cause more confusion than good, so I was very pleased to support the Commission's proposals there.

I wonder if I could speak briefly as well about the proposals for the Halton Constituency. Having worked extensively in Runcorn over a number of years and having held quite a few meetings at Halton Lea Shopping Centre, I always felt it was anomalous for the Halton Lea Ward to be part of Weaver Vale rather than part of the Halton Constituency. It has clear links to the north with Halton Castle and it is very much part of the retail centre of Runcorn and, for me, it always belonged with the rest of central Runcorn as part of the Halton Constituency. Again, I was really pleased to see the Commission make that change in their initial proposals.

I did note that a counter-proposal was submitted yesterday to include the Beechwood Ward within the Halton Constituency rather than Halton Lea. Personally, I think that would be a mistake. I think Halton Lea is a far more contiguous ward with the centre of Runcorn than Beechwood is. If you look at the map here, Beechwood Ward has a very distinct boundary on three sides with the expressway, which is effectively motorway-

sized at that point, and it has some very strong links with Frodsham to the south-west and with the village of Sutton Weaver to the south-east. In fact, if you spoke to probably about half of the residents in Beechwood Ward and asked, "Where do you live?", they would tell you that they live in Sutton Weaver. They would not tell you that they live in Runcorn. Again, I just wanted to speak in favour of the proposals to include Halton Lea within the Halton Constituency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any points of clarification anyone would wish to ask? (No response) Thank you very much.

Now, the next booked appointment is Mr Steve Hewitt. Is he in the room? (No response) I wonder then whether, Lord Hayward, would you like to speak now or would you like to speak later?

LORD HAYWARD: I would like to speak later.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Then, let me check if there is anyone else in the room who is either scheduled to speak later or wishes to speak now. Is there anyone? (No response) I think that means that we will take an adjournment. Can I suggest that the next planned speaker is at 9.50, so I will reopen at 9.50, if that is okay. We may find that, as the morning goes on, every hour we reconvene for 20 minutes or so, but we will see. I am sorry about that, but it is simply the way the bookings are running. Indeed, it might be an indication of the Commission's proposals that we have not quite got the numbers that we had in previous years. Thank you very much.

After a short adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, we resume now. I believe we have our next few speakers here, so I am going to call Mr Steve Hewitt. We are filming all of this for the record, so could you please give your name and address and then go into your presentation, please. At the end of your presentation, there may be points for clarification, so please hang on when you finish while we check. Thank you.

CLLR HEWITT: (Saddleworth West and Lees) I am Councillor Steve Hewitt, parish councillor for Lower Springhead, Saddleworth and borough councillor for Saddleworth West and Lees. There are just a couple of points I would like to make.

Oldham has two seats and keeps historic towns together, such as Royton and Saddleworth. They are not particular parts of Oldham, but they are very, very well connected where a lot of people move in and around and, with these boundary changes, that is going to change as well.

I am really proud of all the work we have done locally from the Oldham Fairness Commission to the Oldham Education and Skills Commission and dementia-friendly Oldham, and building on that work a strong, integrated community. All of this is going to change with this border change. The borough is currently largely coterminous with constituencies and numbers of registered electors, which will allow for two constituencies wholly within the borough area. The new larger constituency rules in terms of geographical ties make no sense whatsoever in splitting the town into two, as proposed.

The Boundary Commission states in its own guidelines that it proposes to identify constituencies by reference to local authority external boundaries as far as practicable. It is, nevertheless, often necessary to cross these boundaries in order to form constituencies that comply with the statutory electorate range.

The Oldham East and Saddleworth Constituency will now be divided into three. Under the initial proposal, one of the new constituencies will be Littleborough and Saddleworth. In fact, this is only two of the three Saddleworth wards, which is taking away Saddleworth West and Lees and putting that into Oldham. This will break historical ties right across the piece which have been going on for hundreds of years. It will take three buses from the end of Failsworth and Droylsden to get to Lees and will probably cost you £4.80 to do that. That is all I have to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any points of clarification anyone would like to ask? (No response) In which case, thank you very much indeed for coming.

Next on my list is Mr Adrian Alexander. Again, could you give your full name and address and then proceed with your presentation.

CLLR ALEXANDER: (Saddleworth West and Lees) My full name and address are Adrian Alexander, 2 Glebe Lane, Moorside, Oldham, OL1 4SJ. I am a councillor for Saddleworth West and Lees, following on from Steve, so fellow councillors.

Basically, my speech will be exactly like Steve's, ditto. The main points are that Saddleworth West and Lees is a giveaway with the name, that Saddleworth West and Lees should be in with Saddleworth. Basically, we think that, with the amount of registered voters we have now, which has gone down from 80,000-odd for the whole constituency of Oldham East and Saddleworth, Oldham could be split into two, Oldham West and Oldham East, like it has been for years, and still meet the 70,000 figure that I think you are asking for.

As Steve said as well, the history has Oldham together; it always has been and always will be if you talk to the people, and I have talked to quite a few people over this. As most people here know, a lot of people do not even know what a constituency is or who

their ward councillors are, but, in talking to lots of people from the elderly to the young, they most definitely want to stay in Oldham and they definitely want to stay with their MP, Debbie Abrahams. If you could do something for us, we would be very pleased and honoured. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I had better not make any promises at this stage. Are there any points of clarification on that? (No response) It was admirably succinct. Thank you very much.

On my booking sheet, I now have another gap. Is there anyone else in the room who would like to speak at this stage? (No response) Well, in that case, we will adjourn again until 11.10 for the next speaker who is due. I am sorry, but there is no point in just sitting around and waiting. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will resume. I am pleased to say that we do have a number of speakers available now. Lord Hayward, will you lead us off?

LORD HAYWARD: My name is Lord Hayward. My address is 11 Grosvenor Park, Camberwell, SE5 0MQ.

I just want to make one or two comments about one particular ward that is included in the proposed North Lancashire Constituency and then talk about aspects of constituencies in general. My comments relate to the University and Scotforth Rural Ward. I think it is important to note that, in the introductory booklet which the Boundary Commission publishes, at paragraph 31, it says that it is “a predominantly rural ward, most of which lies to the east of the M6 motorway”. Now, that is true, except for the fact that 90 per cent of the electorate are actually at the University of Lancaster and they are actually to the west of the motorway. The hint lies in the name of the ward, ie, University and Scotforth Rural. There is Scotforth East and Scotforth West.

If one thinks about any particular university, they are, as a community, more dependent on the town or city in which they are situated than the vast majority of the population. They come there anew, they do not have the facilities and, if you are an average student, you will need health facilities, shopping, cleaning, residential and transport, and a large number of the university students will no doubt come from the university. We can then deal with the nightlife for which they are certainly dependent on Lancaster, I would imagine, outside of the university, and of course where do the facilities that are provided to the university come from? They will come from Lancaster, whether they are in terms of supplies of food, residential for the university lecturers, support staff, cleaning staff and all those sorts of things, so to suggest that this is a ward that is separate from Lancaster in any way, I think, is inaccurate and, as I say, particularly because it is described as being predominantly to the east of the motorway. In land

terms, that is correct, but 90 per cent of the population, as I said, is centred on the western side and is dependent on Lancaster for its facilities.

I would now like to broaden out my observations in relation to both North Lancashire and Colne and Clitheroe. Looking at the two constituencies and comparing them with those around the country elsewhere, they are truly two of the most odd constituencies that I can see in any part of England. The fact that they are abutting each other, to me, is no coincidence; you have created one constituency and, as a result, you have created another odd constituency.

Strikingly, if one looks at the Cumbria constituencies, each of those, although being very large, has a centre of population. North Lancashire has no single centre of population around which it could coalesce. In fact, 22 per cent, by my calculation, of the voters in the four different local authorities are in Ribble Valley and would have to go over areas which, according to the Boundary Commission's own map, have only one road crossing that area with the exception that a road leads out into Yorkshire, so there are no population centres. This is very rare in terms of constituencies right around the country and, to a large extent, it is a collection of rural areas around the population centres. I believe that constituencies are far better constructed if you have one core population centre to which most of the people can relate in one form or another. If you have two or three, fine, but it is striking that the largest ward in this constituency with some 5,000-odd voters is Garstang, which again is a wide-ranging, stretched ward.

The other comment I want to make is in relation to community. We heard a lot yesterday, quite understandably, as to what forms a community in towns and cities, and there is no doubt that, even in this mobile age of people moving from one part of the country to another on a regular basis and families dispersing around the country, there remain marked communities, whether it be in places like Bolton or Manchester or other major conurbations in the country. I think there is a supposition in the creation of North Lancashire that, just because you draw a line between fields, you are not breaking a community. If you live in a city, you can go to another B&Q, you can go to another health centre, you can go to another school. The people who live in these sorts of communities in both the north and eastern sides of the proposed constituency do not have that option. Communities have been built up over centuries. You probably only have one pub, one post office, one school, one baker's and one butcher's to go to and that follows whatever the line of communication is and normally down a valley. In other parts of the country, you can have large constituencies, but they are generally flat. This is not a proposed flat constituency until you come to the western side. Therefore, what I am saying is that, in terms of communities, just because you are not dividing a street does not mean that you are actually not dividing a community. The chances are that the farming families and the service industries that supply these sorts of communities have been there for many generations, and what you will be doing in breaking them up away from their centres of population, like Clitheroe or Colne, is actually saying, "Well, these communities don't matter, they can be split, whereas the town communities can't".

On those two bases, on the question of both population centres around which a constituency would naturally coalesce and the breaking of rural communities, I think that both Clitheroe and Colne and North Lancashire are ill-founded constituencies and, as I say, looking at alternatives around the country, two of the most odd proposed anywhere in the country by the Boundary Commission. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any points anyone would like to ask? (No response) Can you just remind me, on the alternative proposals, which is presumably what you are talking about here, Upper Lune Valley, the communities you are linking are in Lancaster, are they?

LORD HAYWARD: No, you have Morecambe and a constituency around there and then you have Lancaster and a constituency running down there, and these areas which are over here (indicating) would relate to a Ribble Valley and Hyndburn West Constituency, so there would be a series of population centres in each case to which the constituencies could relate in one form or another.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

I believe Councillor Ken Hind is here now. When you get to the podium, please give your name and address and feel free to begin when you are ready.

CLLR HIND: (Ribble Valley) Sir, my name is Kenneth Hind. I am the former Member of Parliament for West Lancashire. I am a councillor in the Ribble Valley and I speak on behalf of, first of all, the Ribble Valley and, secondly, on behalf of the Conservative Association in the Ribble Valley and also on behalf of the Hyndburn Conservative Association, all of whom are affected by the Commission's proposals.

Sir, I have made a submission which is in writing and is before you, so I will not go into too much detail in relation to it. The Ribble Valley Borough Council have unanimously passed the resolution that is before you and they have decided, all-party, that the position is that they would like to retain the Ribble Valley Borough in one constituency and they would also like to retain the Ribble Valley name. A working party has been set up and what will happen is that the Ribble Valley Borough Council, in the light of that, will make their own independent submissions, but they support, in essence, the retention of the Ribble Valley in one borough.

My colleague, Councillor Hoare who is here, and I have looked, along with the Conservative Association, at the impact of doing that and we realise that we obviously do not live within a situation where we can just pick out our own position, so we have looked at the whole position and we have come up with a series of proposals.

The first thing I would like to say to you, Sir, is that the two constituencies into which the Ribble Valley Borough is now divided on the Commission's proposals really do not make an awful lot of sense. You have heard from the previous speaker who set out what the really big problem is. The North Lancashire seat effectively draws the whole of central Lancashire together, there is no administrative centre and, effectively, half of the borough of the Ribble Valley goes into it. The Ribble Valley itself is based upon two towns and the 34 villages that surround it. It is based upon Longridge in the west and Clitheroe in the centre, which is its administrative centre.

Now, what this constituency really means for our people is that, if we look, for example, in the east at Gisburn and Rimington, to travel from one end of it to the other, what we find is that it is 50 miles by the back road from one end of it to the other in Carnforth, according to AA Routefinder, on a good day, which will take something in the region of an hour. The other way is to go on two motorways from Rimington right up to Carnforth, which takes an hour and six minutes, to give you some idea. It also covers four local authority areas. Now, as a former member, I can say to you, Sir, that this is a nightmare for any Member of Parliament, to say nothing in relation to the administration of an election, and there are very, very few, if any, community connections between the various parts of this particular constituency. It is obviously something that numbers have driven, but really, in community terms, it makes no sense and it also makes no sense in terms of geography.

What is not immediately obvious is that there (indicating) is the Forest of Bowland, a big wilderness, effectively, populated by sheep. It is visited in large measure by walkers and people who wish to come and admire the scenery, it has virtually no population at all and creates quite a big barrier geographically between the Ribble Valley on the one side and the rest of this constituency and, in order to get from Rimington up to Carnforth, you have to go through it. In our final submission, Sir, we will present some photographs of the road to give you some idea of the quality of transport links that exist. There are virtually no transport links between this area and the top there (indicating) and, of course, there is no administrative centre really to hold advice surgeries and for MPs to operate from. Without putting too fine a point on it, it is a seat which really, in our view, has not been very well thought out at all.

In a nutshell, what we are proposing, having a look at the circumstances, are three criteria in our proposal. We wish to put together the Ribble Valley and part of Hyndburn. We recognise that on a simple basis. We have looked at community and we have based our communities on local authorities because they have a community of interest. We have looked at the geographical, transport and natural barriers that exist and we have also looked at the question of movement or churn in relation to the changes that are necessary from the existing seats to the ones that we are actually putting forward. I have listed them in pages 3, 4 and 5 of our submission and, if I may, I will just pick out certain things that are quite important.

Key to all of this is that we have tried to put together seats that are only covered by two local authorities. There is only one where we have failed and where there are three. In our proposal, ten of the seats in Lancashire are contained predominantly within one local authority. Obviously, there are local authorities, like Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen, where clearly there is an excess of numbers and they need more than one seat. If we go through them, what we will find in relation to our position is that Chorley, Fylde, Pendle, Preston, the Ribble Valley, South Ribble and West Lancashire are all contained predominantly within one local authority area. That means that their administrative centre is there, established community links are kept together and, of course, it makes it much easier for any Member of Parliament. In each of these constituencies that we have proposed, there are only two local authorities and, in some, there is only one. Chorley is an example, Blackburn is another, the whole of Rossendale is in one and so forth. That has been the essence of our proposal. We have not been blind to what is happening around us in the Ribble Valley and we recognise that the jigsaw puzzle has to be looked at.

In relation to the proposed Ribble Valley and West Hyndburn Constituency, we recognise that there are pinch-points in every plan put forward by the Commission, and this is obvious and, clearly, we had to address it. The Ribble Valley Constituency at the moment has a number of wards that are in South Ribble. They will go back to South Ribble. We also recognise that some, three in particular, will have to go to Preston to make up the numbers. Also, in relation to Hyndburn, some of the areas that in the past have been part of the Ribble Valley Constituency, in particular Great Harwood which is two wards, can form a constituency with the Ribble Valley, which we have called 'Ribble Valley and West Hyndburn'. The purpose of that is obviously to form one constituency, but there are also quite well-established links in any event. Great Harwood is right up against the Ribble Valley, there are organisations, both voluntary and statutory, that cross the boundaries and we work together on a number of things. Therefore, in proposing to put Overton and Netherton, which is part of Great Harwood, Baxenden, Church, Emmanuel and St Andrew's and St Oswald's together, we then have quite a compact constituency which has common community of interest, it only covers two boroughs and the Member of Parliament will only be required to represent two. It will involve the division of Hyndburn, but Hyndburn will be divided only into two seats and it will have the benefit, unlike a lot of other constituencies, of having two Members of Parliament to actually speak for it in the circumstances.

The view of the Hyndburn Conservative Association is that they support this proposal. They have considered it and they have asked that it be called 'Ribble Valley and West Hyndburn' because they wish to retain its name. They are also proposing, and they wish it to be known, that the other seat, which is consequently formed from this, which is a combination of Burnley and Accrington, be called 'Burnley and East Hyndburn' so that the name of Hyndburn, which is the borough name, is kept and in that way they feel that the interests of their borough can be properly represented.

Sir, I think I have covered everything. The only thing that I would say to you is that our proposal brings back our neighbouring borough, Pendle, into one seat, which makes a lot of sense; it does not divide it and it recreates the seat of Morecambe and Lunesdale, which exists at the moment and is at the north of the county. It is a seat that has existed going back to 1983 under that same name, so, in this sense, when we say to you that we do not want a change, the churn, these are the sorts of areas where the churn is very much reduced. Overall, much of what we are putting forward is based upon the previous Boundary Commission report, which was rejected in the House of Commons. We can see the sense of it, but we can see, if you will forgive me for saying, that this seat really does not make any sense in any respect, community, geographical barriers or in any respect at all. Therefore, we suggest and respectfully say to you that that seat should be totally reconsidered with the consequences of what we are advocating.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That was very helpful. Can you just remind me, as I am not familiar with the area: Hyndburn is a locality rather than a location, is it?

CLLR HIND: No, Hyndburn is a local authority and is at present an existing seat. It is not totally coterminous with the borough, but it takes two wards that currently are in Rossendale. Now, on the Commission's proposal, they move those two wards back to Rossendale so that Rossendale is totally within one borough. We endorse that view and, in our proposal, the same would apply, but what we are doing is dividing Hyndburn as a borough into two parts, part of it going with Burnley, and we restore the Pendle seat as it exists, effectively. If I can come back to pinch-points, Sir, you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, and that one, unfortunately, is a pinch-point, but I think it makes a lot more sense to be put together than this.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Are there any other points that anyone would like to raise?

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Nicholas Elliott, Assistant Boundary Commissioner. It is just some clarification on the name. You have referred to Ribble Valley and West Hyndburn. The Conservative proposal say "Ribble Valley and Hyndburn West". It is a small point, but is there a difference between you?

CLLR HIND: No, there is not. That, I am afraid, Sir, is down to me. Whatever you wish to call it, whether you wish to call it 'West Hyndburn' or 'Hyndburn West', when I represented West Lancashire, it was referred to as 'Lancashire West' or 'West Lancashire'; it all depends on how the Commission decide to deal with it as to which is more appropriate.

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any other points? (No response) Thank you.

Is Richard Bliss in the room? When you are ready, please give your name and address.

MR BLISS: Richard Bliss, 21 Stamford Grange, Dunham Road, Altrincham, WA14 4AN. My interest is in the proposed changes to Altrincham and Sale West. I do not agree with the proposals as they are made. A far simpler solution is to leave the constituency as is, but to add Bucklow, which meets the number requirements. All the other changes that are listed in your representations for the new constituency of Altrincham and Tatton breach most of the criteria you have, whether they be crossings, boundaries or school catchment areas. We have different school systems across the proposals as they are currently written and we would remove a lot of those by retaining the constituency as is and by adding just Bucklow to give the numbers, as I have said.

The difficulties that we would have are very much reflected in the nature of the three Cheshire wards which are truly rural as opposed to what is, clearly, a metropolitan or urban area in the existing Altrincham and Sale West. The Bollin Valley, which was referred to earlier, we can show photographs to show that it is, indeed, a valley and it is a very natural barrier for anybody from the south of our constituency. I would rest my case on the fact that it is better to leave as is.

It is a very, very old constituency, Altrincham and Sale West; it has been there since the year before I was born, I think, so it was created in 1945 and I was born in 1946, so I can actually say that it is older than I am, and I think that it should continue in as near the current shape as it is. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Are there any points anyone wishes to raise? (No response) Thank you very much indeed, Mr Bliss.

Is Mr Stephen Blackhurst here? Please introduce yourself with your full name and address and then please carry on.

MR BLACKHURST: My name is Stephen Blackhurst, 55 Durham Street, Droylsden. I actually live in Droylsden, which is in Tameside, but my family, about 20 of them, live near Stockport and are in the Marple part of the proposed-to-be-abolished Hazel Grove Constituency.

Having looked through the various proposals, I was a little bit concerned about what was going on around the whole of the east Manchester area, particularly in relation to the representation for Stockport and for Tameside. At the moment, when the Boundary Commission is proposing to reduce constituencies, these two boroughs will actually get an increase in MPs. The effect, because of the split constituencies, will lead to both boroughs being covered by four MPs. In Stockport's case, it will have one MP and

three shared constituencies. In each of the three shares, two with Tameside and one with Cheshire East, it will be the majority part of the constituency. In the case of Tameside, the three shared parts of the constituency will all be a minority part, with one town moved into the proposed Marple Hyde Constituency, one town moved into the Stockport North and Denton Constituency and the third one would be moved into the Oldham Constituency, which is Failsworth and Droylsden, where again Tameside would be the minority part.

In terms of effective representation, in some of the things I am going to say a little bit later on, it will become clear why I think this might be an issue. One of those is to do with the devolution which is going on in Greater Manchester. Quite clearly, MPs in split constituencies will have dual loyalties. Health is one of the issues that is being devolved. Any MP that represents, for example, Oldham and Tameside or Stockport and Tameside may well be put in a position where they are having to deal with constituents who are saying that one hospital should be given priority or investment as opposed to another, and there are many other examples where split constituencies, particularly in the Greater Manchester context, could lead to problems.

Greater Manchester itself is a very artificial type of county. You do not have to look very far to find red roses in Manchester, which is obviously a Lancashire symbol, and, if you go to Cheshire or Altrincham, you will not have to look hard to find the Cheshire wheatsheaf. Manchester City have just restored the traditional crest with a red Lancashire rose on it. Greater Manchester is a proper noun, a collective noun, it is a geographical and administrative expression. The loyalty within Greater Manchester tends to lie with the individual boroughs. People, if you ask them, will not say, "I'm a Greater Mancunian". You would have more chance of finding a Scotsman who would say that he was British, I would suggest, but what you will find is that people will say, "I'm from Wigan", "I'm from Bolton", "I'm from Bury", "I'm from Stockport", "I'm from Altrincham" and from various towns.

In Tameside's case, again the name was invented in 1974 from a selection which were up for grabs, but Tameside is, in fact, nine individual towns, being Droylsden, Ashton-under-Lyne, Stalybridge, Hyde and so on. The reason I mention this is because those loyalties do not lie with a Greater Manchester area, which, as I say, is a very artificial thing. In fact, the deeper loyalties lie with the old pre-1974 Cheshire and Lancashire boundaries. Almost every letter my parents receive says "Stockport, Cheshire" or you see "Bury, Lancs" and so on. One of the reasons why I mention this is that the constituencies that are drawn in Tameside and Stockport are blurring these boundaries. Because they are all Greater Manchester, that does not mean that they have got very much in common. Indeed, Tameside and Stockport are exceptionally different; their demographics are very, very different. I was not going to mention demographics, but you will see later that, in one of the Boundary Commission's own proposals, they have actually referred to demographics as being a determining factor in the creation of a constituency.

To cut this very short, the Boundary Commission is proposing to shift about 60,000 votes from Tameside into predominantly Stockport constituencies. I feel that the effect of that would be a greater change to the town's representation and it would be greater than anything the electorate has ever meted out on politicians of any party at all. It would be an unintended consequence.

One of the other parts of this is when Marple was tagged on to Hyde. I am well aware that the Boundary Commission is not supposed to look at intended outcomes, but we have heard from other people about traditional constituencies. The outcome for the Marple and Hyde Constituency is either that the Tameside town of Hyde would have its first ever Conservative MP since the war or Marple would, for the first time ever, have a Labour MP. That is an unintended consequence, but it is just an example of how this particular constituency is something which appears to be made up of leftover bits in the part of the area which the Boundary Commission itself has said has been very difficult to fix, this east and south Manchester part.

I do believe that there have been inconsistencies, which a previous speaker has mentioned, about applying the guidelines and the other statutory factors, especially following local government, the existing constituencies and the local ties that would be broken. I have given you one example about these inconsistencies. Rochdale, Bury and Oldham all have created individual town-centre, urban constituencies. Stockport had one, but the proposal is to actually split it in two, so you have got the outcome here of it moving in two different ways.

I do need to just refer to point 59 in the report, which is the proposed new constituency of Bramhall and Poynton. In the Commission's own report, it states that they are "not dissimilar in composition and outlook". In other words, with the Stockport town of Bramhall and the Cheshire East one of Poynton, somebody has been looking at the demographics, and that was almost a complete quote from the failed 2013 report where the Boundary Commission was faced with objections about moving Poynton into a Stockport seat. Therefore, having justified Bramhall and Poynton as being "not dissimilar in composition and outlook" as the reason why they have put them together, we then end up with what I can only call this 'Frankenstein constituency' of Marple and Hyde, which has two so totally disparate and different parts to it that it has this feeling of simply being something that has been left over. As I said, one of those two parts of the constituency will end up being represented in a way that it has not been represented certainly since the Second World War, where I stopped looking any further back.

The lack of clear constituency identities is also reflected in the clumsy and often clunky proposed nomenclature of these eight constituencies covering this particular area. Seven of the eight are double-barrelled, trying to cobble these parts together, leaving only Ashton-under-Lyne, which in its radical redrawing incorporates Stalybridge, which

has been a traditional constituency linked with Hyde, and the name 'Stalybridge' suddenly disappears for some reason.

In summary, I feel that, whilst the area may end up with more MPs, it will, in fact, end up being less well represented, and it does seem that a disproportionate number of the Greater Manchester changes seem to have been focused on this particular south-eastern corner.

In terms of counter-proposals, I have listened with interest to the references to North Lancashire. I did start to try and say, "Well, yes, perhaps we could do this or do that or move", but the chain effect in an urban area like Greater Manchester is far more difficult, unless you have got a party machine or unless you have an awful lot of time to actually come up with some proposals. I have got some general things which I would say. The 2013 Review did, in fact, much more logically put together the Stockport and the Tameside constituencies with the necessary addition of a few votes from Cheshire, which was actually Poynton being added on to Hazel Grove. I do think that that situation could perhaps be relooked at. When I added up the number of voters, Stockport itself is only about 1,000 short of being worth three constituencies on its own, but, given that the Greater Manchester total had to be topped up with votes from Cheshire anyway, it actually was not a problem to make three constituencies contained within the borough. Tameside was always going to have to have a top-up from somewhere else and, just so that it does not sound as if I am being all critical, Droylsden and Failsworth makes eminent sense as a cross-border constituency between Oldham and Tameside.

The problem, therefore, as I see it is that many MPs get an awful lot of local government time issues, and I am not here to speak on behalf of MPs, but I do understand the point of view that, for those split constituencies, that does increase the workload in terms of having to deal across and prioritise the necessary things.

Some years ago, one of my responsibilities in my job was that I wrote the school timetable for the largest secondary school in Luton. In the first year I did it, I ended up with an awful lot of split classes, rather like, I feel, this first attempt for this part of Greater Manchester where it has ended up with an awful lot of split constituencies, an unacceptably large number of split constituencies. In the second year I wrote the timetable, I actually managed to get rid of them all, I had absolutely none. This was a very large secondary school and I had no split classes, and I always consider that as one of my greatest ever achievements. I would just hope that perhaps, if the Boundary Commission could look at some of the ways of reducing the splits across to preserve the identity of the boroughs, which, as I say, is far, far stronger than the Greater Manchester identity, then I think some good will have come from this, but at the moment I do feel that, with the proposals as they stand, there are too many split constituencies, which will actually adversely affect the representation of the people in these towns. One of them, particularly the Marple and Hyde Constituency, is one of those, which, as we

have heard with other ones, unlike Bramhall and Poynton or Droylsden and Failsworth which make eminent sense, does not make very much sense at all. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I will give you two bonus points, one for your Jekyll and Hyde-type presentation and the other one for being the first person to mention the 1974 reorganisation, and you will not be the last in these sessions. The further north I go, the more I hear it. Thank you. Are there any points of clarification from anyone? (No response) Thank you very much.

Is Mr Roger Frost here? Please give your name and full address, Mr Frost, and then begin when you are ready.

CLLR FROST: (Burnley Borough Council) I am Councillor Roger Barstow Frost. I am a member of Burnley Borough Council. I live at 33 Cross Street, Briercliffe, Burnley.

As I came in, you were talking about my part of the county, north-east Lancashire, and there are two points I would like to make fairly briefly. The first one is about the remit that the Commission was given and had to work with. I know that it is rather late to make this point, but it may be worth making. My problem is that the remit, it appears, was nearly conjured out of thin air. To save 50 seats or to reduce the number by 50 seats just seems to be unscientific, to say the very least. It has resulted in a lot of predictable anomalies, some of which can be identified where I live in north-east Lancashire. The Government should have been more strategic rather than wanting to save a few million pounds. I realise that the Commission had to work with what it was given, which leads me on to my second point, which is all based on what the recommendations are, and they refer to my part of the world as well.

The first point I would like to make is about the new constituency of Clitheroe and Colne. This satisfies neither of those two communities and it is clear to me that, if ever there was a constituency with Frankenstein dimensions and proportions, it would be this one. The previous speaker has used the word 'Frankenstein' and I think it is a good one to use. Now, other constituencies based on real communities that mean something, like Hyndburn and Pendle, will disappear and Burnley will be divided into two constituencies. The main point that I am making is that the recommendations that are being proposed, and I understand why they have been made, will not destroy communities, but they will do nothing to strengthen existing communities.

I would have thought that an alternative approach could have been used, and let me just mention two of the constituencies. The one that I will be in, if this is adopted, is the Burnley and Nelson Constituency. However, this constituency will contain more of Pendle than Burnley, yet Burnley is chosen as the first word in the title. One of the previous speakers talked about nomenclature, and it is a minor point, but it is something that I would just like to draw to your attention. Now, the other one, Accrington, which has been recommended by the Commission, will contain more of Burnley than

Hyndburn and certainly more of Accrington itself. I just give those two examples. I have looked around the country and the naming of the constituencies, the nomenclature, is a problem to me and it ought to be looked at again more carefully. I know that people in the western part of Burnley will not like to be part of a constituency entitled 'Accrington'. Of course, there is absolutely nothing wrong with Accrington, but I think you take my point.

The other thing I would like to conclude with is to say that the constituencies themselves might have been better formulated if Ribble Valley had been, for want of a better word, sacrificed. I know that will not be terribly popular in Ribble Valley, but it would make more sense to me to add areas closest to the existing constituencies, Pendle, Burnley and Hyndburn, and I could increase it to include a few others as well. Someone referred to the 1974 changes, which incidentally I was involved in as a lecturer here at the polytechnic at that time. I would have thought that, if areas like Read and Simonstone were taken from the present borough of Ribble Valley, it would be a far better solution because it would have kept the identities of the larger towns and Burnley could have remained a constituency in its own right. Pendle, which is not all that far short of being acceptable under the Boundary Commission's remit, could have done the same, and I think it would have been possible with Hyndburn. The main point I am making, and it is been made by someone else a few moments ago, is that, if we lose that identity with the bigger urban areas, which would be the case in north-east Lancashire, I think it would be detrimental, and I know it is very easy to say without going into any detail, to democracy. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Does anyone have any points of clarification on that presentation?

CLLR HIND: Kenneth Hind, Ribble Valley. If we were to press the Commission to recreate the seat of Pendle, would you be in support of that?

CLLR FROST: I think so, yes. In fact, I will revise that. I certainly would. It makes more sense. I was expecting a more critical question from someone from Ribble Valley, but I am sure we will get on very well!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are all friends in this room! Thank you very much.

Is Mr Iain Roberts here? Again, please give your name and full address and begin when you are ready.

CLLR ROBERTS: (Cheadle and Gatley Ward) Sir, my name is Iain Roberts. My address is 25 Frances Avenue, Gatley, Cheadle, and I am a councillor for the Cheadle and Gatley Ward in Stockport.

I am here to actually support the Boundary Commission's proposals. It is not an easy exercise and I appreciate that it is very much bound by the law that has been laid down, which is not a law that I would personally have supported, but, given that the situation is where we are, I actually think that the proposals, certainly for my area in and around Stockport Borough, are probably the best that they realistically can be.

I think it is actually important to minimise the constituencies that cross the Greater Manchester boundary. I appreciate that it is not possible to completely eliminate them due to the numbers, and an earlier speaker did talk about old loyalties, Lancashire and Cheshire and these sorts of things, but actually I think that, if we are going to do this, it makes more sense to look to the likely loyalties in the future rather than maybe what the loyalties have been in the past. There is no doubt at all that Greater Manchester is becoming more of a city in its own right, it is being perceived that way, it will be getting an elected mayor next year, and there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that, over the coming years, people will more and more identify themselves with Greater Manchester and less with those historical loyalties. There is nothing wrong with them, but they are historical loyalties, loyalties that go back in the past rather than the future.

In particular, the South Stockport and Cheadle Constituency, which is the one that my ward and my home would fall within on these proposals, falls wholly within both Stockport Borough and Greater Manchester. I think the proposed constituency is reasonable. It does remove some current anomalies, for example, an area called Cheadle Heath, which currently falls outside the Cheadle Constituency, would fall inside the new constituency, and I think the South Stockport and Cheadle Constituency would be perfectly sensible in terms of the mix and connectivity.

I have spoken to local residents in my role as a councillor and I have been quite surprised at how little complaint I have received. Normally, with these things, there are people who are kicking up a fuss, but actually no one seems particularly concerned. I do not think there is huge excitement about it, which may be unfortunate. I am sure we would all like people to be singing and dancing in the streets. There is not quite that excitement, but there certainly is not any particular anger about it. I think people see it as a reasonable proposal which is probably as good as any other.

In summary, I think the Boundary Commission has taken a sensible approach, given the restrictions laid down in law. I think that it is important and a good thing, let's say, that seats should avoid crossing the Greater Manchester boundary wherever possible, although I accept that it is not possible in all cases, and I think that my local proposed constituency of South Stockport and Cheadle is sensible and I think it is one that the residents who live there will be content with, so I would support the Boundary Commission's proposals, and I will be putting in a written submission to that effect.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Mr Roberts. Are there any points anyone would like to raise on that? (No response) No, so thank you very much

indeed. Now, we may be at a point for a break as I have no one else listed to speak this side of lunch, as it were. Is there anyone in the room who hopes to speak and would like to speak now rather than later, or at all? (No response) No, in which case, I am going to adjourn until two o'clock.

After the luncheon adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon. With a bit of luck this afternoon, we should get quite a steady stream of speakers, so we will see how we go and, if we have to break, we will break. On current plans, we may possibly finish a bit early, but we will see how demand goes.

I am fairly sure that Mrs Jean Stretton is here in the room. Would you like to come up? Because this is a matter of record and the presentation is given as part of the overall representations, we are both filming from the back and recording, so could you give your name and full address and then begin.

CLLR STRETTON: (Oldham) My name is Jean Stretton and my address is 20 Caernarvon Street, Oldham, OL8 3PW. I am Councillor Jean Stretton and I have been the Leader of Oldham Council since January and, before that, I was the Deputy Leader. I have served as a Hollinwood Ward councillor for a total of 11 years.

I am objecting to the Boundary Commission proposals. I intend to make particular reference today to the Metropolitan Borough of Oldham and the wards within it and, in doing so, I will refer briefly to the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale. I will also address the treatment of the existing constituencies of Oldham West and Royton and Oldham East and Saddleworth.

It is heartening to note that the Boundary Commission's consultation document states: "We ask people to be aware that, in publishing our initial proposals, we do so without suggesting that they are in any way definitive or that they provide the right answer." It is heartening because these proposals, insofar as they affect Oldham, go against all of the principles that the Boundary Commission's own documentation says should be taken into account.

The proposals do not take account of local government boundaries for either Oldham or Rochdale as at May 2015. They break community ties that exist within the existing constituencies. There are geographical issues, which I will refer to later, and the proposals depart drastically from the boundaries of the existing constituencies of Oldham West and Royton and Oldham East and Saddleworth.

I intend to set out an alternative that does take account of all of these principles by arguing for two parliamentary constituencies wholly contained within Oldham Metropolitan Borough. This arrangement allows for the retention of the existing

constituency names and involves minimum disruption. It is clear that the aim of retaining existing constituencies where possible has not been well met in the North West with just 19 per cent of constituencies unchanged. This has significant impact on the east of Greater Manchester.

Starting in the west of the conurbation and retaining constituencies there creates some very odd configurations of wards in the east, for example, a Failsworth and Droylsden constituency that draws wards from four existing constituencies with seven of the ten wards being drawn from the 20 Oldham MBC wards. The constituency stretches from the Saddleworth West and Lees Ward in Oldham East and Saddleworth in a swathe via the central Oldham wards of Alexandra and Werneth and then south through Medlock Vale and Hollinwood, currently in Oldham West and Royton, then takes in Failsworth East, Failsworth West and the two Droylsdens from Ashton-under-Lyne and, finally, picks up Audenshaw from the Denton and Reddish Constituency, creating a seat that draws 66 per cent of its electorate from within Oldham Metropolitan Borough.

Oldham is a growing place with a relatively young population of almost a quarter of a million people, yet it feels like the electoral arrangements proposed for its people are a series of after-thoughts. Oldham deserves better. The two existing Oldham constituencies are relatively stable in terms of electoral numbers and it seems clear that the impact on the constituencies on the east of the conurbation arise from the need to address electoral spikes elsewhere. In the very urban parts of Manchester and Salford, for example, there are areas where constituency boundaries pass through contiguous built-up areas, yet in the east the proposed Littleborough and Saddleworth seat has component parts, wards that are separated by moorland. Anyone who has ever visited this part of the world in winter will know the challenges that brings. Clearly, such an arrangement is unavoidable in predominantly rural areas, but, for the most part, the 20 wards of Oldham are centred around a solid urban core. Creating a two-constituency Oldham makes sense.

Now, for the detail of the alternative proposal. Firstly, I will turn to Royton. Separating the two Royton wards is illogical and would be difficult for local people to understand. I expect that, once these proposals are more widely communicated, there will be considerable objection to the idea of splitting this town in half. Prior to the deformation of the Metropolitan Borough of Oldham, Royton was a self-controlling urban district in its own right. After the Reform Act of 1832, Royton became part of the Oldham Borough parliamentary constituency. Whilst Royton found itself in different constituencies since then, the two wards have never been split. Royton still retains its own town hall. Under Oldham Council's strong commitment to localism, significant funding and decision-making is devolved to local district executives. For the purpose of Royton, it is a two-ward district executive with six councillors. Roytonians identify with their place as a single town. It has its own town centre with a thriving shopping centre, a busy weekly market, its own library and only this year work was completed on a new leisure centre.

Roytonians are also Oldhamers and are very proud that the name of the current constituency contains the name of their town, Royton.

To create two constituencies with the Oldham Borough boundaries, the two Failsworth wards would need to be brought into Oldham West and Royton. This would reunite Failsworth with Hollinwood, which was removed from the Ashton-under-Lyne Constituency in the last parliamentary boundary changes. Despite this, the two Failsworth wards retain strong links with Hollinwood. Many parts of the Failsworth East Ward are still considered to be Hollinwood by locals. The famous housing units of Hollinwood are actually in Failsworth East and the site of the former Roxy cinema, strongly identified by local people as Hollinwood, is also in Failsworth East. An indicator of the relationship between Failsworth and Hollinwood is the fact that these wards retain a single district partnership with nine members, which meets in Failsworth Town Hall. Although the geography of the district executives has been revisited twice in Oldham since the 2010 General Election, members and communities retain a strong preference for this arrangement.

Now, I will turn to the proposals for Saddleworth. The three Saddleworth wards form a single district executive with nine members. Saddleworth is parished and has its own civic hall in Upper Mill. Although the Lees part of the Saddleworth West and Lees Ward is not part of the parish, the rest, roughly half of the electorate, is. Saddleworth people do not distinguish between the three ward boundaries and, indeed, many still assert that Saddleworth is in Yorkshire. It is welcome that these proposals make no attempt to separate the Chaddertons. Splitting these three wards would be as unacceptable as splitting Royton or Saddleworth. Chadderton retains its own town hall, its own sports centre within the Health and Wellbeing Centre, has a district shopping centre and a nine-member district executive.

In order to create a two-constituency Oldham with the Failsworths in Oldham West and Royton, it would be necessary to transfer one ward into Oldham East and Saddleworth. I would argue that the most appropriate ward to transfer is Medlock Vale. This would make for a better geographical split between Oldham East and Saddleworth and Oldham West and Royton. There are very strong community links between Alexandra Ward and Medlock Vale; the wards are demographically similar. Both wards were part of a New Deal for Communities initiative in the last decade and the NDC leaves as part of its legacy the excellent Honeywell Community Centre, which both communities share. Both communities also see Hathershaw School as their primary provider of secondary education. There are strong transport links around the A627.

The City of Manchester Moston Ward is included in the proposed Oldham BC constituency. The proposals across the North West seek to avoid any constituency with wards from more than two local authority areas. Whilst this is achieved in these proposals, it should also be noted that Oldham Borough will have three MPs who work across four of the ten Greater Manchester authorities. This brings its own

administrative challenges, in particular for elections and especially for election counts when local and parliamentary elections fall on the same day. It is for colleagues from Rochdale to argue the case for their place. However, if a two-constituency Oldham were to be accommodated, it would also be possible to create a two-constituency Rochdale.

I would urge the Commissioners to give serious consideration to a two-constituency Oldham, and I understand that I am not the first person to put forward that proposal, with exactly the same configuration of wards as I have set out here. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I will check in a moment whether anyone has any points of query. Can I just check, and I am sure someone has done the homework themselves, but, in creating your two-constituency Oldham and indeed, you were suggesting, maybe Rochdale, is that a self-contained proposal or have you considered the knock-on effects in terms of numbers elsewhere?

CLLR STRETTON: There will be knock-on effects in terms of the numbers for elsewhere, but I believe that the seriousness of the impact that this has on Oldham is such that there should be a configuration that has less disruption within the totality of it. I know, for example, that there might be a suggestion of splitting the Dentons and that people will argue strongly against that. I think that, if the Boundary Commission were to go back to the drawing board and look more closely at the impact that, in particular, this has on the Oldham Borough, they will be able to come up with a configuration which, in totality, provides less disruption. I have looked at it and I know that there is not an option that would be able to avoid any disruption.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anyone else have any points of clarification?

MR WALSH: John Walsh, 52 New Hall Lane, Heaton, Bolton. Can I just ask for clarification, please, on the list of wards that you would propose for each of the two constituencies?

CLLR STRETTON: To start with Oldham East and Saddleworth, it is the existing Oldham East and Saddleworth plus Medlock Vale, so the wards would be Alexandra, Crompton, Medlock Vale, Saddleworth North, Saddleworth South, Saddleworth West and Lees, Shaw, St James's, St Mary's and Waterhead, so that is as it exists plus Medlock Vale.

Then, for the Oldham West and Royton Constituency, it is Chadderton Central, Chadderton North, Chadderton South, Coldhurst, Failsworth East, Failsworth West, Hollinwood, Royton North, Royton South and Werneth, which is as it exists, but bringing Failsworth into it and losing Medlock Vale.

MR WALSH: I have a second question, if I may. To be absolutely clear, if that configuration could be achieved with other configurations around it, you would be happy that that met the aspirations of Oldham Metropolitan Borough?

CLLR STRETTON: Yes.

MR WALSH: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any other points of clarification? (No response) No, in which case thank you very much Mrs Stretton.

Is David Heyes here? Please give your name and full address and then please proceed with your presentation.

MR HEYES: My name is David Heyes. My home address is 17 Hartshead Crescent, Failsworth, M35 9UD.

I think you will find, Sir, that I will be making many of the same points which have just been made by Cllr Stretton, but hopefully in a slightly different way.

I served as the Member of Parliament for Ashton-under-Lyne from 2001 until I retired in May 2015. Previously, I was a member of Oldham Council, representing Chadderton South for 12 years. I have lived in Failsworth since 1971 and currently I chair the governing body of Failsworth School.

Paragraph 9 of the initial proposals document explains the Commission's wish to retain existing constituencies wherever possible, but it also states, "...as long as the other factors can also be satisfied". I want to submit that, in giving undue weight to the retention factor, particularly in relation to the western side of the Greater Manchester conurbation, insufficient weight has been given to the other factors the Commission may also take into account, which are special geographical considerations, including, in particular, the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, local government boundaries and any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.

I will not rehearse the well-established arguments that present and former MPs tend to make about the difficulties of representing cross-boundary seats with two or more sets of complex relationships and networks to sustain. It is a problem I wrestled with, and not always successfully, for 14 years. A seat entirely contained within a single borough is much to be preferred. It is a matter of regret that the Commission's initial proposals have not taken the obvious opportunity to prioritise the creation of such constituencies in the eastern segment of the conurbation. In fact, the initial proposals would see Oldham, for example, represented by three MPs, each of whom will have cross-boundary seats and who will, in total, have to cultivate relationships with four local authority areas in Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside. Locking in so many

of the current constituency boundaries to the west has resulted in concentrating a far greater level of change than necessary on the eastern side of the conurbation and particularly in the Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside boroughs.

There is an opportunity here to create minimally changed seats which wholly or largely respect these boroughs' boundaries. For example, the electorate numbers in both Oldham and Rochdale would allow the creation of two coherent constituencies in each of those boroughs, which would sit entirely within the respective borough boundaries. In Tameside, it would also be possible to create two entirely in-borough constituencies by placing only one of the 19 wards in an adjacent borough seat.

Nowhere is a lack of coherence better illustrated than in the proposed Failsworth and Droylsden constituency. This peculiar construction made up of bits from four current constituencies creates a new constituency which stretches from Audenshaw on the Cheshire Plain to Saddleworth in the hills of the Yorkshire Pennines, which dismally fails all of the Commission's other factors tests. The proposed constituency name of 'Failsworth and Droylsden' suggests that the heart of the constituency might be found somewhere within one or other of these townships. Based on my experience as their MP, I doubt this. As a detached part of Oldham, Failsworth has sat uncomfortably alongside Droylsden in the Ashton-under-Lyne Constituency since the 1997 General Election. These townships, both former urban districts, are largely the product of Manchester's suburban expansion during the 20th Century, but, despite many demographic similarities, Droylsden and Failsworth are distinctly separate. Their boundary is marked by the River Medlock. The Medlock Valley is a wide, semi-rural expanse of Green Belt which serves to divide rather than connect the townships. There are no direct road links between them. I will repeat that. There are no direct road links between these two adjacent areas. The nearest we have to a direct road link is the three-tonne weight-restricted Stannybrook Road, which has the character of a narrow country lane as it winds through the Daisy Nook Country Park from Failsworth, passes through the Waterloo Ward of Ashton-under-Lyne before connecting with Lumb Lane and onwards towards Droylsden, another narrow lane with a 6ft 6" width restriction, passes through Woodhouses, along Green Lane and through the Miles Platting and Newton Heath Ward of Manchester before joining Edge Lane on the western fringes of Droylsden. If it is within your remit, Sir, I would encourage you, if possible, to visit the area to see that for yourself.

The historic urban development and present-day community ties of Failsworth and Droylsden are, like so much of Greater Manchester, delineated by the radial routes emanating from Manchester City Centre. In the case of Failsworth, this was along the route of the present-day A62 towards Oldham. The Rochdale Canal and railway followed the same route and nowadays, most notably, the Metrolink tram passes through and links Failsworth with Chadderton, Werneth and Coldhurst wards on its way to Oldham and beyond. Droylsden has similarities in that its main community links are marked by the Ashton New Road/Manchester Road, the A662 corridor, from the city

centre towards Ashton and beyond. The Ashton Canal and the heavy rail link both pass through Droylsden in a cross-Pennine direction. Again, nowadays these communication links are supplemented by the Metrolink route through Droylsden and Audenshaw to Ashton-under-Lyne Town Centre. In short, Failsworth looks to Manchester in the west and Oldham in the east for its social and community links, whereas Droylsden looks to Manchester and Ashton, and only rarely do the townships look to each other.

These serious issues in linking Droylsden and Audenshaw with Failsworth are not even the most significant weaknesses in the Commission's initial proposals for this new constituency. Sixty-six per cent of the proposed constituency, by electorate, would sit in the Oldham Metropolitan Borough and, apart from Failsworth, actually within the boundaries of the historic Oldham County borough. The constituency would stretch as far as, and include part of, Oldham Town Centre. In the Alexandra and Werneth wards, a large sign on the King Street roundabout proudly proclaims, "Welcome to Oldham Town Centre". Oldham's local government headquarters, the civic centre, sits just a few metres beyond the Alexandra and Werneth ward boundaries. It is difficult to discern any community of interest between Audenshaw and Droylsden on the one hand and the Oldham Town Centre wards of Werneth and Alexandra on the other, and even less so with Saddleworth and Lees. Direct public transport links barely exist with the only viable alternative routes involving a tortuous and expensive bus or tram journey into Manchester City Centre and then out again along a different radial route; this in an area identified as one of the poorest in the UK and where car ownership levels are among the lowest.

My experience tells me that constituents rightly expect to be able to visit their MP's office. If the initial proposal is enacted, the MP would have a difficult task in deciding where to locate his or her office. In terms of maximum accessibility for the greatest number of electors and in the area of greatest need, Oldham Town Centre on the northern fringe of the constituency might be the most suitable location, although this would make access from Audenshaw and Droylsden extremely difficult. Audenshaw sits particularly uncomfortably in the proposed Failsworth and Droylsden Constituency. The former urban district looks towards Ashton, Denton or even Manchester for its community, trade and transport links. For example, the Snipe Retail Park, regarded as Ashton's main out-of-town shopping area, is located entirely within the Audenshaw Ward. I would be unable to discern any significant connection in recent or previous times which might link the township with Failsworth or Oldham or, most definitely not, with Saddleworth. Bringing the Saddleworth and Lees Ward into this constituency would have the unfortunate effect of breaking strongly held community loyalties in the civic parish of Saddleworth in what was formerly the West Riding of Yorkshire, and I expect the consultation will be receiving strong representations to that end from Saddleworth residents and representative community groups. It is hard to imagine two such dissimilar areas in this part of the world as Audenshaw and Saddleworth.

In summary, Sir, it appears that, in seeking a solution to their undoubted difficulties in conducting this review, the Commission has, perhaps unwittingly, focused all of the worst consequences on this part of Greater Manchester and on the proposed Failsworth and Droylsden seat in particular; this to accommodate the Commission's self-imposed constraints and unwillingness to take a more flexible approach to the reorganisation of constituencies on the western side of the conurbation and in the cities of Manchester and Salford. There is more to be said than is possible in ten minutes here today, so I will put my further thoughts and suggestions into a counter-proposal and hope that they might be helpful or even persuasive to the Commission. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Mr Heyes. Can you hang on for a second in case there are any points of clarification which anyone might have?

MR LARGAN: Terry Largan, 56 Marle Croft, Whitefield, which is in a part of Bury. Did you say you have counter-proposals?

MR HEYES: Well, I am working on them. It is quite a task trying to produce a coherent and logical set. It has outwitted the Commission and is testing me greatly, as it is others. I see that I am not the first and the previous speaker is not the first, but others have made the point that the arguments I have been making have strength, and that is cutting across political boundaries, as I see it. I will be producing the best counter-proposal that I can, but within it will be the recommendation that Rochdale, Oldham and, hopefully, Tameside have constituencies that are wholly contained within their borough boundaries. If it is possible to achieve that beyond the area that I am most familiar with, then I will make some more recommendations.

MR LARGAN: Thank you and thank you, Chairman.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I think I saw Debbie Abrahams arriving. Would you like to come up? As with others, could you give your name and full address and then being, please.

MS ABRAHAM: (MP Oldham East and Saddleworth) Good afternoon. My name is Debbie Abrahams and my address is 11 Church Lane, Oldham, OL1 3AN. Thank you for the opportunity of speaking here today.

I speak to oppose the initial proposals for constituency boundary changes as they relate to Oldham and Saddleworth on the following grounds:

Firstly, the proposal splits the historic communities of Saddleworth and Royton. Saddleworth, in case people are not aware, is a discrete area and was first documented in the Domesday Book as being a "discrete area in its own right". There is also evidence that actually precedes that from the Castleshaw Roman fort remains, so we

have an established community going back centuries. Today, Saddleworth has a distinct and unique identity which local residents identify with very strongly. Royton has an equivalent history; it was established in the Middle Ages, but prospered under the Industrial Revolution as a hub for textile manufacturing. Royton's population has grown and has gone from strength to strength. Once again, this is a natural community which has a strong local identity. We believe that the proposals impact on these communities and they need to be considered under Rule 5(2) of the Boundary Commission guidance.

Secondly, each of the proposed parliamentary boundaries of Littleborough and Saddleworth, Oldham Central, Failsworth and Droylsden cross a number of local authority boundaries, as previous speakers have already mentioned, and there is absolutely no coherence with any one of them. Again, both the Act and the Boundary Commission guidance say that this must be considered.

Finally, in the case of the proposed Littleborough and Saddleworth Constituency, there are no community, administrative or even direct public transport links. This again needs to be considered in relation to the Boundary Commission guidance. Similarly, the proposed new Failsworth and Droylsden Constituency also has the issue around direct public links and no relationship in terms of community and administrative boundaries. We believe that, on these grounds, there is significant opportunity to challenge the proposals which have been put forward, but also on the grounds of population. There is justification for Oldham parliamentary constituencies which are coterminous with Oldham Council local authority boundaries. Indeed, this was the conclusion that the former Boundary Commission review in 2013 came to, and I do hope that the points that have been made will be considered in revised proposals. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Are there any points anyone wishes to make? (No response) No, so thank you very much, Ms Abrahams.

Is there a Mr Jim Fitzpatrick who wishes to speak?

MR FITZPATRICK: Good afternoon. My name is Jim Fitzpatrick, 1 Douglas Street, Hyde.

I would like to oppose the Boundary Commission's proposals, as the two previous speakers have, David Heyes and Debbie Abrahams. What the proposal does for Tameside is split it up and give us four MPs, and the Boundary Commission is quite clear that you are supposed to try and remain in metropolitan borough areas. Tameside is big enough to have two MPs solely within its boundaries, yet this proposal takes Hyde and puts it with Marple. The Stalybridge and Hyde Constituency is one of the oldest constituencies within the boundaries. It was first formed in 1918 and has been that way ever since. We have had three different parties for the MP in that area, but historically we have always had Stalybridge and Hyde. Now, in 1997, we changed it slightly and

Mossley came in from the Ashton Constituency and Dukinfield went to the Denton and Reddish Constituency. If we put Dukinfield back into Stalybridge and Hyde, that would give us 78,000, which I know is on the limits of the Boundary Commission's quota, but we also could have Ashton and Denton as a constituency, which would give us two constituencies within the borough of Tameside and would do as the Boundary Commission have said. Trying to split Tameside into four constituencies across boundaries, as David Heyes said, Audenshaw, Droylsden, Failsworth up to Saddleworth, is just a clamour of wards just all shoved together and makes no real sense at all. Linking Audenshaw with Saddleworth just seems madness to me.

On the thing about the Hyde and Marple Constituency with no links at all really with Marple, as I say, for the last 100 years, we have been linked with Stalybridge. Historically, the bus outside of Tameside was for Stalybridge, Hyde, Mossley and Dukinfield, SHMD, and that ran around the streets of Stalybridge for many years before the deregulation of buses, so historically we have always been with Stalybridge and Hyde. Like I say, in 1918, we were first formed and we are up to 100 years and it is coincidental that this Boundary Commission will come in in 2018 exactly 100 years from when we first formed Stalybridge and Hyde as a constituency. It just seems wrong that we are breaking up that constituency and the links that we have had in Stalybridge and Hyde for all those years. It is wrong. We have no links at all with Marple. The proposals just break up Tameside, they break up Oldham and they break up Rochdale, and that is totally against what the Boundary Commission is trying to approve. It does talk about having boundaries within borough areas. This proposal just does not do that. Mr Heyes put it across quite adequately about the way that it destroys Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside, and that is why I oppose these proposals and I ask the Boundary Commission to reconsider what they are doing, especially in Stalybridge and Hyde. Historically, it is one of the most historic constituencies we have got and you are proposing to break it up exactly 100 years after it was formed.

If these proposals do go through, the fact that you have Ashton as an Oldham constituency with no mention of Stalybridge at all in that constituency is wrong. If you are going to have Ashton and Stalybridge together, it should be the Ashton and Stalybridge Constituency, not just Ashton. Stalybridge is a town in its own right and it is one of our oldest towns in Tameside, and it is wrong that it does not get mentioned by the Boundary Commission. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Does anyone have any points of clarification? (No response) No, so thank you very much; well put. John Brooks?

MR BROOKS: My name is John Brooks. I live at 58 Stoneswood Road, Delph, Oldham, and obviously I want to talk largely about the constituency that affects me most, which is Littleborough and Saddleworth, but also about Oldham in general.

It seems, looking at the proposals, that what Oldham has been left with as a borough are the leftovers. Somebody commented to me that it looks like the Commission started in the west of Greater Manchester, moved east and got to the point where they were left with little alternative but to do what they have done. I do not think, if that is the methodology that was used, that it is the correct methodology.

The issue for me is not that Oldham has been split into different proposed constituencies, as it clearly has to be because Oldham, as a borough, is too large for one constituency, but under the proposals the distinct historic townships within the borough have been fragmented. For example, areas within the old Oldham town have been split between Failsworth and Droylsden and the Oldham constituencies. For example, Alexandra and Werneth, which are Oldham wards and always have been, are in the Failsworth and Droylsden Constituency.

Saddleworth, where I live, has a very distinct historical, geographical and cultural cohesion and that is going to be split under the proposals between two constituencies. Similarly, the people of Royton, and I speak as an ex-resident of Royton, do not see themselves as living in Royton north or Royton south, but they see themselves as living in Royton, again a historic town, but that town is going to be split between the Littleborough and Saddleworth and the Oldham constituencies. In my view, that does not make any sense.

Specifically in relation to Saddleworth, the area of Saddleworth has been part of Oldham since the 1974 local government reorganisation. It has not always been an easy relationship between Saddleworth and Oldham, but the fact that for a number of years now Oldham and Saddleworth have shared the same constituency has helped the borough build the cohesion that is needed within the borough, and I think that the proposal to split Saddleworth both away from Oldham altogether and, on top of that, across two different constituencies will work against the cohesion that the council and the MPs have actually worked very hard to bring about.

When you actually look at the boundaries, first of all, Saddleworth West and Lees has gone into constituencies with Audenshaw and Droylsden, and I think it has already been mentioned that there are no links whatsoever between those two areas both in terms of a cultural link, a historical link and also, importantly, a public transport link, because a lot of people need to use public transport to see their MP. The same goes also for the Littleborough and Saddleworth Constituency. What we have here is again a constituency that has no focal point whatsoever and, in particular, for the Saddleworth part of that constituency it is impossible to get to any other part of the constituency without going through another constituency by public transport. It strikes me that, wherever the MP chose to locate themselves in that particular constituency for a constituency office, it would create difficulties for constituents in one part or another of that constituency.

Overall, I think part of the problem that the Boundary Commission has is Moston. Moston has been placed in the Oldham Constituency. It is a big ward, over 11,000 voters on the latest figures that you used, and what really needs to happen, I think, is that Moston needs to be removed from the equation around Oldham, placed into Manchester as part of the solution for Manchester and that would then free up the possibility of having two Oldham constituencies based totally within the borough and they would be meaningful and recognisable seats. Also, having heard what has been said by previous speakers, it would also give the opportunity of the same thing in both Tameside and Rochdale. I suspect a lot of the objections you are going to be getting are from these three particular boroughs because, when you look at the boundaries for those three boroughs, they make very little sense whatsoever to the people who live within the boroughs. Hopefully, you will be able to look at your proposals again in this particular area and come back with a solution that gives us two seats in Oldham, three seats, I have heard, in Tameside and also coterminous seats in Rochdale, which I think would be an ideal solution for people on the east side of the Greater Manchester metropolitan area. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Can I just ask the simple question, which is: why is it such an issue that someone might have to pass through another constituency in order to get from one part of a constituency to another? Why should that be such a governing issue?

MR BROOKS: I think it is one of these things, is it not? To be honest, the fact that you are passing through another constituency is not in itself the problem, but it is the manner in which you would have to pass through it. A lot of people who need to use their MPs and see their MPs rely on public transport and, basically, what you have got is a situation where to go from one part of the constituency to another, for example, from Saddleworth to Littleborough by public transport, you have to come into Oldham and out from Oldham all the way back to Rochdale, change in Rochdale and get out to Littleborough, so it is very, very difficult for people on low incomes who perhaps do not have access to cars, people who are elderly, for example, and people with disabilities. I think having a cohesion within the constituency boundaries that enables people to get around those constituencies by public transport actually helps the representational activities of the MP and helps the constituents when they want to deal with their MP.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I fully understand the transport links, but it was the geography point. Are there any other points that anyone would like to raise? (No response) No, in which case thank you very much.

MR BROOKS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think this might be our longest spell of consecutive speakers. Is Mr Geoff Abell here? Could you give your name and address and then please begin.

CLLR ABELL: (Marple) My name is Councillor Geoff Abell. I am a councillor for Marple. My address is 7 Winnington Road, Marple, Stockport. I will be relatively short, I hope.

We understand the constraints that the Boundary Commission is under with the numbers in a constituency and, as a result, the knock-on effect means that it is now proposed that I will be in the Marple and Hyde Constituency. However, this is a constituency very much of two halves separated by, if I can describe it as, a high point, Werneth Low, which is already in my ward. We do have links with neighbouring Werneth. For instance, for social services, we have the same social services health agenda with Werneth, which is next door to us. Hyde is in Tameside, obviously a different borough. I know that the Boundary Commission was tempted to not cross boundaries in the past, but it has singularly obviously been unable to do so this time round, but we could learn from them as well. It is not that much further. We are also of a similar nature in that the wards proposed would be semi-rural in nature. I am not sure about the transport links, which the previous speakers have told us of. In consequence, I would suggest that the Lib Dem councillors in Marple, of which I am one, are actually in favour of this proposal. I am not saying necessarily that it has to be exactly the same boundaries, but, in principle, we are in favour of this proposal.

If we ever get to a lovely place with proportional representation, the Commissioners would not be out of a job if we had multi-member constituencies. That is a small aside. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, you are the first one to make that point, Sir.

CLLR ABELL: I am sure I am not.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Once and once only. Are there any points of clarification, not debate? You will have to give your name and address again, I am afraid.

MR FITZPATRICK: Jim Fitzpatrick, 1 Douglas Road, Hyde. Can I just point out that Werneth Low is not in Marple, it is in Hyde. It has never been in Marple. If that is the natural boundary that separates the two of us, how can that be in the same constituency? It is the highest point in Tameside, Werneth Low, it is over 2,000 feet above ground level, a huge, big hill. I walk it often and I walk it within Hyde. I do not travel to Marple to go up Werneth Low.

CLLR ABELL: I fully understand your point, but, as a matter of clarification, it is part of Marple North Ward. I know; I go up there regularly. We have the southern half of it and you have the northern half, and we are not at war here!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any other points? (No response) No, so thank you very much.

CLLR ABELL: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Mr Neil Allsopp? Can you give your name and address and then please proceed.

MR ALLSOPP: I am Neil Allsopp. I live at 23 St Mary's Drive, Greenfield, Saddleworth, Yorkshire; I just thought I would make the point! It did not change, Sir, the county boundary has never changed, so it has been confirmed by Parliament twice and by the Heir to the Throne once.

I want to start by saying to you something unusual, something you probably very rarely hear at these sorts of dos. I want to say thank you. I want to say thank you for the return of the Littleborough and Saddleworth Constituency. I have not met one Saddleworth resident until five minutes ago who disagrees with that proposal. However - there is always a 'however' - one minor but absolutely crucial modification needs to be made, that is, Saddleworth West has been separated from the rest of Saddleworth, and that is why I am here. I am here to ask you to include all of Saddleworth in the Littleborough and Saddleworth Constituency, and I will explain how I believe this minor but vitally important change can be made which, with the resultant changes to neighbouring constituencies, the other three proposed, is modest, justifiable and, I believe, produces a better outcome. It will include proposals that will keep the town of Royton as one whole entity in one constituency. The north and south of Royton, that historic town, are presently, under your proposals, in different constituencies. Now, I know you have heard yesterday and today, and probably when you go to Chester tomorrow and Friday, from the suits, those party hacks sent out to defend the status quo and try to get an advantage over their political opponents. They will be the Conservatives from the north-west office, their counterparts from Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens probably, UKIP, Uncle Tom Cobley and all. Well, I am not here as one of them, I am here as me. Why me? What qualifies me to speak about Saddleworth and what is so special about Saddleworth to warrant modifying your proposals?

Well, I am 64 years old and I have lived in Saddleworth for every one of those 64 years. My family have lived in Saddleworth for almost 200 years. I am very proud to say that I am a Saddleworth parish councillor and have been for the last five and a half years, and we have an electorate for that parish council of in excess of 21,000. My roots are in Saddleworth, it is my home.

So what is Saddleworth and what makes it so special and why should the whole of Saddleworth be in the same constituency? Well, Saddleworth, in some shape or form,

has existed for centuries. It is the name given to a large area of the rural Pennines between Oldham and Huddersfield and it comprises many individual villages, each with its own unique character either nestled in its own valley or sitting on top of a hill, yet, as Saddleworth, we share a unique history, traditions, even our own dialect and, of course, as many, I hope, will know, we are home to the world-famous Whit Friday Brass Band Contest and much more.

Prior to the Local Government Act 1972, we were administered by our own Saddleworth Urban District Council. The Saddleworth people, whether newly arrived, lifetime residents or somewhere in between, all have and share a great sense of community and a strong sense of belonging to Saddleworth. We see ourselves as coming from Saddleworth, not north, south or west, but Saddleworth as a whole.

How are we to achieve this? Well, my proposal would be to move Saddleworth West and Lees from the Failsworth and Droylsden Constituency into Littleborough and Saddleworth, to move Royton North from Littleborough and Saddleworth into Oldham, to move Healey from Rochdale into Littleborough and Saddleworth and to move Smallbridge and Firgrove from Littleborough and Saddleworth into Rochdale. This is because Saddleworth West and Lees is historically part of Saddleworth, the North and South wards. It is currently part of Saddleworth Parish Council and actually Saddleworth West and Lees has 25 per cent of all the seats on Saddleworth Parish Council; it is a significant part of Saddleworth. Now, in order to balance out Saddleworth West and Lees going into Littleborough and Saddleworth, I suggest that Royton North be moved back into the Oldham Constituency. The town of Royton is historically linked, dating as far back as the chartists of the 19th Century. It is currently split under the initial proposals from Royton South Ward and, therefore, I would like to suggest that the town of Royton be kept together and the Healey Ward in Rochdale could be moved into Littleborough and Saddleworth Constituency. Healey is a semi-rural ward and has historically been closer to Littleborough than the area of Healey and Whitworth.

Now, with regard to the Failsworth and Droylsden proposals and some of Oldham as well, we would move Saddleworth West and Lees from Failsworth and Droylsden into Littleborough and Saddleworth, then we would move Werneth from Failsworth and Droylsden into Oldham and then move Moston from Oldham into Failsworth and Droylsden. The Failsworth and Droylsden Constituency is an urban mix. In terms of constituency, it would cover much of the overspill areas of Manchester and Oldham. The Werneth Ward should be part of Oldham; it is just one mile west-south-west of Oldham's commercial centre. We would suggest that Moston move into Failsworth and Droylsden, as the Moston Ward borders the most populated part of Failsworth West Ward, and it would then become an integral part of that constituency. Historically, Moston was referred to as a "hamlet of Manchester", so it is better suited as part of the Failsworth and Droylsden Constituency.

Finally, Rochdale. If we move Healey from Rochdale into Littleborough and Saddleworth, it is a straight swap; you move Smallbridge and Firgrove from Littleborough and Saddleworth into Rochdale. Smallbridge and Firgrove is next door to the commercial centre of Rochdale and the local population consider themselves to be part of the town of Rochdale proper. The ward would be more appropriately part of Rochdale. It is not on the border of the town centre, but it is actually part of the town. Smallbridge and Firgrove is more urban in character, and Healey is a typical mix of suburban and rural Lancashire, including Shawclough, Syke and Duck Farm(?).

These changes would result in the following: that the Littleborough and Saddleworth Constituency which I propose would be 76,043; the Oldham Constituency would be 78,071; Rochdale would be 73,451; and Failsworth and Droylsden would be 74,181.

I ask you not to do the political thing and suit the suits, but to put the people first and the people of Saddleworth first. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. First of all, let me just state that I am not political in this. This is a non-political exercise on our part. Parliament have asked us to try and come up with the best proposals in consultation with everyone, including everyone in this room, and it is not a government exercise, we are not reporting to the Government and government ministers have no more say in this than you do in practical terms, just to put that straight.

If I might say, for us, as Assistant Commissioners, and again we are one step removed from the Boundary Commission itself, the idea, as you have just done there, of painting pictures of what life is like and the areas is enormously helpful to us, as Assistant Commissioners, when we are trying to look at the maps and the numbers, so I am very grateful to you for the background there.

MR ALLSOPP: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And I am grateful for all the work you have done to put the figures together to prove that your argument could work and may work.

MR ALLSOPP: It was not just me; I did have some help from a young chap, but thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is there anyone who has any points of clarification? I see a fellow Assistant Commissioner about to ask something.

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Nicholas Elliott, Assistant Commissioner. Mr Allsopp, are you going to be putting your representations in writing to the Commissioners so that we have it available?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I have it.

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR ALLSOPP: I can actually tell you that I made a written submission with far more detail, which I sent via the website just a few days ago, but that is just some maps and some notes which, hopefully, will allow these gentlemen to keep up with me.

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any other points that anyone would like to make? (No response) Thank you very much, Mr Allsopp. We have had the 1974 reorganisation mentioned and I forgot to mention it, but the Domesday Book did get its first mention at a Boundary Commission review. It will not be the last, but it is the first. Is Mr David Black here and ready to speak?

MR BLACK: David Black, member of the public. My address is 33 Chew Valley Road, Greenfield, which is in Saddleworth South, which is part of Oldham East and Saddleworth Constituency, in Oldham.

I would just make three points really. The first one is that I have only lived at my current address for this century and I did not live there in the previous century, so I do not have the same historical knowledge as the previous speaker, who has been there for 64 years, so 16 years is only 25 per cent of 64. Despite that, I think I would agree with the argument that Saddleworth sees itself as having an identity and, therefore, it does not seem to me to make much sense for the three Saddleworth wards to be separated into different constituencies. Without going into any detail, that just seems to me to be a perfectly sensible point to make, that all three Saddleworth wards should really be in the same constituency. There are lots of voluntary bodies in Saddleworth all working together, and I think it would be extremely disruptive if they were in different constituencies.

The question then arises about whether Saddleworth has an affinity with any other areas. I think it says in the guidance that socioeconomic factors are only taken into account as part of the links between areas and it is not a separate issue. In my 16 years in Saddleworth, I have not noticed any great affinity between Saddleworth and places like Littleborough. I may be wrong, but I do not have any evidence that people in Saddleworth feel a great affinity. Obviously, some people in Saddleworth know people in all sorts of places, but I do not see any particular affinity with the areas around about Littleborough. Personally, I walk to Littleborough occasionally and it takes me, well, it used to be about three hours and it is probably nearer four hours now. It is not a very easy place to get to because coming back again, as a previous contributor has said, it takes me a train, a tram and a bus to get from Littleborough back and sometimes it takes almost as long to get back by public transport as it actually takes me in my unfit

condition to actually walk to the place, so it does not seem very sensible to me to put the areas to the east of Rochdale along with Saddleworth. I can only speak for Saddleworth. I do not know about other parts of the constituency.

If there is any affinity from Saddleworth, it is probably with Marsden, but, because Marsden is in a different region of the country, I know that the Boundary Commission would not look very favourably at a proposal that put parts of two different regions together. I think the most important thing is the link between national government and local government and the link between the MP and the councillors, the 60 councillors in Oldham and in Rochdale. It seems to me very unusual that we have actually got two adjoining local authorities which happen to fit perfectly into the numbers that are required for the constituency. I would imagine that that does not really happen very much across the whole of the UK, so having got that opportunity with two local authorities, Oldham and Rochdale, that can fit into two constituencies, it seems a glowing opportunity for the Commissioners to do that, if it is possible to do it. The knock-on effect obviously would mean that other constituencies would have a combination of different local authorities, but that is happening already and it is not necessarily going to be any worse by putting Oldham and Rochdale each into two constituencies. I do not think the knock-on effect would be any different from what is in the current proposals.

The last point I would make in terms of socioeconomic factors is that I have been a voter in 11 different constituencies since I reached the age to get the vote and, out of these 11 constituencies, I think Oldham East and Saddleworth is easily the most diverse of any of them. Some people might regard diversity as a weakness, a disadvantage, but personally I regard diversity as an advantage and a strength really. Our MP has actually got to deal with problems right across the whole spread of society. If you look at the economic indicators, like employment, some parts of our constituency have three and a half times the level of unemployment in other parts. If you look at qualifications, where I live, I think something like 40 per cent of people have higher-level or university-level qualifications and, in other parts of the constituency, 40 per cent of people have no qualifications whatsoever, so an incredible diversity, and I think that is the strength of the constituency. You could take all sorts of other factors, like ethnicity, owner occupation, health, et cetera, and you would come to exactly the same conclusion. To me, the solution really is to move one of the Oldham wards, such as Medlock Vale, for instance, to join up with the existing nine wards in Oldham East and Saddleworth to make a constituency which fits within the guidance, and then to move the two Failsworth wards into Oldham, which are presently in Oldham West, to give another constituency which also fits within the guidance. That seems a very neat solution and I would ask the Commissioners to look at that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Are there any points of clarification anyone would like to make? (No response) Thank you very much for your contribution.

I think we have reached the point where I have run out of booked speakers, unless Mr Andrew Findlay-Stewart is here. No, and he is not due here until 4.30 and we have someone at four o'clock who is not here, a new booking. Unless there is anyone else in the room who would like to speak now, and please feel free to speak if you wish to, I am going to adjourn until four o'clock. Thank you, everyone, for the contributions so far.

After a short adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We will resume, if we may. I think I see Councillor Rob Chilton here. Would you like to come up and speak? We are filming this for the record, so please state your name and full address and then go into your presentation.

CLLR CHILTON: Thank you very much, Chair. I am Councillor Rob Chilton, 2 Tulip Close, Sale, M33 5RX, from Altrincham and Sale West.

Chair, if I may, I have some concerns, as I think others may have, regarding the Commission's proposed Altrincham and Tatton and Stretford and Urmston constituencies. Briefly, the proposal to move Ashton-upon-Mersey and St Mary's into the new Stretford and Urmston seat and the Bucklow-St Martin's Ward into the Altrincham and Tatton seat would create a constituency that may look contiguous and pleasant on a map, a plain map, but would create a rather lopsided constituency. The Ashton-upon-Mersey and St Mary's wards would not then be connected to the rest of Stretford and Urmston, aside from over a motorway and a river and across some Green Belt, which would leave that part of the constituency somewhat isolated from the rest of it.

In the Commission's proposals, Bucklow-St Martin's Ward has been referred to as a "rural ward that connects with the rest of Altrincham and Tatton". Well, it is not and it does not in that Bucklow-St Martin's consists of an urban Manchester overspill village in one corner, the semi-industrial landscape of Carrington in the middle and a part of Sale West in the other corner that really should be, by rights, part of the Altrincham and Sale West seat.

In addition, what would form the constituency boundary then between St Mary's Ward and Broadheath Ward is a rather odd boundary that snakes at right angles through a residential district and, in fact, at one point goes up someone's garden fence. This would be a very odd and, in my opinion, a rather unsuitable constituency boundary, plus the fact that school catchment areas and what-have-you will spread over these constituency boundaries.

There is also the problem, Chairman, that the Knutsford area that is proposed to be added to the Altrincham area does not connect very well with Altrincham. Altrincham,

Knutsford and those other parts of Cheshire East do not see themselves as particularly connected and would be urban areas that are again quite significantly isolated from one another.

I understand that a counter-proposal is being prepared that would create an Altrincham and Sale West Constituency enlarged slightly by the addition of the Bucklow-St Martin's Ward. This would be a much more preferable solution in that it would create a constituency where all the parts of those communities, to an extent, identify with one another and the boundaries of that constituency would be a Roman road, the River Mersey and the River Bollin. These would be very sensible natural boundaries and would leave the residents of those constituencies certainly feeling, as I said, that they identify with one another. If the Commission is presented with such a proposal, I would ask that it is treated favourably. That is all I have to say, Chairman, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I am running out of people to ask, but does anyone have any points of clarification? (No response). No. Very clear, so thank you very much.

Now, we reach the point again where our next speaker is not due until 4.30, so I am going to adjourn again, I am afraid, and I think that is the last speaker, so after that speaker we will finish the Manchester hearing. Thank you.

After a short adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I would say "Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen", but we are only gentlemen at this stage of the proceedings. Our final speaker does not appear to be attending and we have not been able to contact him, so, given the late hour, I shall formally close this hearing now.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed or attended. I would particularly like to thank the Commission staff and the audio-visual team for supporting us through the two days and, for those of you who travel around these things, the boundary junkies amongst us, I will see you in Chester tomorrow. Thank you very much.

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