

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

**VICTORIA HALL, ROYAL STATION HOTEL, NEVILLE STREET,
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE NE1 5DH**

ON

**MONDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY ONE**

Before:

Ms Eileen Brady, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

**Transcribed from audio by W B Gurney & Sons LLP
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Telephone Number: 020 3585 4721/22**

Time Noted: 10 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to this public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in the North East region.

My name is Eileen Brady and I am Assistant Commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England. I was appointed by the Commission to assist them in their task of making recommendations for new constituencies in the North East. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow, and I am also responsible, with my fellow Assistant Commissioner, Adele Bomgard, who is seated on the right-hand side there, for analysing all the representations received about the initial proposals for this region and then presenting recommendations to the Commission as to whether or not those initial proposals should be revised.

I am assisted here today by members of the Commission staff led by Sam Hartley, who is sitting beside me to my right. Sam Hartley will shortly provide an explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for new constituencies in this region. He will tell you how you can make written representations and he will deal with one or two administrative matters.

The hearing today is scheduled to run from 10 am until 8 pm and tomorrow it is scheduled to run from 9 o'clock to 5 pm. I can vary that timetable and I will take into account the attendance and demand for opportunities to speak. I should point out that under the legislation that governs the Commission's review, each public hearing must be held over two days and cannot be extended into a third.

The purpose of this public hearing is to allow people to make oral representations about the initial proposals for the North East region.

A number of people have already registered to speak and have been given a time slot and I will invite them to speak at the appropriate time. If there is any time free during the day or at the end of the day, then I will invite anyone who has not registered but who would like to speak to do so.

I would like to stress that the purpose of this public hearing is for people to make oral representations about the initial proposals. The purpose is not to engage in a debate with the Commission about proposals, nor is this hearing an opportunity for people to cross-examine other speakers during their presentation. People may seek to put questions for clarification to the speakers, but they should do that through me as the Chair.

I will now hand over to Sam Hartley who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the North East region.

MR HARTLEY: Thank you, Eileen. Good morning. As Eileen mentioned, my name is Sam Hartley and I am secretary to the Boundary Commission for England. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their role to recommend new Parliamentary constituency boundaries and at this hearing I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly.

As Eileen has already stated, she will chair the hearing itself and it is her responsibility to run the hearing at her discretion and take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here today to support Eileen carrying out her role. Please ask one of us outside of the hearing if you need any help or assistance.

I would like to talk now about the Commission's initial proposals for new constituency boundaries which were published on 13 September 2016.

We use the European electoral regions as a template for the allocation of the 499 constituencies to which England is entitled, not including two constituencies to be allocated to the Isle of Wight. This approach is permitted by the legislation and has been supported by previous public consultation. The approach does not prevent anyone from putting forward counter-proposals that include one or more constituencies being split between the regions, but it is likely that compelling reasons will need to be given to persuade us to depart from the regional-based approach we adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

The Commission's proposals for the North East are for 25 constituencies, a reduction of four. Our proposals leave three of the existing constituencies unchanged. In considering the composition for the region, we noted that it might not be possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties or unitary authorities. Consequently, it has been necessary to cross county or unitary authority boundaries in some areas.

We are proposing one constituency that crosses the boundary between Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, which combines the town of Stannington with wards from the northern part of Newcastle. We are proposing one constituency that includes wards from County Durham and the borough of Gateshead combining the town of Rowlands Gill and the town of Consett. The borough of Middlesbrough is divided between three constituencies and the borough of Stockton-on-Tees is also divided between three constituencies. The borough of Darlington is wholly contained within one constituency.

The statutory rules allow us to take into account local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015. These include both the external boundaries of local councils and their internal boundaries, known as wards or electoral divisions. We seek to avoid dividing wards between constituencies wherever possible. Wards are well defined and well understood units which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. We consider that any division of these units between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for electoral registration and returning officers who are responsible for running elections. It is our view that only in exceptional or compelling circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified and our initial proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes to split wards, strong evidence and justification will need to be provided and the extent of such ward splitting should be kept to a minimum.

The scale of change in this review is significant and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation period. We are consulting on our proposals until Monday, 5 December so there is still time

after this hearing for people to contribute in writing.

There are also reference copies of the proposals present at this hearing and they are available on our website and in a number of places of deposit around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at www.bce2018.org.uk. I do you urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December.

Finally, I would like to remind all participants that this hearing is part of a public consultation and you will be asked to provide us with your name and address if you wish to make an oral representation. The Commission is legally obliged to take a record of the public hearings and, as you can see from the back, we are taking a video recording from which we will create a verbatim transcript.

The Commission is required to publish the record of the public hearing along with all written representations for a four-week period during which members of the public have an opportunity to comment on those representations. We expect this period to occur in the spring of next year. The publication of the hearing records and written representations include certain personal data of those who have made representations. I there invite all those contributing to read the Commission's data protection and privacy policy, a copy of which we have with us, which is also available on our website.

Housekeeping: the toilets are quite some way away, all the way back through the bar and downstairs, so leave enough time. Please switch your phones to silent or vibrate. There is a fire alarm test due this morning, between 11 and 11.15 is as much as I have been given, so if it goes off at that point, it is a test, stay where you are. If it goes off at any other time, there is an exit just to the left of the bar there or straight back through where you entered the room.

At this stage, I would like to hand you back now to Eileen to begin the public hearing, and I thank you for your attendance today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sam, thank you very much for that introduction.

I would now like to turn to the first listed speaker and ask them to stand if they want to make a presentation at the lectern. Yes. For the purposes of the recording, would you please state clearly your name?

LORD SHIPLEY: (Liberal Democrat Party) Okay. Thank you for the opportunity this morning. My name is John Shipley, I am a member of the House of Lords, I was a councillor for some 36 years in Newcastle and the Council leader for four of those. I was also a board member of One North East for almost seven years.

This submission is made ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry, just for the purposes of record, can you give the address as well?

LORD SHIPLEY: My personal address?

MR HARTLEY: Or the Lib Dem office address is fine.

LORD SHIPLEY: It is 8-10 Great George Street, London, SW1, or my personal address is 6 Bridge Park, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 2DX, and that is on the form that I completed at the start. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that.

LORD SHIPLEY: This submission is made on behalf of the Liberal Democrat party nationally and the North East Regional Liberal Democrat party and it is the outcome of extensive consultation with local and constituency parties, elected councillors and parliamentary representatives, past and present.

We thank the Commissioners for holding this public hearing and the associated one in Darlington later this week and we wish to welcome you to the region and to the city of Newcastle upon Tyne.

We note the requirement for the Commission to recommend a scheme of 25 constituencies in the North East of England European Parliament electoral region with each constituency having an electorate as per the December 2015 electoral rolls of between 71,031 and 78,507 electors and we note also the relevant factors that can be considered in determining the scheme, which includes special geographical considerations, local government boundaries, boundaries of existing constituencies and local ties.

The Commission's initial proposals published in September set out a scheme that meets the numerical requirements and it has been a useful tool in provoking debate and discussion, but we wish to set out what we see as a helpful counter-proposal that builds upon the Commission's initial proposal and, we believe, better respect local geography and local ties as well as meeting the numerical requirements.

Our counter-proposal, like the Commission's proposal, does not require the subdivision of any local authority wards. Unlike the Commission's proposal, it does not have any constituencies split across the tidal estuaries of the River Tees or the River Tyne. In the submission we will first offer a critique of some of the Commission's proposals and then we shall set out our proposals and finally conclude by indicating some measures that objectively compare our proposals with the Commission's. We will, of course, be making a written submission to the Commission before 5 December.

We do not anticipate our counter-proposal in the written submission being significantly different from this submission although it may include some more detailed arguments for our proposals and we may make minor adjustments in the light of ongoing consultation and evidence gathering. In particular at this stage we have concentrated on constituency composition rather than constituency names and receipt of more local responses during this week and later may lead to changes in proposed names.

Weaknesses in the Commission's proposals. We consider that the principal weaknesses in those proposals are first, the formation of a very large Hexham and

Morpeth constituency that links disparate towns and which have poor communication links. Travelling from Hexham to Morpeth on public transport involves travel via Newcastle, as does the recommended route for private car on Google and Sat Nav software.

Secondly, the separation of Rothbury and electors in large parts of Longhorsley and Pegswood from the Berwick constituency that they have long been part of.

Thirdly, the linking of Ashington with Berwick, despite the lack of any natural connection. Ashington has much closer connection to and affinity with nearby Blyth.

Fourthly, the formation of an incoherent Blaydon constituency that crosses the Tyne estuary and joins semi-rural parts of Gateshead with inner city and industrial heartland wards of Newcastle.

Fifthly, the formation of a West Durham and Teesdale constituency that stretches from the Yorkshire border south of Barnard Castle to within a mile of the Tyne despite the prevailing physical geography and lack of any coherent communications or local ties across the proposed constituency.

Sixthly, the formation of a Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency that straddles the natural barrier of the River Tees and separates the town centre of Stockton from the major part of Stockton.

Seventhly, the formation of an enlarged Redcar and Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituencies that reach from the coastal resorts of Redcar and Marske to nearly the middle of Middlesbrough each containing a diverse mix of areas and communities and lacking internal cohesion.

Eighth, the needless splitting of significant townships such as Barnard Castle, Billingham, Birtley, Eston, Gosforth and Washington, the last split across three constituencies.

Ninthly, the excessive splitting of local authorities such as Gateshead with its electorate of 140,942, which is split across six constituencies and Middlesbrough, electorate 90,162, which is split across three constituencies.

Tenthly, a relatively high number of orphan wards, that is single wards, from a particular local authority within a constituency. Now it may be inevitable that some constituencies crossing local authority boundaries will contain a single ward from a particular local authority. We think it is generally agreed that such orphan wards are not conducive to generating local ties within a constituency and increase complexity for both elected representatives and local authorities. The Commission proposes three orphan wards; our proposals reduce this to one.

Let me move to our proposal and in the maps that we present here our proposed constituencies are shown shaded in colour, the Commission's proposed constituency boundaries are shown in a thick black line, ward boundaries have thin grey lines and full details of our proposals are in the appendix to this document that we have supplied to you.

In north and east Northumberland, we propose retaining Rothbury in an enlarged Berwick constituency which reflects local ties and geography. Secondly, adding the market town of Morpeth and the surrounding wards of Longhorsley and Pegswood, currently shared with Wansbeck, to the enlarged Berwick constituency. Morpeth has an affinity with Alnwick and Berwick as the three main towns on the A1 through Northumberland.

Thirdly, we would add Ashington to an enlarged Blyth constituency. Blyth and Ashington are close together and both are former mining communities in south-east Northumberland. They have good communication links via the A189, the A1147 and the A1068. Ashington has a far stronger affinity with Blyth than it has with either Alnwick or with Berwick.

Fourthly, we would include the ward of Newbiggin Central and East in the enlarged Berwick constituency. The inclusion of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea is consistent with the other coastal communities through Creswell to Amble that have long been part of the Berwick constituency.

Fifthly, we would link the adjacent new towns of Cramlington in Northumberland and Killingworth in North Tyneside in a Cramlington, Killingworth and Longbenton constituency which I will refer to again in a moment.

For the remainder of Northumberland, as with the Commission, we propose adding Ponteland East and Stannington ward into a seat based in North West Newcastle and rather than this being an orphan ward from Northumberland, we also propose the inclusion of the Ponteland South ward with Heddon ward into Newcastle North West. Reviving the Commission's proposal of the aborted 2013 review to include western wards of Gateshead along the Tyne Valley into the revised and enlarged Hexham constituency, we propose adding a semi-rural group of three wards from Crawcrook to Blaydon and these lie adjacent to the River Tyne and have strong links with Prudhoe and elsewhere in the Hexham constituency. That was for the remainder of Northumberland.

Our proposals in Tyne and Wear in North Tyneside, first, we agree with the Commission's proposal to leave Tynemouth unchanged.

Secondly, although the North Tyneside constituency is of a suitable numerical size, we note that it consists of a number of geographically discrete local communities that have strong connections with communities beyond North Tyneside, so Killingworth to south-east Northumberland and Wallsend to Newcastle. We therefore consider it is appropriate to realign this constituency with six north Tyneside wards grouped with the Cramlington and Seghill wards of south-east Northumberland to form the Cramlington and Killingworth and Longbenton constituency that I referred to earlier. The name of that is something that I think we would need to give further consideration to as we progress through 2017.

The four mainly riverside wards can sensibly be included in a revived Newcastle East and Wallsend constituency made up of four wards from North Tyneside and six from Newcastle.

In Newcastle, compared to the Commission's proposal, we wish to reduce the extent

of change in Newcastle Central and North whilst reuniting the community of Gosforth. Our revised Newcastle Central constituency contains seven of the current eight wards, together with three wards from the current Newcastle East and the Riverside ward of Lemington from the current Newcastle North, and the remaining wards of Newcastle and the two Ponteland wards referred to earlier form our proposed Newcastle North West constituency.

In Gateshead, as I said earlier, the Commission's proposals split Gateshead into six constituencies. This is excessive and breaks up local ties as well as creating unnecessary complexity for electoral administrators and we propose three wards in Gateshead outer west being included in an enlarged Hexham constituency, five eastern wards being placed in a Jarrow and East Gateshead constituency - and two of those already are in the Jarrow constituency - with two wards, Birtley and Lamesley, being included with Washington, and the remaining wards forming a Central and West Gateshead constituency.

In Sunderland and south Tyneside, with the inclusion of the additional East Gateshead ward into an enlarged Jarrow constituency and the transfer of two wards from Jarrow into South Shields constituency, we can reduce the amount of change in Jarrow and avoid splitting Washington town. Our proposal for Jarrow and East Gateshead is largely made up of a connected urban area rather than three non-contiguous areas in at the Commission's initial proposals.

In Sunderland, our proposals retain the existing Washington and Sunderland West with the addition of the two wards from Gateshead, except for the largely disconnected St Anne's ward and that is because it lies south of the River Wear whereas all the other wards are north of the River Wear. We propose transferring St Anne's to a realigned Sunderland Central with Fulwell transferred to South Shields and Ryhope to Sunderland South, and two wards, Sandhill and Silksworth, transferred from Houghton and Sunderland West to Sunderland Central. The six remaining wards of Houghton and Sunderland South, together with Ryhope and the three adjacent County Durham wards of Dawdon, Deneside and Seaham, from the current Easington constituency, form our proposed Sunderland South.

In County Durham, as a result of the re-warding, has a significant number of wards that cross current constituency boundaries and significant change is, therefore, unavoidable. We propose that the current North Durham is made up of several discrete towns and small settlements and we propose to add the Chester-le-Street wards in with the central and north-eastern wards of Durham City. Both Durham City and Chester-le-Street are in the Wear Valley and on the A1 corridors and together they form a coherent constituency.

The remainder of North Durham, mainly on the Durham plateau, is better linked with Lanchester, Consett and Burnopfield, also on the plateau, in our revised North Durham constituency.

The Commission's proposals include a West Durham and Teesdale constituency that splits the relatively small but historic and significant town of Barnard Castle into two and extends past the rural Tees and Wear Valley uplands to the more urban area of Consett and into the Derwent and Tyne catchment areas, linking communities with no apparent community of interest, and driving from one end of the

constituency to the other, or even between main population centres, would necessitate passing through a number of other constituencies. Our counter-proposal is for a West Durham and Teesdale constituency that extends further towards Central Durham rather than north into Tyne and Wear. It would unite East and West Barnard Castle and it would incorporate Bishop Auckland up to Willington and Hunwick, Deerness, Esh and Witton Gilbert.

On the east Durham coast our proposed revised Easington constituency takes in three wards at the north of Hartlepool together with the Wingate and Trimdon and Thornley wards from the current Sedgefield constituency. By aligning the constituency in this way, with its northern wards added to Sunderland South to which they relate, it is possible to avoid splitting the residential area of the town of Peterlee from its industrial area and the adjacent community of Shotton Colliery.

The remaining wards of Durham county form our proposed Aycliffe and Sedgefield constituency and as with the Commission, we do not propose any constituency crossing the local authority boundary of Darlington, so in the Tees Valley area we are agreeing with the Commission's proposal to have a constituency that is coterminous with Darlington unitary authority, but we propose a realignment of the Redcar and Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland boundary. These constituencies and Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland especially have long lacked coherence extending east-west, from coastal and agricultural areas into core urban areas.

With the requirement for larger constituencies, extending them further into central Middlesbrough makes little sense and we propose a realignment on a more north-south basis, with a Redcar and East Cleveland constituency linking Redcar, Saltburn and Guisborough in the east of this sub-region and a Middlesbrough East constituency inland of this and incorporating five Middlesbrough-facing wards of the current Redcar constituency from Normanby to Grangetown together with the five wards of Middlesbrough constituency and the six Middlesbrough wards of the current Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency.

This arrangement gives greater adherence to local ties within each constituency and better respects local authority external boundaries than the Commission's proposals for a Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency and a Middlesbrough North East and Redcar constituency. In contrast to the Commission's proposal, we would keep the whole of the Eston town and urban area together.

The remaining wards of Middlesbrough and the five Stockton South wards that are south of the Tees form our proposed Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency, but unlike the Commission's proposal, lies entirely south of the Tees which is a geographical barrier. Communications and local ties in this area primarily run either side of the river rather than across it.

The Commission's proposals for a Hartlepool and Billingham seat involves splitting from both these townships and we would prefer to split neither, but electoral arithmetic and geography have thwarted us. Our proposals do, however, place all of Billingham in a Hartlepool and Billingham constituency with the Jesmond ward in Hartlepool being transferred, together with the adjacent wards of Hart and De Bruce, as proposed by the Commission, into the constituency immediately north of

Hartlepool.

With the five Billingham wards of Stockton forming part of Hartlepool and Billingham and the five wards south of the Tees forming part of Middlesbrough West and Stockton East, the remaining wards form our proposed Stockton West constituency and this arrangement allows Stockton town centre to be inside the main Stockton constituency enhancing local ties across the constituency and avoiding breaking local ties in the wards from the current Stockton North constituency.

In conclusion, our proposals meet the statutory requirements with regard to size. They do not split any existing wards and they seek to build upon and to improve the Commission's proposals in respect of other relevant factors. In our written submission there are a number of measures that can be used to illustrate this which we have shown. There are two in particular that I would draw your attention to now. In each of the following two measures it becomes clear in terms of constituencies crossing natural and human boundaries, the Commission's proposals have 17 constituencies crossing natural and human boundaries, whereas our proposals only have ten.

In terms of respecting local authority boundaries, the Commission have three orphan wards, we only have one orphan ward and we have, in terms of the average number of local authorities per constituency, slightly fewer than the Commission's proposals. In terms of enhancing local ties and protecting local community interests, then our proposals are, in our view, better.

That is really all that I want to say at this stage. Clearly the content is quite complex and our submission, of which I have covered some six pages, actually is 13 or 14 pages long, which you have, but it gives all the numbers, wards, constituencies and how it would actually map out in practice. I hope very much that our submission will prove helpful to your deliberations.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very well. Thank you very much for that presentation. As that completes your submission at this stage, I would like to invite anybody else in the room who would like to make any points for clarification only. There is a roving mic there, make use of it, please, and introduce yourself with your name and address.

MR McDONALD: Thank you, Madam Commissioner. My name is Dennis McDonald, I am a resident of Fulwell in Sunderland. Can I ask Mr Shipley where he gets the idea that there is a natural link between Fulwell and South Shields? They are in different local government authorities, and having lived in Fulwell all of my life, there is no link between Fulwell and South Shields.

LORD SHIPLEY: No, I understand the point that is made. The difficulty is that there is a numerical requirement on the size of constituencies and there are consequences to that, so you end up with a set of orphan wards, you end up with one or two wards, but on our proposal there are many fewer. As you will know, the Fulwell ward in Sunderland stretches right to the north and comes up against the South Tyneside barrier. In that sense, it is not a perfect answer, but given the criteria that have been set by the Boundary Commission, it is the least worst that we can come up with.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you. There is a further person who wants to make a point of clarification only.

MR PRATT: (Conservative Party) Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party, Matthew Parker Street, London.

It is helpful that you have that particular slide up because I wonder if you could clarify for me which are the two Commission proposals that cross the Northumberland-Tyne and Wear boundary? I appreciate you do it three times, but which are the two that the Commission have?

LORD SHIPLEY: Right. It lies on the Northumberland and Newcastle boundary. Is that what you said?

MR PRATT: Yes.

LORD SHIPLEY: Okay.

MR PRATT: You say there are two, I wonder which of the two.

LORD SHIPLEY: The two that we cross are Hexham and Newcastle North West. Yes, it is, but also, as you know, Gateshead is split across six constituencies.

MR PRATT: Sorry, you say your proposals are three, which I agree, I am fine on that, but Northumberland-Tyne and Wear, you say the Commission proposals are two?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Off microphone) Hexham and Newcastle North West, Hexham and Morpeth.

MR PRATT: Yes.

LORD SHIPLEY: It is possibly how we are describing two. The two are Newcastle North West and Hexham.

MR PRATT: Right. So in actual fact that should say one and three?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Off microphone). We will double check that.

MR PRATT: If you could, that will be helpful.

LORD SHIPLEY: Sure, we will double check that, but the point is that the Newcastle North West seat, the splitting of Gateshead into six constituencies, whether Gateshead crosses the Tyne or does not cross the Tyne, and which way Northumberland should link into Newcastle to deliver the required numbers requires some alteration, but in our case, in our view, it would not be appropriate for the River Tyne to be breached. We have seen that in the past because the boundary, if you use the river as a boundary, as we previously have, not least in the Tyne Bridge constituency a number of years ago, there is no coming together of local ties.

MR PRATT: I have one further question and I just wondered if you would clarify, as

Mr Hartley said at the beginning, the Commission proposed three no-change constituencies within the North East. I wonder if you could say how many no-change constituencies there are in the Liberal Democrat proposal.

LORD SHIPLEY: There are two and those are the Tynemouth seat and the Darlington seat.

MR PRATT: Darlington is not a no-change, is it?

LORD SHIPLEY: It is respecting the unitary boundaries of the constituency.

MR PRATT: Yes, but the three no-change constituencies that Mr Hartley mentioned were Sunderland Central, Tynemouth and North Tyneside.

LORD SHIPLEY: You would have to read all our proposals for Sunderland carefully. Is that okay? I think there are a whole range of issues around North Hartlepool about the issue around Fulwell and its linking to South Shields and so on, which means that the constituencies are redrawn.

MR PRATT: I think the answer is probably one.

LORD SHIPLEY: Right.

MR PRATT: Which is Tynemouth.

LORD SHIPLEY: We are realigning Sunderland Central. I mean, it is what I said in my presentation, Sunderland Central. The Boundary Commission may have it exactly as it is, but we have realigned it.

MR PRATT: Sunderland Central and North Tyneside is no-change.

LORD SHIPLEY: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. Obviously any points that would require clarification would be submitted in due course and the deadline is 5 December.

LORD SHIPLEY: I am going to respond to that point in writing actually because you have just said that Sunderland Central will not change, but that is not what I said, I said it was being realigned on our proposals.

MR PRATT: It does not change under the Commission's proposal.

LORD SHIPLEY: I see, under the Commission's proposal. No, that is absolutely.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very well.

LORD SHIPLEY: That is absolutely true, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: For the purposes of the record would you mind introducing yourself?

MR IZAKS: (Sunderland Green Party) Helmut Izaks from Sunderland Green Party, but my comment is about Durham and that is that Durham Central includes --- sorry, I have lost myself.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Take your time.

MR IZAKS: The City of Durham includes Chester-le-Street and you have put Pelton into North Durham, but Pelton aligns itself very much with Chester-le-Street. I wonder why you have made that parting of the waves.

LORD SHIPLEY: It is partly about getting the numbers to balance. The Boundary Commission requires a certain size of constituency and Pelton is outside of Chester-le-Street, so it not far away, I accept that, but when you have situations like Barnard Castle being split in two, Pelton looks perfectly well towards Stanley and towards other parts of north and north-west Durham.

MS VAUGHN(?): My name is Emma Vaughn(?), Sunderland Green Party. I was just interested because I live in Ryhope in Sunderland and I would just like more clarification now. I am fairly new to politics, but I understand Ryhope has been in Sunderland South before and now it is in Sunderland Central. I just wanted more clarification on that. Thanks.

LORD SHIPLEY: Can I suggest, because I think everything is publicly accessible, that the solution to that is for you to read the detail of the submission that we have made, but if I just repeat from the presentation that I have made that Ryhope would go to Sunderland South. It is, of course, in the south of Sunderland, and two wards Sandhill and Silksworth would be transferred from Houghton and Sunderland West to Sunderland Central, the new Sunderland Central, but the remaining six wards of Houghton and Sunderland South with Ryhope, and the three adjacent County Durham wards of Dawdon, Deneside and Seaham from the current Easington constituency that lies a bit to the south of Ryhope, they would all come into that new constituency. Ryhope would actually be about in the centre of that new constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do not forget to introduce yourself for the purposes of the record.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: (North East England Green Party) Good morning, I am Andy Blanchflower, North East England Green Party.

Because of the type of criteria, we are thwarted anyway to deal perfectly with these five criteria that the Act of Parliament requires, but could you confirm that in your proposals the two largest councils, Newcastle City Council and Sunderland City Council, will not have a constituency wholly within their boundaries?

LORD SHIPLEY: No, that is not right. I think that is not right. I think you would have to read the detail of our submission actually. I mean, I realise this is complicated in terms of the detail, but the simplest answer to that, otherwise we could take quite a bit of time, your basic question is incorrect.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Would you get back to me on that, please?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, anything which is requiring further clarification can be referred to in any further submissions.

It appears then that that completes issues for clarification from the audience, so in light of that I would like to thank you very much for your very good presentation.

We then move onto the next listed speaker. If you would like to come forward. You realise, for the purposes of the record, you should introduce yourself formally.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much. I thank the Commission very much for all they are doing.

My name is Roger Pratt, I am the Boundary Review Director for the Conservative Party based at Matthew Parker Street, Westminster, London. This is a representation on behalf of the Conservative Party and the North East Region Conservatives, and I will, during my presentation, quote from two documents. One is the initial proposals document of the Commission for the North East, and one is the revised proposals document for the North East for the aborted review and particularly the Assistant Commissioner's report on that occasion.

We support the allocation of 25 seats to the North East. However, we do not support the decision to allocate no sub-regions in the region and instead propose alternative groupings as follows. We would have a grouping of Northumberland and we would then have the rest in one grouping, although technically Darlington is obviously separate as a unitary authority.

In terms of Northumberland, I wonder if I could just quote two things from the initial proposals document in item 21, page 11, it says:

"We welcome counter-proposals from respondents to our consultation based on other groupings of counties and unitary authorities if the statutory factors can be better reflected in those counter-proposals".

We believe by reviewing Northumberland alone you can get better factors in those kinds of proposals. They said in item 22 that:

"In developing our initial proposals for the North East we noted that Northumberland with an electorate of 232,448 could be allocated three constituencies within five per cent of the electoral quota, that would be wholly contained within its boundary".

We agree with that and think that that is what should happen.

The way that we have worked is to look at the proposals in respect of the rules for redistribution of seats and see if we can improve on the four statutory factors, the special geographical considerations, local government boundaries and particularly how many constituencies are within a local authority and how many local authorities are within a constituency, the boundaries of existing constituencies and that means particularly no-change constituencies, and the degree of change and any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.

We support the Commission's proposals in their entirety for the following seats. We think it is absolutely sensible, very sensible, that Darlington is coterminous with the local authority, that meets the statutory factors very well indeed and we note on page 14 of the initial proposals document, item 38, it says:

"Our proposed Darlington constituency retains 17 wards of the existing constituency. We have been able to include in this constituency the remaining wards of the Borough of Darlington, therefore our proposed Darlington constituencies are coterminous with the borough boundaries".

We think that is logical, sensible and we fully support that.

We also support the Easington and Houghton constituency, the Hartlepool and Billingham constituency, the Jarrow constituency, the two Middlesbrough seats of north-eastern Redcar and South-eastern Cleveland. We would look, if there were alternatives that could be sensibly agreed in those constituencies, at alternatives if there were any and Newcastle upon Tyne East, which is totally within Newcastle.

We also support the North Durham and Chester-le-Street constituency; no change to the North Tyneside constituency; a South Shields constituency that is all within South Tyneside; no change to the Sunderland Central constituency; a Sunderland West constituency and no change for Tynemouth. Those are the constituencies we support.

We do not support various other constituencies, a total of 12 constituencies, in the North East where we are proposing alternatives. I will not name those, but what we will do now is we will look at our alternative.

In Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, to a certain extent, similarly to the Liberal Democrats, we would have a Berwick and Morpeth seat. We would have no objection, by the way, if that seat included the name of Alnwick. If it was Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth, we would have no objection whatsoever to that, we have just put it as Berwick and Morpeth for simplicity, but absolutely no problem with that.

That is basically largely the existing constituency plus Morpeth and one or two surrounding areas. I would refer here to the Assistant Commissioner's report last time because there was a lot of discussion in terms particularly of the Morpeth constituency and I would refer in this case to AC27 on page 13. There is a general support, there is general support for a constituency, including Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth, that extends down the North Sea coast. However, the initial proposals included the ward of Rothbury in the proposed constituency of Hexham. At present the ward is in the existing Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency, so there was a lot of controversy last time about Rothbury and the Commission again have included Rothbury within the Hexham constituency.

We have received representations from members of the public and others that Rothbury's existing ties lie with the towns of Alnwick, Berwick and Morpeth and not with the town of Hexham. The representations indicate residents of Rothbury look to the towns of Alnwick and Berwick for services rather than to Hexham. Transport corridors from Rothbury lie north in the direction of Berwick rather than west to

Hexham. Children from Rothbury attend schools in Morpeth to the east, not in Hexham to the west. Overall, therefore, the evidence that we have received is that the residents of Rothbury have geographic, historic, economic and educational links with the towns of Alnwick, Berwick and Morpeth rather than Hexham. A number of people they quote as giving evidence including Alan Beith, the then Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

In our opinion, the Rothbury ward should remain part of the proposed Berwick and Morpeth constituency having regard to the boundaries of the existing Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency, including the Rothbury ward, having regard to the local ties that would be broken by including the Rothbury ward in the proposed Hexham constituency. We fully agree with that and think there should be a Berwick and Morpeth constituency.

We would have a Blaydon constituency which had one more Gateshead ward in it and one less Newcastle upon Tyne ward. Blyth and Ashington, we would put Blyth and Ashington together and have that totally within Northumberland. The Gateshead constituency would just be less one Gateshead ward, so the constituency as is. Then we would have a Hexham and Cramlington seat, so it is the existing seat plus Cramlington, and the important thing there is that we put the whole of Ponteland together, we do not believe that Ponteland should be divided, we believe Ponteland should be united within the Hexham and Cramlington seat, so it is the existing seat plus Cramlington. We have a Newcastle North seat which actually includes a further ward, Denton, which is currently within Newcastle North, so again making less change.

I would again like to quote from some parts of the Assistant Commissioner's report from last time:

"There was overwhelming opposition for the inclusion of Ponteland East ward in a proposed Berwick and Morpeth constituency".

Obviously it is now being proposed in a constituency with Newcastle and not with Berwick and Morpeth, and the Rothbury ward in the proposed Hexham constituency, as I have pointed out. But: "There is opposition for the initial proposals inclusion of the Ponteland East ward". Again, it is not in a different constituency.

"At present the Ponteland ward is part of the existing Hexham constituency. Again we have received evidence that including the Ponteland ward, East ward, will break local ties, the initial proposals would divide the town of Ponteland, part of which would remain in the proposed Hexham constituency. The evidence is that the town of Ponteland is a tight knit community and that goes to the whole of Ponteland with strong links which would be broken if part of the town were in one constituency and part in another".

Again, people giving that evidence included Alan Beith.

"Furthermore, the evidence is that the residents of Ponteland East have geographic, economic, social and educational links with Hexham to the west. In our opinion the Ponteland East ward should remain part of the proposed Hexham constituency having regard to the existing Hexham constituency and having regard to the local

ties that would be broken by including Ponteland East ward”.

Again that was in Berwick and that was AC29 on page 14.

We think there is a strong case for this alternative where you have three constituencies totally within the area of Northumberland.

That is the position and I would like to quote now from the initial proposals document, items 24 and 25. 24 says in respect of the county of Northumberland, item 24, pages 11 and 12:

“We have needed to make substantial changes to the existing constituencies in the county”.

Then item 25: “We have investigated alternative configurations to this constituency” - they are talking about Berwick and Ashington – “but due to the large geographical area of the county, the alternatives we considered would not be practical”.

Our submission, Madam Chairman, is that this is a practical and better solution as regards the position. We do not have this orphan ward of Ponteland East and Stannington and we have, we think, much more sound geographical constituencies and it is the existing Hexham constituency plus - and it is effectively the existing Berwick constituency - plus it is not quite because there is a small part of one of the Ponteland wards that is currently in the Hexham seat, but effectively it is Berwick plus and Hexham plus which we believe is right.

We would make one other point as regards the Ponteland East ward. I know it is called Ponteland East and Stannington. The position is that in the initial proposals in item 28, page 12, the proposed constituency of Newcastle upon Tyne North West, which is the one that takes that particular ward, does cross the county boundary of Northumberland with the inclusion of Ponteland East and Stannington ward and it says from the existing Wansbeck constituency on item 28, page 12. That is incorrect. The Ponteland East and Stannington ward is totally within the Hexham constituency and we believe that it should remain there. That, we think, is a much more logical, much more sensible, Northumberland totally within Northumberland.

In terms of Tyne and Wear, we get rid of this massive orphan ward of Ponteland East. In fact, the orphan ward would probably be as large in area as the rest of the constituency put together and we do not think that makes any sense, so you get rid of it, so you have one constituency which is totally within Newcastle, which is much more sensible. You also ensure that this ward, which is Denton, is back in Newcastle North where it claims in the existing constituency and it has very strong ties to the Westerhope ward, which is that particular ward, so we believe these are better shapes. The only other change we would make is this ward, Dunstan and Teams, comes in making a more logically shaped Blaydon constituency.

The advantages of our Northumberland and Tyne and Wear is we restore close ties in the town of Ponteland, which is divided under the Commission’s proposals. We reflect local ties between the towns of Ashington and Blyth connected by the A189 and share local services, including the Wansbeck Hospital at Ashington. We reflect the connection between the towns of Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Morpeth by

the A1 and the railway. We note that these connections are stronger than those between Hexham with its east-west links and Morpeth with its north-south links. We reduce the size of the expanse of Hexham and Morpeth seat proposed by the Commission, which is the largest by area proposed in the North East region, we also thereby reflect Rothbury's ties to Alnwick.

We create three constituencies entirely contained within and covering the county of Northumberland, removing the orphan ward status of Ponteland East and Stannington. Newcastle upon Tyne local authority has one additional constituency entirely contained within its boundaries. That is the constituency of Newcastle upon Tyne North, as we propose it. The Commission proposes North West, but I do not think we have any strong feelings as to whether it should be North or North West. As I say, this ensures that Denton and Westerhope, where there are strong local ties, are together again in the same constituency.

Four of the six constituencies are contained within one local authority rather than three under the Commission's proposals, so that is the position with regard to Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

We then look at western Durham where we propose alternative constituencies in both Bishop Auckland and what we call North-west Durham and the Commission call West Durham and Teesdale. Our Bishop Auckland is the existing constituency plus and North-west Durham is more of the existing constituency. The two wards we would move are Barnard Castle West into Bishop Auckland, so as I say Bishop Auckland would become the existing constituency plus and then Willington and Hunwick, which the vast majority of the electors are currently in north-west Durham, 6,472 are currently within north-west Durham, and although it is a split ward with the new boundaries, actually the other electors are all within the City of Durham not even in Bishop Auckland, so there is nothing in Bishop Auckland.

I would refer to the Assistant Commissioner's report last time, 91, pages 29 and 30, and here it says:

"The evidence that we have received is that the residents in the two Barnard Castle wards and the Evenwood ward look to the area of Bishop Auckland for local services, shops and employment. See for example the representations of the Member of Parliament for Bishop Auckland Alan Goodman, a labour Member of Parliament, and this would avoid changes, break existing local ties. We therefore recommend that the proposed Bishop Auckland constituency includes the three Barnard Castles and Evenwood, which it does under our proposals, and does not include Willington",

which we again take out because of the ties with Crick. That is the proposed constituency and this is our alternative, so we put the Barnard Castle ward back in with Barnard Castle and we put the Willington and Hunwick ward back where it has strong ties to Crook there.

The advantages are we restore local ties between the town of Crook and Willington which are divided by the Commission's proposals, and we restore local ties in the town of Barnard Castle which is divided by the Commission's proposal, so we agree entirely with the Liberals in terms of the breaking of links in Barnard Castle.

We retain the division between Teesdale and Weardale which follow the line of the River Tees and the River Wear respectively, both of which have stronger transport links east-west and which are divided by a series of moors and commons with very few north-south links and 12,791 fewer electors move from their existing constituency.

We make a minor change between the City of Durham constituency and the East Durham constituency, so the City of Durham constituency becomes the existing constituency plus. Again it is not exactly the existing constituency plus because there are two wards where there is a small part in another constituency, I have mentioned one of them being the Willington ward.

These are the two wards we would move. Coxhoe which is currently in the City of Durham moves back to the City of Durham and Hetton we would move into the East Durham seat. That is the current proposal and that is our alternative proposal, so we would put the Hexham ward with a south Hetton ward and we would put Coxhoe, which is currently in Durham, back into Durham. The advantages of that is we restore local ties between Coxhoe and the City of Durham divided by the Commission's proposals, we reflect local ties between the Hetton ward and Shotton South Hetton ward and 9,280 fewer electors move from their existing constituency.

We make changes in terms of the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East seat and the Stockton West constituency. We propose these alternative constituencies. Ingleby Barwick, the two Ingleby Barwick wards we put back into Stockton West reflecting the ties they have with the current Stockton South seat and we unite the two Nortons, Norton North and Norton West and Newtown tying it in with the Stockton town centre into the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East seat. That is the position. We put the two Ingleby Barwick wards back into Stockton West, we put all three Norton wards together, and indeed the Newtown ward which has links to Stockton town centre.

The advantages of this are we restore local ties between Ingleby Barwick and Eaglescliffe which are divided by the Commission proposals. I must say Yarm also has very strong links to those and very much is a Stockton ward, and we believe that is right that all those wards go together, Yarm is tied to Eaglescliffe and Ingleby Barwick. We restore ties between Norton North, Norton South and Norton West, which are divided by the Commission's proposals. We restore ties between Newtown and Stockton town centre and again, if I can just refer to the initial proposals document, item 41, page 14, it says:

"We have included in this Middlesbrough West and Stockton East we have included Stockton town centre ward from the existing Stockton South constituency".

It is actually from the existing Stockton North constituency and we believe it is right that we reunite those ties, and 13,284 fewer electors move from their existing constituencies.

A reminder of the criteria that we have used in terms of the proposals we have come up with, the special geographical considerations, local government boundaries, boundaries of existing constituencies and local ties. If we look at that in summary,

we propose an alternative configuration of constituencies which in respect of the Commission's Hexham and Morpeth and West Durham and Teesdale constituencies better reflects geography and accessibility and reduces the size of both constituencies, therefore being more compliant with Rule 5(a).

We propose considerably better local authority links in Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne, thus being more compliant with Rule 5(b), and we move 28,373 fewer electors in the Commission and restore many wards back to their existing constituencies thus being more compliant with Rule 5(c). In addition on existing constituencies, we retain three constituencies, three existing constituencies unchanged, as the Commission do, North Tyneside, Tynemouth and Sunderland Central. In addition to that, the Hexham seat and the Bishop Auckland seat become the existing constituencies plus, they are clearly not large enough to be an existing constituency, but the existing constituency plus, and in effect both the Berwick seat and the Durham seat become the existing constituency plus, albeit there are a few electors that are not included because they are very much the minority parts of split wards in each case.

We believe that those are much better. We break fewer local ties, restoring ties, for example, in Blyth and Ashington and Ponteland and Newcastle upon Tyne and Hetton-le-Hole and Teesdale, Weardale, Barnard Castle and Stockton-on-Tees. We break fewer local ties thus being more compliant with Rule 5(d).

In conclusion, Madam Chairman, we support the allocation of 25 constituencies in the North East, but believe there is a much better scheme available, particularly in respect of Northumberland, County Durham and Stockton-on-Tees.

We are going to submit to the Commission before 5 December a comprehensive document outlining our rationale whether we support the Commission or propose alternatives. We will take account of representations that are made at the two hearings in the North East and may, in the light of these and the other representations, amend our submission from that which we have outlined today.

Finally, Madam Chairman, as this is the last lead hearing, we will have all the lead hearings in England and indeed all the hearings in Wales, but in terms of England, can I pass on my very grateful thanks to both Sam Hartley, as secretary of the Commission, and to all the Commission staff who have been at all these hearings and have been, as always, extremely helpful and co-operative. I would like to place on record our grateful thanks to the Commission and indeed obviously to yourselves as Assistant Commissioners and to the member of the Commission who is in the audience as well. Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that very useful submission. Now that you have completed it, I would like to invite members of the audience to raise some points for clarification only at this stage. Could you introduce yourself with your name as well? Thank you.

MR COOK: (Labour Party) My name is Greg Cook and I am a representative of the Labour Party.

Just a couple of points, you talked a lot about the division of Ponteland. I wonder if

you could tell me how many constituencies the town of Cramlington would be included in under your proposal.

MR PRATT: Indeed. Cramlington would be divided and I think we are going to hear evidence at a later stage as to how that is a logical division of Cramlington. However, if there was a proposal with Cramlington united we would certainly look at that as well. It is just a question of the numbers obviously to get the existing Hexham plus Cramlington, but there is going to be evidence produced as to why that is a logical division in Cramlington.

MR COOK: Thank you. The other point was your proposed East Durham seat. Could you tell me how many local authorities, how many parts of different local authorities, that contains?

MR PRATT: Yes, of course. That is in three local authorities, but the advantage is that it ensures that Durham is united in one, so it has an advantage on one side and a disadvantage on the other.

MR COOK: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Is there anybody else who wishes to raise issues for clarification?

MR HINDLE: (Liberal Democrats) Frank Hindle from the Liberal Democrats. Two questions. First, could you confirm that your proposals continue to keep Billingham and Washington as split towns between constituencies?

MR PRATT: Obviously the Commission do that and we are not departing from the Commission proposals in that, obviously we would look at alternatives, if there were sensible alternatives which could unite those, but that is what the Commission do and we have not departed from that.

MR HINDLE: Secondly, how many constituencies is Gateshead split across in your proposals, please?

MR PRATT: I would have to check, but I assume it is probably the same number as the Commission proposals.

MR HINDLE: Does that mean six?

MR PRATT: I do not think there would be any difference in that. Obviously we have one more Gateshead ward within the Blaydon constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Is there anybody else who wishes to raise any issues for clarification purposes? Okay. In light of that then I would like to thank you very much for taking the time to present that. Thank you.

I would like to call on the next person listed to make a presentation on behalf of the Green Party. For the purposes of the record, will you outline your name and representation?

MS FEATHERSTONE: (North East Green Party) My name is Rachel Featherstone, I live at Claremont Terrace in Sunderland and I am representing the North East Green Party today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MS FEATHERSTONE: I would like to thank the Commission for their efforts on what has been a very complicated task and I am sure very time consuming, and we appreciate your willingness to take into account local views at this time.

We have gone about our review by consulting with the 13 local parties in the North East. Representatives of all the North East parties were invited to a regional meeting where they were invited to put their views on the proposals. They were then asked to consult their members and those members have reported back from between Saltburn and Berwick at either end of the region.

We therefore maintain that what we submit to you today is the best fit of local community opinions from across the region. Furthermore, it is compatible with your remit to take into account considerations of geography, local governance, existing constituencies, inconveniences of change and local ties.

We have no MP in this region and we are very far from getting one in 2015, so nothing that we say today has any political motivation, we are simply concerned to ensure fair and meaningful representation to the electorate of the North East.

We asked our local parties and some of them chose not to submit detailed critiques of the proposed constituencies but instead took issue with the principles of the Commission itself. Now we do realise that there is nothing that the Boundary Commission can do about this, these rules were imposed upon them as a condition of the review, but we would like to ask for these to be considered for future reviews.

We have the use of electoral registration data from December 2015 which was a low point of registration due to the transfer to individual voter registration. We believe that there are several million people missing from the electoral data that was used for this review. It has been shown to under-represent from people from deprived backgrounds, black and white ethnic minorities, young people, students and renters, and so we are concerned that actually constituencies will be unbalanced, that some inner city constituencies, whose numbers have come down because of the use of this data, will be extended into rural and suburban areas possibly changing the character of the constituency itself in favour of the party currently in power. We would ask you to consider completing future reviews on a basis of voting population estimated using a combination of census and citizenship data including things like passport data.

We are also concerned with the change in variance. This review was conducted with five per cent variance on either side of the ideal when it has been traditional to use a ten per cent variance figure. This is not as forgiving to a mismatch between electoral registration and voting population and we feel it could make it more difficult for MPs to be accessible in larger constituencies because they must represent not just those people who vote for them but everyone who lives in their constituency and

we fear that it may lead to a disparity in size between constituencies in 2020. We would ask you to consider reverting to the ten per cent variance for the next review and consider using polling districts as basic units rather than wards.

We are concerned about the splitting of several communities with distinct identities which causes confusion in the electorate and the new constituencies may not reflect a strongly felt identity. Political engagement will therefore be less meaningful and may be discouraged. We noted evidence submitted to the last review by Gateshead Council when one of their wards had been moved into a Jarrow constituency, and they reported a lot of unhappy people, some making complaints, with many of them saying they had nothing to do with Jarrow and certainly would not be voting in the election. We fear that this would discourage political engagement in an area that already has low political engagement. We would ask you to consider the alternatives we present for Washington, Gosforth, Gateshead, Barnard Castle and Sunderland.

We have accepted several of the Commission's recommendations. We are pleased to see Darlington is kept within the unitary boundaries. Hartlepool and Billingham, Middlesbrough North East and Redcar, Middlesbrough South East and Cleveland, Middlesbrough West and Stockton West and North Tyneside, though we do believe that that name should be changed to reflect local character to Wallsend and Killingworth. We would also approve of South Shields, Stockton West, Sunderland Central and Tynemouth.

We have several issues with the new Northumberland constituencies. The Commission is proposing three constituencies in place of four and our concerns on that centre on geographical considerations and local ties. The Hexham and Morpeth constituency, we are glad to see that there is quite widespread agreement on this, that it is geographically too big, it would be very difficult for any MP to represent it adequately and to be accessible to all of their constituents. There are no direct rail, road or bus links between Hexham and much of what is currently the Wansbeck constituency around Morpeth. Morpeth and Hexham have little in common; they have very different characters to their towns. Berwick and Ashington seem mismatched as there are no direct transport connections between them and they have very little in common in terms of history and orientation.

We propose three other constituencies which would be North and Central or North and Mid Northumberland, which would take in Berwick and Morpeth. Tynedale with Ponteland, which would keep the Ponteland wards together along with Rothbury, and Ashington and Blyth. We believe that these are better proposals because Berwick and Morpeth are linked by East Coast Rail and the A1, and Berwick and Morpeth share a lot in common, they are both involved in the rural economy, whereas Ashington does not seem to have a lot in common with Morpeth or Berwick.

All 22 wards in Ashington and Blyth share coal-mining heritage and the proposed alternatives for this in limits of variance and we have full details of the wards that we have included on the handouts and as part of our written submission.

Tyne and Wear, it is proposed ten constituencies in place of 12 with significant change to existing boundaries. Again our concerns are on local ties, geographical considerations and local government boundaries.

The Jarrow, Gateshead and Sunderland West constituencies see Washington being split between Jarrow, Gateshead and Sunderland West, Birtley to be added to Sunderland West crossing the local authority boundaries into Gateshead, and Castle and Redhill to join Jarrow where they are currently part of Sunderland. This means that Jarrow will cover three local authorities, something which we know the Commission is reluctant to do.

Washington was formerly an independent entity and still considers itself to be an independent community. We have had several very strongly worded emails on the subject of Washington being split in this way, which I am afraid I cannot repeat at a public hearing, but there is a very strong feeling in the community that Washington should not be split into three separate constituencies.

Birtley is divided from the rest of the proposed constituency by undeveloped land, the Fell and by the A1, with very little opportunities for people in Birtley to mix with the rest of the constituency, to exchange views and so on. Castle and Redhill certainly consider themselves to be part of Sunderland and would be quite mystified as to why they have been moved.

The Easington and Houghton constituency adds Doxford and Copt Hill from Sunderland which crosses the local authority boundaries. That means that it would cover two local authorities this constituency and we feel that there is little in common between certainly Doxford ward and Houghton and Easington. Doxford is mostly comprised of new estates, so-called garden estates, that were built quite recently and have quite distinctive character. Whereas Houghton and Easington are ex-coal field sites with strong traditions in those industries.

The residents of Doxford identify strongly with Sunderland. At the last review, they were not even happy that the name of Houghton was added to their constituency, they felt that was confusing and did not know whether they would have to go and vote in Houghton or not.

Newcastle East and Newcastle upon Tyne North split Gosforth between them with Gosforth East going to Newcastle East and Gosforth West to Newcastle North West. Gosforth again considers itself to be a distinct community with strong historical ties and a shared high street. It does not seem appropriate to split them into two different constituencies here. That means that the Newcastle upon Tyne North West crosses the local authority boundaries between Newcastle and Northumberland.

We also take issue with the Blaydon constituency which combines five wards from Newcastle, ex-industrial areas, with rural areas in Blaydon and Gateshead. Both sides of the communities have strong ties respectively to Newcastle and Gateshead. The constituency would cross the River Tyne, which has long been seen as a strong natural boundary and it would cross the local authority boundary between Gateshead and Newcastle.

Our alternatives. We would propose that Newcastle upon Tyne North and Cramlington, Newcastle upon Tyne East, Tyne Bridge, Jarrow and South East Gateshead, Washington and Sunderland West, Sunderland South and Houghton, and outer Gateshead, and full details of the ward we would include in those constituencies are available in our handouts.

This would keep Washington wards within the same constituency which we feel is extremely important so they would be kept within Washington and Sunderland West. It keeps Gosforth wards in the same constituency of Newcastle upon Tyne East. Gateshead would be divided between two constituencies rather than five under the current proposals which we also feel would be welcomed by the people of Gateshead. Similarly, Newcastle wards of Castle, Parklands and Woosington would be kept together in Newcastle upon Tyne North and Cramlington, while the similarly affluent areas of Heaton, Gosforth and Jesmond would remain in Newcastle upon Tyne East. We feel that this is a better reflection of local affiliations and ties, and also these new constituencies would fall within the variance.

We have had late representations from our Durham parties, so we did have alternative proposals prepared for today, but they have decided that they would like to change them and those changes will be ready in time for our written submission.

The Commission is proposing six constituencies in place of seven and our concerns in this area again centre on local ties, government boundaries and geographical considerations. Our City of Durham constituency, the current proposal, has Hetton from Sunderland, Tow Law from north-west Durham and includes divided wards of Esh and Witton Gilbert. Tow Law is very far from Durham and has little in common with the wards in Durham City, it has more in common with the rural areas in Durham. The City of Durham constituency would cross the local authority boundary between Durham and Sunderland and Esh and Witton Gilbert remain divided wards under this proposal, which we know the Commission are reluctant to do and for good reason.

The new East Durham constituency would add Hart and De Bruce, which would cross local authority boundaries into Hartlepool, it would create a very large and diverse constituency from Aycliffe inland to the coastal areas of Durham. It would also cross local authority boundaries.

We are working on proposals for alternative Durham constituencies, but we would like to see constituencies cover the same local authorities and in the current plans that we have they do, apart from Easington and Hart. The new towns of Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor would be in the same constituency of Sedgefield and Spennymoor, again reflecting the similar character of these towns.

Ties of the Durham Dales will be retained in the Durham Dales and Bishop Auckland constituency and it would keep the Barnard Castle wards within the same constituency and include the smaller town of Aycliffe and that would all be within Durham Dales and Bishop Auckland.

The other representations that were made to us by the local parties concerned fair representation, so we recognise that wide-ranging reform was necessary to address wide disparities in constituency size which are traditionally given advantage to particular parties within the region.

The instructions to the Boundary Commission on variance and electoral data to be used seem to favour the party currently in power and while we recognise that this will redress some historical imbalances, we do feel that it should be done on fair and

equal representation basis.

The stated aim of the review was to reduce the cost of politics as a source of dissatisfaction with the electorate, but while the number of MPs is decreasing by 50, the number of peers has increased moving power even further away from the electorate. The recent referendum results, we feel, reveal frustration with our current political system. People feel that their votes do not count in many wards and many constituencies in this area. We are keen to ensure that this review does not exacerbate that situation by making people feel even more disconnected from their political life.

We would also like to take this opportunity to renew our calls for proportional representation to be introduced at the soonest possible opportunity. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for your very helpful presentation. As you have completed the presentation, I would invite members of the audience to raise issues for clarification purposes only. State your name for the record, please.

MR McDONALD: My name is Dennis McDonald. I have three points to put to Ms Featherstone, if I may. Has she any concrete evidence there are 3 million people missing from the register? Does she accept that no matter what the timescale had been, there would be people who would not be on the register? Finally, does she accept, as she remarked in her last part, that there are some people who may not have registered who do not want to be part of the political process for the reasons that you have given?

MS FEATHERSTONE: Absolutely, yes. I do not believe I gave an exact figure of 3 million. There is an estimate currently at round 2 to 3 million people who are missing.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: With respect, I realise that this is straying onto something that is quite irrelevant at the moment unless there is some purpose behind the questioning that serves this process today.

MR MCDONALD: Sorry, Madam. If you make a statement there are 3 million people who have been left off the register for whatever reason, then you should give concrete evidence that that is the case. It is speculation, nothing more than that.

MS FEATHERSTONE: No, there is research that shows that 2 to 3 million people have been missing from the register. Yes, we do realise that, of course, at any point in the electoral cycle there will be people missing from the register. Perhaps because they simply do not want to be part of it, but December 2015 was a particular low point in registration because of the transfer of people to individual registration, and so we are puzzled as to why that particular point in time was chosen as the basis for this Commission's review.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. I have to say that this is a matter for another platform and we will just try to keep on line so we can maintain our time schedule. Would there be anybody else or would you have any further questions, Mr McDonald, in relation to further clarification on other issues? Okay. Very well.

Thank you very much.

MR HINDLE: Frank Hindle, Liberal Democrat again. I think you have got the Rothbury ward in the Tynedale constituency. Could you explain why, please?

MS FEATHERSTONE: We can. Like yourselves we were thwarted by some of the considerations of this review and we were able to put Rothbury into Tynedale. We would have liked to keep it in with north and central Northumberland because we do feel it has links with Alnwick and Morpeth, but the numbers simply would not allow us to do that and we feel that we have done the best we can with the numbers that we have been given.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. That seems to complete the amount of points being sought for clarification. In light of that, thank you very much, and that completes your presentation.

Now we have completed this morning's presentations, it is appropriate for a break and we will return at ten minutes to 12. Thank you.

Time Noted: 11.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you very much, everyone. We are resuming the hearing into the initial proposals presented by the Boundary Commission. In light of that will, I call the next speaker who is listed to talk which should be from the Labour Party. Would that be correct? For the purposes of the record, indicate your name and details.

MR HARTLEY: Whilst Mr Cook is preparing, I told you this morning there would be a fire alarm test and you will notice there was not one. I have checked and in fact the fire alarm test is tomorrow, so if it goes off, it is real. Thank you.

MR COOK: (Labour Party) Thank you very much. My name is Greg Cook, I am an official of the Labour Party based at our head office whose address is 105 Victoria Street, London SW1. I am making this submission on behalf of the Labour Party and the North East region of the Labour Party. It has been presented as an overall response to the initial proposals of the Boundary Commission, it follows a detailed consultation process within the Labour Party involving all our members of Parliament, constituency Labour parties and others within the region.

My remarks this morning are going to cover four areas. The first three relatively briefly to make some general comments about the review process, the statutory legislative criteria which the Commission operate to and the policies of the Commission on certain areas of contention, and then finally I will look at the initial proposals now in our view of them and make some counter-proposals to them.

Firstly, on the process, the Labour Party welcomes the initial proposals of the Commission, and the clear and comprehensive way in which they have set those proposals out. Whilst we disagree with some of them, and in the presentations to the regional hearings we have set out alternatives which we believe better fit the statutory criteria, we accept that in all cases they have fully considered the different options and explained the decisions they have made. We welcome their efforts to

stimulate and encourage public participation in the process to consult with the political parties on their policies and procedures. We are grateful in particular for the opportunity at this hearing and at the others to set out the views of the party on the Commission's initial proposals and I would like to echo the thanks of Mr Pratt to Sam Hartley and the Commission staff for the very smooth way in which the hearings have run to date.

We notice that under the terms of the Act the Commission may, in choosing between different schemes, take into account four criteria, special geographical circumstances, local government boundaries, the boundaries of existing constituencies and any local ties that are broken by changes to constituencies. It is self-evident the Commission may not be able to respect all of these criteria or indeed in some places any of them in every part of the region while keeping the electorates of constituencies within the permissible range, except that in some areas the disruption to existing constituencies is likely to be substantial, that it may be difficult to respect local authority boundaries and that local ties may be broken. Where we put forward alternative proposals to those of the Commission, we do so on the basis obviously that we believe them to be on balance more consistent with the statutory criteria and we accept and note that the electoral quota for this review is 74,769 and that all seats in this region therefore must have electorates between 71,031 and 78,507.

To turn to some of the relevant issues of policy which arise in this region and others, firstly, on the issue of the use of regions. We welcome the decision to use European electoral regions as the sub-national review areas for the purposes of the initial proposals. Were the Commission not to do so, the review of constituencies in England would become much more complex with almost limitless options. The result would be that meaningful consultation and public participation would be much harder to achieve. We note that the electorate of the North East region of 1,874,639 gives an entitlement under the Sainte-Laguë allocation to 25 seats with an average electorate of 74,976, which is 207 above the electoral quota.

Secondly, on the issue of wards and electoral divisions, we note the policy of using district and unitary wards as the smallest unit with which to build constituencies and also the Commission's remarks on this issue set out in their booklet which state that they recognise there may be exceptional or compelling circumstances that it may make it appropriate to divide a ward, but no such proposal has been made in the North East region by the Commission or anywhere else.

The Labour Party supports that policy and we believe that any such proposals should be treated on its merits, but within an assumption that whole wards and divisions should remain intact in the absence of compelling and exceptional circumstances such as I described and we are making no proposal which divides a ward within our counter-proposals.

Thirdly, on the issue of so-called orphan wards, which has been mentioned already today, we note the concept of an orphan ward where one ward of a local authority is added to a constituency wholly or partly in another local authority and that this is regarded by definition as undesirable, and we accept such an arrangement is often anomalous and clearly at odds with the respect for local boundaries. However, we believe that dogmatic policy which considered that such arrangements are always

undesirable, it is not appropriate and that the addition of other wards just for the sake of not having a single ward in such a scenario is not by itself necessarily to be preferred if it means that ties are broken and electors are moved in that ward. In this region, there are several examples in the initial proposals of such arrangements, many of which are anomalous, some of which we believe may be unnecessary, but most, however, we believe may be the best arrangement that is available.

Fourthly, on the issue of sub-regional review areas, we note there is no requirement on the Commission to avoid the crossing of county boundaries, as there previously was under the old legislation, and that in this region they have allocated one seat to Darlington and two seats to North Tyneside, but the rest of the region is considered as one review area.

We believe that the use of counties as units in this way is a sensible approach insofar as it is consistent with respect for local authority boundaries and also where counties have a strong identity and tradition that is a relevant factor in determining local ties. In the North East region, while there are strong county traditions, the recent changes to the structure of some local authority areas mean that the local authorities do not always reflect that, so some communities which may consider themselves part of County Durham and Northumberland may, in fact, be in local authorities which are in part of Tyne and Wear county, but one of the unitary authorities of the now abolished Cleveland County. Also, with the region being entirely comprised of unitary authorities, the administrative significance of these historic counties is diminished, so we therefore believe there may be less advantage in using counties as review areas in the North East than in some other regions.

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

If I turn to the initial proposals of the Commission, we have set out here our views on the initial proposals of the Commission and make counter-proposals to some of them. Whilst we refer to those proposals in terms of the statutory criteria, we do not in this statement include the detail of community ties and other relevant matters, which will be amplified in the statements of individuals in the areas affected, and we are making counter-proposals for 11 constituencies and in others we believe the initial proposals break ties and could be improved. Whilst we have definitive counter-proposals for 11 constituencies, we are open to all other counter-proposals that may be made in the other seats as well and we will obviously consider them.

We note that of the 12 unitary authorities in the region only four can sustain whole numbers of constituencies. Darlington and Durham, which currently share seven seats, have theoretical entitlements to 1.00 and 5.05 seats respectively. Northumberland has a theoretical entitlement to 3.11 and North Tyneside to 2.02. The electorates and their theoretical entitlements obviously is the electorate divided by the electoral quota as set out in the table.

The electorates of the remaining eight local authority areas are all unsuitable for the allocation of whole numbers of seats and all need to be paired or grouped with other areas and we note in particular that the joint entitlement of the former county of Cleveland, which is the authorities for Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees, is to 5.30 constituencies, which means there must be at least one seat which includes parts of one of those authorities and part of Durham. It thus becomes impossible for a whole number of seats to be allocated to Durham. We also note that the average electorate of three seats wholly within Northumberland will be 77,483, very close to the upper threshold, and it may therefore be difficult to create those seats without splitting at least one division. Obviously the Conservatives have made such a proposal this morning and we will obviously be looking at that and commenting on it.

These difficulties and the scale of change required with a net loss of four seats mean that we believe adherence to local authority boundaries may be less of a priority in the North East region than in some others.

If we start by looking at the areas of Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside, we recognise that the net reduction of one seat in Northumberland means that the initial proposals are of necessity very disruptive in some areas with the abolition of the Wansbeck constituency and the enlargement of the other seats. However, we do believe that there is some merit in the initial proposals and that they basically keep three of the existing seats, either wholly or largely, intact. Wansbeck, because of its location, has to be divided, the others do not.

We support the pattern on constituencies as proposed with the Blyth Valley constituency kept intact and including in addition the town of Bedlington, and Hexham and Morpeth constituency, also including Rothbury and Berwick and Ashington constituency.

I would interject at this point just to clarify because this has been an issue of some debate this morning. The wards which are in use in Northumberland at this review are different to the ones which were in place at the last review, which is relevant in that the Commission was unable last time to propose a Berwick and Ashington constituency because of the presence of the very awkwardly shaped ward called Ulgham which entirely surrounded the town of Morpeth and made it impossible to have a constituency with Berwick without Morpeth in it as well, and so that has to be taken into account in terms of the issues which were at play in the last review and similarly also the issues in Ponteland where the Ponteland East division, which was the issue last time, is not the same as the Ponteland East and Stannington division which is in play this time.

We do wish to propose that the Berwick and Ashington constituencies should include the Stakeford division this time, which has strong ties to its neighbour Choppington, which are broken under the initial proposals both part of the Bedlington North parish area, and the effect of that counter-proposal shown in the map there very simple change. Obviously the Stakeford division is one which would move into Berwick and Ashington under that proposal. We note that both constituencies in North Tyneside can remain unchanged and we support the initial proposals, obviously in that case that is consistent with the existing constituency and local authority criteria. We would, though, like to suggest the name North Tyneside might revert to Wallsend,

which was its historic name prior to, I think, 1997, which would distinguish it from that of the local authority.

We note the electorate of Newcastle upon Tyne of 180,183 gives a theoretical entitlement to 2.41 constituencies and with three seats wholly in Northumberland and two in North Tyneside, it is necessary for there to be a seat containing parts of Newcastle and parts of Gateshead. We do also accept that the previous Tyne Bridge constituency, which was in place until 2010, was unpopular in some quarters in that it put together two communities which were distinctive and separate. We believe, however, that any alternative this time, which would require a complete rearrangement of seats in Northumberland, would be much more disruptive overall, so we therefore support the proposed Blaydon constituency, although we do believe that ties are broken between the wards in the west of the City of Newcastle with Westerhope and Woolsington being included in the Newcastle upon Tyne North West constituency and we would therefore seriously consider any alternative arrangements of wards in these two constituencies which better reflected community and other ties.

We support the proposed Newcastle upon Tyne East which retains the current seat intact and adds three other wards to increase its electorate above 71,031.

Turning now to the three Tyne and Wear unitary authorities south of the River Tyne of Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland. We note there are proposed to be five constituencies wholly within these local authority areas and another five which are partly within them and we support the unchanged Sunderland Central constituency. We note that the Gateshead constituency is retained intact and enlarged. We do believe, however, that ties are broken by some of the other changes, including the transfer of Simonside and Rekendyke to the Jarrow constituency, and of Boldon Colliery and Cleadon and East Boldon to South Shields, and we also note in particular that the town of Washington, as has been mentioned, is divided between three different constituencies and we note also that only two of the constituencies in these three local authorities are wholly within one of the local authorities. Parts of Gateshead and Sunderland are also included in four further constituencies with parts of Durham which results in the borough of Gateshead and the City of Sunderland separately containing parts of six constituencies, only one of which, Sunderland Central, is wholly within one council area and one constituency, Jarrow, contains parts of all three local authority areas.

We accept that this is a large conurbation, therefore the ties between communities are complex, any particular area is likely to have ties in more than one direction and also the ward electorates are relatively high which reduces the number of options available, but we would, however, consider any alternative which addressed some of the ties which are broken.

To look at the area of Durham and Darlington, we note that all seven existing seats in Darlington and Durham have successor seats of which they provide the most electors and that therefore there is some continuity in this part of the region. In all of these seats more than 70 per cent of the electors of the existing seat remain in the main successor seat. Two of those seats are retained intact with additional electors to exceed the lower threshold, the 71,031.

We believe, however, that some of the proposals themselves break ties whilst the West Durham and Teesdale constituency is a large diverse seat comprising some sparsely populated areas with limited communications links. However, we accept there may be some merit in combining these similar communities in one seat.

We would argue that the division of the town of Barnard Castle between this constituency and Bishop Auckland is undesirable, it clearly breaks ties and would be confusing to electors, particularly as one of the seats involved includes the name Teesdale. Barnard Castle, as the largest town in Teesdale, should be the focal point of the southern part of the constituency, but instead will be split with the boundary run through its centre. We therefore propose that Barnard Castle East division should be included in the West Durham and Teesdale constituency restoring the ties which are broken within the town and resulting in much more of Teesdale being in that seat. We propose that the Crook division should be included in Bishop Auckland constituency respecting its ties to Willington and Hunwick in the Wear Valley all currently in the North-west Durham constituency.

We also note that Bishop Auckland is under the initial proposals to include Ferryhill which has ties to Chilton and has been part of the Sedgefield constituency since 1983, so we propose therefore that it should be included in the successor to Sedgefield, which is East Durham constituency, and that Bishop Auckland should instead include the Heighington and Conniscliffe ward of Darlington borough, most of whose electors live in Heighington which has strong communications links to Shildon. We would then propose that the Coxhoe division should be retained in the City of Durham and that Esh and Witton Gilbert division, which is currently divided between City of Durham and North-west Durham, should be in the West Durham and Teesdale constituency where the majority of its electors lie currently in north-west Durham, respecting its ties to the Lanchester division, and the map of the counter-proposal is set out there.

We support the proposed North Durham and Chester-le-Street constituency, although we believe that ties are broken by the separation of Lamesley and Birtley and also that the change of name of the constituency, whilst it does recognise the largest town in the seat, may imply that there has been more radical change there than there has.

We also support the Easington and Houghton seat, although we again believe that ties are broken within Sunderland, particularly by the separation of Hetton and the other parts of the Houghton and Sunderland South constituency.

To Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees, we regret the Hartlepool constituency, which has been unchanged for many years, cannot remain coterminous with its borough, but we do support the proposed East Durham seat which includes part of it with the amendments described above, and the Hartlepool and Billingham seat, although again self-evidently ties are broken by the inclusion of the Billingham West ward in the Stockton West constituency. We also note there must be a constituency which comprises parts of Middlesbrough, parts of Stockton-on-Tees and that changes are required to increase the electorates of constituencies in Redcar and Cleveland.

In Stockton-on-Tees, we support the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East

constituency with the amendment that the wards of Norton South and Stockton town centre should be included in Stockton West restoring the ties which would be broken with the Norton South and Norton West wards under the initial proposals, and providing a focal point in the Stockton West constituencies so that the seat which was entirely within the borough would include its town centre and indeed that seat could potentially simply be called Stockton-on-Tees.

We would then include the Yarm ward, which is effectively a self-contained town which lies south of the River Tees, in the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East seat. It is an area which has road access to Ingleby Barwick which neighbours it. We would also make changes to these constituencies by retaining the Middlesbrough wards of Hemlington and Stainton and Thornton, which are south of the A174 ring road, in the Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency which they have been part of since its creation and we would then instead include the Park ward, which has ties to Linthorpe and the centre of Middlesbrough in the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency and would propose that the Eston ward of Redcar and Cleveland should be in Middlesbrough North East and Redcar, all of which changes would reduce the number of electors changing constituency and the map of the changes is set out on the screen.

To conclude, the details of the new constituencies, the ward lists of our counter proposed seats are listed in appendices (a) to (c) at the back. We would be making a detailed written submission which will include the statistics and the mapping of our counter-proposals before 5 December. We obviously reserve our position and will comment on all other proposals that are made by the other political parties and by other individuals and so on during this consultation we will make our comment on that during the secondary consultation period. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you very much. That was very helpful. I will turn now to the audience and ask is there anybody seeking clarification on any points that were raised during that presentation?

MR HINDLE: (Liberal Democrat Party) Just one point with regard to the --

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sorry, could you introduce yourself for the purpose of the record?

MR HINDLE: Yes. Frank Hindle, Liberal Democrat. With regard to the West Durham and Teesdale constituency, you have made a change at the south end of the constituency with regard to Barnard Castle, but the constituency, as you are proposing, as I understand, still stretches from the Tees all the way up to within a mile of the Tyne. Are you supporting that or are you simply offering no counter-proposal?

MR COOK: We are supporting it in the absence of any better proposal at the moment basically. Yes, we are supporting it effectively, certainly as counter proposed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very well. Thank you. Does that complete your point then? Is there anybody else seeking clarification? There does not appear to be any. That would conclude your presentation. Thank you very much

for attending. Thank you.

We will proceed onto the next set of people who are listed to present a submission or raise points here before this hearing and it would be Mr Helmut Izaks, if he is here. Yes. Just to remind you for the purposes of the record, give your name and address, please, before you start.

MR IZAKS: (Sunderland Green Party) Helmut Izaks, number 5 St Mark's Crescent, Sunderland.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MR IZAKS: I am representing Sunderland Green Party. In my presentation I will be concentrating on Sunderland alone.

I reject the proposals from yourselves, the Conservatives and the Labour Party in that they do not take the thorny question of Washington into account. Washington has always been a separate entity and always considered itself to be so. Examples of how much that entity actually goes within the essence of Washington is if you have an organisation called, say, Sunderland Horticultural Society you will only get people from Sunderland appearing, although Washington is in Sunderland City. If you call it Sunderland and Washington Horticultural Society, you then get people from Washington attending. That is how sort of insular Washington are within themselves. Unless Washington is mentioned, they do not want to know. The proposals from the three organisations, I said, do not keep Washington as one entity and it must be kept as one entity because it is such a strong entity in itself.

The proposals from the Liberal Democrats and from ourselves, the Green Party, do include Washington as a whole entity. I would recommend the Green Party one in particular in that when you come into Sunderland within three constituencies it includes the whole of Sunderland borough, plus a couple of wards to add to Washington and Sunderland West in order to make up the numbers. You retain three constituencies within the borough of Sunderland, which is what it is at present, and you keep those communities together.

The proposals from the Labour Party and from yourselves split the Sunderland Borough Council into six different constituencies. Surely it is better to have it in three, and that is it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. I would like to invite any questions seeking clarification on the issues raised there.

In light of that, I will call on the next person listed, Mr Dennis McDonald, please, if you wish to come forward. Once again I know you have made some interactions earlier, but you will have to express your name and address for the purposes of the record. Thanks.

MR McDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. My name is Dennis McDonald, I live at 23 Culbertson Court in Fulwell, Sunderland. I have come here today to support the draft proposals of the Commission set out in the documents of 25 constituencies, each with a quota of between 71,000 and 78,000. I believe,

besides the complexities which have been mentioned this morning, they are an important component part of a Parliamentary democracy which is fair Parliaments, where the vote of each person carries the same weight. The situation at the moment is untenable and I will give you an example of two constituencies within Wales and England, one Torfaen, where you have a constituency of less than 50,000 voters, and the Isle of Wight, where you have a constituency of 110,000 voters. This clearly cannot be allowed to go on. That is all I have to say, Madam.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Would anybody like to raise any issues again for clarification? Okay. Mr Izaks. Please indicate your name for the purposes of the record.

MR IZAKS: Sorry. Helmut Izaks from the Green Party. The proposals set out by the various parties also covers that, so we both cover the same number of figures, we have kept within those figures.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That appears more commentary than clarification. Would that be right? Yes. Is there anybody else who wishes to seek clarification? No. In light of that, thank you very much, Mr McDonald. We will move onto Mr Blanchflower who is listed to make a presentation. Once again I will remind you to state your name and details for the purposes of the record.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: (North East England Green Party) I am Andy Blanchflower, 15 School Avenue, Gateshead, representing the North East England Green Party.

I would like to thank everyone for their presentations this morning and I would like to offer to work with those who have put alternatives so that between the four political parties here we can bring some united front in because we obviously have some areas where we oppose the initial proposals of the Commission. For example, this Durham upland seat stretching from Bowse to Winlaton and, for example, the Northumberland situation with the proposal as stretching from Morpeth to Allenheads, which would be called Hexham constituency.

I would like you to look at our proposals and we will look at your proposals and we will certainly be looking to see if we can revise our proposals between now and 5 December to improve their community aspect. I just want to state again that we in the Green Party have come to this hearing from the point of view of trying to get the best deal for the residents of the North East, not just for the electors of the North East. Regardless of what might be political advantage, we are looking at the communities.

Please have a look at our proposals. I am not going through all the areas where we disagree with the Commission or where we agree with the Commission, and I am only going to touch on maybe one or two points that maybe were not clarified before. For instance, I would like you to look at our Newcastle upon Tyne North and Cramlington proposed constituency because Cramlington has six wards and we have retained all those in the same constituency.

Cramlington is the only post-war new town in Northumberland, so Cramlington has a different heritage to everywhere else in Northumberland and this is why we think it looks more to the south to Newcastle upon Tyne. I think that when you look in detail

at this constituency, you will see that there is a small margin where the constituency is not geographically on the ground linked, the two parts of it.

I would really like clarification, legal clarification, from the Commission. Firstly, is this permitted by law before I go any further?

MR HARTLEY: Could you explain again what the area in the question is?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Yes. We have the six wards of Cramlington.

MR HARTLEY: Yes. Shall I put it up on the screen?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: We have linked this to seven wards in the north and west of Newcastle. There is a little area - and I am not used to using this.

MR HARTLEY: That is all right. What we do need to do is capture what you are saying for the transcript, so you must stay near the microphone.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: All right. This area here.

MR HARTLEY: Sorry, sir, if you could move back to the microphone so we can get it for the transcript.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: This area here is maybe a few hundred yards just what is known as Seaton Burn junction, Seaton Burn roundabout. The junction of the A19 at its northern most point and the A1, and there are possibly a few hundred yards which separates the constituency into two parts. You have these Cramlington wards and then we have the Dinnington, Parklands, Woolsington, et cetera, wards there and the small gap, and we strongly believe that Cramlington has more traditional affinity and more travel to work with Newcastle than with, for instance, Blyth Valley, which is the other side of the A189 anyway, and this traditional more rural area of Stannington and Ponteland. We just do not know if this is permitted under the Act.

MR HARTLEY: I think I understand your question. Your counter-proposal is you are asking me, because you would have to go outside the constituency for a few hundred yards, whether that is legally permissible. Is that right?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Yes.

MR HARTLEY: Yes, it is.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Right.

MR HARTLEY: There is nothing legal to stop it, although obviously we would have to look at the arguments that you have sent into us about whether that was practical.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Have you anything further you would like to add, or does that complete it?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: There is just one more point at this stage.

We propose a Tyne Bridge constituency in our handouts which is similar to the Tyne Bridge constituency that used to exist. We prefer that Tyne Bridge constituency to any other cross Tyne proposals between Newcastle and Gateshead because that is inner Tyneside where there were more cross-river links, there are three railway lines in the Tyneside, three roads, one pedestrian cycling bridge and this is the traditional area of Newcastle, Gateshead, that used to look to the river for its trade and transport. That is all I have to say. I am happy to answer any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. In light of that, would anybody like to seek some points for clarification? For the purposes of the record, state your name please.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much. Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. What you are saying is your Newcastle upon Tyne North and Cramlington seat is effectively two detached parts with no link between the two?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Well, the small linked area between the two is just a massive road interchange and a little bit of farmland and I do not know how many acres it covers, but it is not hundreds of acres.

MR PRATT: Okay. Effectively, it is two detached parts which I think I would be right in saying is not against the law, but it is not within the normal policy guidelines.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Is there anybody else who seeks clarification? Okay. Thank you very much for that.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In light of those presentations being completed, could I just clarify myself, are there any representatives from UKIP present this morning that wish to come forward and make any submissions? No, there does not appear to be. Okay. Thank you.

I have an update here in terms of the listings. It appears that a Tom Forrester is present and may be happy and might be suitable for him to make a presentation at this stage. Eileen Armstrong? Would that be yourself? Would you like to come forward, would it suit you? Take your time, relax. I am sure you are already aware, but you do have to state your name and details for the purposes of the record.

CLLR ARMSTRONG: (Ponteland East and Stannington) Thank you. My name is Eileen Armstrong I live at Hill Crest, Prestwick Village, Ponteland. I am a resident of Ponteland and the county councillor for Ponteland East. I am the county councillor for Ponteland East and Stannington.

I would firstly like to thank the Boundary Commission for the opportunity to speak. Although I understand and appreciate the difficulty in developing an efficient way to equalise the number of votes needed for parliamentary constituencies, I would like to express my concerns over the proposed changes to the borders of my own constituency, Ponteland East and Stannington as this stands to be an area that

would be removed from the Hexham constituency and placed under the new proposed Newcastle upon Tyne North West constituency.

Ponteland East, together with Stannington and Walton, has a total shared boundary length of 42.7 miles. Out of those miles, 32.4 border with Northumberland. That is three times more than the 10.3 miles bordering with Newcastle leaving many residents vastly removed from the area of Newcastle. The proposed new Parliamentary boundary line would split the town of Ponteland taking with it a strong sense of community spirit from residents as the majority of Ponteland residents would remain in the Hexham constituency with a Northumberland MP, leaving Ponteland East with a reality that neighbouring properties, principally in Eastern Way and Edge Hill, would be managed under a Newcastle MP. That in itself breaks local ties.

Conflicting views between MPs could possibly cause difficulties on neighbouring streets as any Newcastle MP would be challenged to accommodate and satisfy the needs of both urban and rural areas. What is needed is one MP for one area and not set Ponteland East and Stannington apart which are essentially rural areas much in common with Northumberland and not that of urban Newcastle. Furthermore, schools within Ponteland East constituency complicate matters, especially as there will be two members of Parliament involved in any possible school issues and as MPs are predominantly political, this in itself risks party politics being brought to the playground.

Residents of Ponteland East and Stannington living in the rural areas are not offered the same advantages of Newcastle residents. They have less public transport choice, less frequent and more expensive resulting in those residing in the rural areas disadvantaged as they may struggle to reach their Member of Parliament. That is if they are based in a new Newcastle upon Tyne North West constituency.

The Metro line, for example, ends at Newcastle airport whereas it runs the length of Newcastle and reaches into Sunderland. The links to Hexham are far more accommodating in terms of travel time and expense. I see here that the priorities for constituents would lie with those already in Newcastle and this jeopardises residents' needs being addressed. If Ponteland East and Stannington are to be added to what is a predominantly urban area of Newcastle, as opposed to where they belong, sharing the same concerns, issues, as that of rural Northumberland, therefore I would strongly suggest leaving Longhorsley and Rothbury within the Berwick constituency and Ponteland East with Stannington where they belong with Hexham would be a way forward and a step in the right direction to maintain local ties.

Again I thank you for the opportunity you have given me to voice my concerns.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That was a very good presentation. If you would remain there for a moment in case somebody wishes to seek any clarifications on that very useful presentation you made.

MS ARMSTRONG: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would anybody like to raise any issues for clarification? Yes. Would you state your name again for the record.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Andy Blanchflower, North East Green Party. We agree with your proposal. We have made particular effort to create a constituency that is called Tynedale with Ponteland and that includes all the four Ponteland wards, Ponteland North, Ponteland South with Hetton, Ponteland West and Ponteland East and Stannington, and we propose that name because Ponteland has four wards and a hinterland and then allows for its different identity from what is presently called Hexham constituency to be taken into account, We realise at the minute that it is not liked, I believe, by yourselves and fellow residents that the constituency is probably called Hexham at the minute.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Well it appears that is more of a recap of your presentation already.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The taking of the issues that you have raised and your presentation will take place after the conclusion. Unless there is something you wish to reply to that, it does appear to be just a recapping of what the Green Party are proposing.

CLLR ARMSTRONG: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In light of that, is there anything else or anybody else looking to seek clarification issues? No, that appears to be it. Thank you very much again.

CLLR ARMSTRONG: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Has Mr Forrester returned? No. Bear with us for a moment, please.

We will have a break in the proceedings and we will return at 1 pm for the next listed speaker. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 1.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon. We will resume the presentations before us today and I would like to call, if he is here, Mr Tom Forrester. Is Tom Forrester present? Peter Jackson, are you prepared to come forward to keep the list moving? That would be very helpful. For the purposes of the record, explain your name again and your address details.

CLLR JACKSON: Right. Thank you. Yes. I am Councillor Peter Jackson, I am a councillor for Ponteland South with Heddon, and I am also leader of the main opposition group on Northumberland County Council.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Very well. Thank you. Would you like to proceed to make some form of presentation?

CLLR JACKSON: Yes, thank you. I have read the Boundary Commission's proposals in some detail and I come at it with three particular criteria that I am applying to my comments that I am about to make.

The first one is I actually do feel quite strongly that any proposals should adhere to local authority boundaries wherever possible. I think from my experience at the county council, with all the authorities around here being unitary authorities, that link between the unitary authorities - and its own particular MPs - is actually quite a strong one and we do rely as communities for our MPs to represent us in London. For example, in the Berwick constituency the broadband issues are a major problem there and our local MP does represent that particular view for her community.

The second aspect of it is that I do actually strongly believe that each particular constituency should have a recognisable community of interest and we should have an MP who is actually chosen to represent the whole community and I think there is a bit of a worry in some of the proposals that peripheral wards are being added on just to make the numbers up, so that makes it less of a recognisable community for that particular MP to represent.

Then the third aspect of it is wherever possible I think we should not split communities and that comes from my experience as a Ponteland councillor and I think you have already heard that the current proposal is to split Ponteland East and Stannington off and add it into Newcastle and I think that is a particularly bad idea for the community that I represent and it has been widely talked about within our community as being something that is a worry for that community and we would like that to be addressed, if possible.

I do have a few specific points about the proposals. The first one is actually expanding on that issue about the Ponteland area. It is a major service centre in south Northumberland and it does serve a wider area and that particular community certainly does not want two MPs. We do not either wish to be tagged onto Newcastle city because there is no affinity at all between the people who live in Ponteland and the people who live in Newcastle city. We do feel as though we are Northumbrians and we want to stay that way. There is a force or fear that if one or more parts of Ponteland gets tagged onto Newcastle city and end up being represented by a Newcastle-based MP, that we will be just a peripheral interest for that MP and we will not actually get their full attention and service and I think there is a worry about that.

Just moving on, I would like to move onto some comments about the proposed Berwick constituency and from someone who has lived in Northumberland all his life and been involved in local politics all of my life for the last 20 or 30 years, I think there is a real community of interest between the market towns up and down the A1 so you get Berwick in the north and then Alnwick and then Morpeth, and if those areas could be combined into a single constituency, I think that would make a lot of sense because there is a recognisable community in north Northumberland. They have issues of rurality because they are all market towns serving a wide area. I have talked about the issues with broadband and lack of it in that area. There is a lot of hidden deprivation in smaller communities in that area and quite a degree of fuel poverty actually that you do not get in another parts of Northumberland.

There are some sort of defined school catchment areas around those market towns and I would not want to split them up either. Again I will just re-emphasise that those market towns actually serve a big rural hinterland and those areas, like Rothbury, actually look to those market towns and I would like to find some way of keeping them all together.

The next constituency that has been proposed so far is actually a Hexham, Ponteland and Cramlington constituency. Again, I think there was a defined recognisable community of interest there, particularly in terms of the labour market because those areas actually supply quite a number of commuters to Newcastle and they live on the northern and western edges of Newcastle and I think they sort of feel that identity with that. And also they have all of the transport and congestion issues that you get with the commuters' society and I think they feel as though they would be much happier being represented by one MP with all those issues.

Then finally I cannot quite understand the proposal to split Ashington from Blyth. They are areas in need of major regeneration and some of that is happening, but the issue would happen even more to create more employment there. They have the highest unemployment rates of any other part of Northumberland. There is also a distinct particular housing need in that area.

Finally, Ashington and Blyth are about to be joined up by the Ashington-Blyth Tyne line which is a sort of a major regeneration initiative which will actually link positively with transport those two particular towns. They have already got the A19 which they call the spine road. I do think that it makes a lot of sense to actually have the three constituencies in Northumberland based the way that I have just described. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that, Mr Jackson. Would anybody from the audience like to raise any issues for clarification purposes only? It does not appear so. In light of that, thank you very much for that helpful presentation.

Would Mr Lovering like to come forward if he is present?

MR LOVERING: Hello, my name is Peter Lovering, I am a member of the public from Longhirst village near Morpeth in Northumberland. I also run a business from there as well.

I was pleased when I saw the Boundary Commission changes initially because it is good to see that Morpeth and Longhirst have been moved to a rural constituency with the same sort of problems and shared culture that they have with the rural areas, whereas it has been with Ashington, which is one of the most deprived areas in the country, and probably following on from Councillor Jackson's point, so it has different problems to Longhirst and Morpeth. Longhirst itself would be better either in West Northumberland or the Berwick and Morpeth constituency.

I also agree, for the same reason, that the southern boundary of the Berwick constituency should remain about where it is because of the same problem with cultural differences between Ashington and north Northumberland. I know there is the problem that Ashington is such a dense area with a high level of population and

that could actually take away the focus and skew the representations of the area that is being represented, which is what we found with the current setup with us being linked to Ashington, our views never generally really get heard about. Broadband is an issue that was mentioned. We have a broadband issue in the village, but we are not able to progress it because we have not had the support that perhaps we would have had if we had been in a rural area.

I think also that you need to recognise, besides the constituency boundaries, there is a local authority plan in place called the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan which has recently been approved by the Northumberland County Council and it includes plans for Morpeth and the surrounding villages. Longhirst was not included in that plan, although it should have been, but it is key, I think, to keep that area with those villages and the surrounding area of Morpeth together in line with the plan because that helps the planning issues. If there is a problem with planning, which there is at the moment, then it is easier for one MP to deal with that rather than split it across two.

The other point is about transport corridors. We do not have very many in Northumberland and two of the important ones is the A1 and also the East Coast Mainline and I notice the boundary between east and west Northumberland actually zig-zags across both at one point or another. From the rail point of view, the link between Morpeth and Berwick is important because in the future it may well be that rail services could be extended up to Berwick. That is an issue that the county has in terms of providing adequate transport, so perhaps bringing Morpeth into the Berwick constituency would be better, then that would cover the A1, which is currently or will be going through improvements to dual it in the future, and again having one MP responsible for the A1 and for the East Coast Mainline between Morpeth and Berwick would be ideal really.

I agree with Councillor Jackson's point about linking the market towns. Morpeth is a market town, Alnwick is a market town, Berwick is a market town, totally different situation to Ashington and some of the other areas. I do not mind whether Longhirst is in either of the rural constituencies, west Northumberland or Berwick and Morpeth, but my preference would be to be in the Berwick and Morpeth constituency for the reasons I have already stated. That is all I have.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. I would like to ask if there is anybody who would like to seek clarification on any of the issues raised. Okay. State your name, please.

MR PRATT: Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. Am I right in saying that Longhirst is in the Pegswood ward?

MR LOVERING: Yes, it is. Yes, under Alan Sambrook at the moment. He is the councillor.

MR PRATT: Okay.

MR LOVERING: Ian Lavery is the Member of Parliament because the current boundary for the Parliamentary constituency is about a mile outside of the village to the north between Longhirst and Ulgham.

MR PRATT: Okay. What you are saying is that Pegswood, Morpeth and presumably Longhorsley could go either way, but your preferred option would be that they would be with Berwick and Alnwick?

MR LOVERING: Yes. And also because of the transport corridor issues, it all makes more sense to me with somebody dealing with those sorts of problems from a management point of view really more than anything.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you for that. Is there anybody else seeking to put any points for clarification? No. No, we have not. Thank you very much for that presentation.

MR LOVERING: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: At this juncture I wish to ask is there anybody present who wishes to come forward and make a presentation who has not registered already? In light of that then we will take a short break to 1.30 when the next person is listed to present. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 1.30 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are resuming the hearings here and in light of that, if we could have some quiet, please, could I call the next presenter which would be Sharon Hodgson, please Thank you very much. I appreciate your arriving. Could you indicate your name and details and representations for the purposes of the record, please?

MRS HODGSON: (MP for Washington and Sunderland West) Yes, it is Sharon Hodgson MP for Washington and Sunderland West.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do you want to proceed?

MRS HODGSON: Good afternoon. Thank you so much for seeing me and for squeezing me in because I have to try and get down to Parliament and be in two places at the same time, so I was really grateful.

To be honest, the boundary proposals I awaited with bated breath, like everybody else, but my starting position was that I was always, when I actually saw them, was a very personal one from my point of view "Oh no, what, not again? How can this be happening in the same area and the same part again?" because I had all this ten years ago and my seat disappeared when the Tyne Bridge and the Gateshead East and Washington West merged and I had to then go through the whole battle, which I know is not pertinent to this and to what you have to do, but from a personal point of view I have to be honest that was where my initial reaction was because I then had to do a run-off against an MP and then a follow-up and selection. But I survived, so I am here, which is great.

My question initially to the Boundary Commission was do you not take that into

consideration, the fairness and disruption of it all, or is there lightning striking twice, or maybe more than twice in the same part of a region every time or, in this case, at the very least twice in a row?

Also, incidentally, if I was lucky enough to secure a seat next time round, I would have had three different Parliamentary seats in four terms of office and I do not quite know if that is a record, I know lots of MPs, sometimes due to boundary issues, might have in their career have had two different seats, but I would have had three in four terms consecutively.

More importantly, after my initial gut reaction, I really think that looking at the numbers in Sunderland compared to, say, south Tyneside and Gateshead, that the seat we lose south of the Tyne should not be in Sunderland.

I have come up with a solution, I have three options. Option one is very radical, I know, but I think it is something I just wanted to put out there, something the Boundary Commission could have considered as a way of carving up this area and ensuring that lightning was not striking in exactly the same spot twice. This proposal, option one, comes under the comprehensive proposal category and it also takes all four of the necessary criteria. There would be a knock-on effect into Durham that I did not cover in detail, but I am sure that these could be addressed in any changes being considered in that part of the region.

Sunderland, by my calculation, is just two wards short of three seats, something like 2.8, but I am not a mathematician so you guys are the ones who would be able to check that better. Whereas south Tyneside again and Gateshead, from my calculations, comes to circa 1.5 seats or thereabouts each. South Tyneside and Gateshead together comes to roughly enough electors for three full seats with some left over to then make up the short fall in Sunderland, the borough of Sunderland, to have three full seats. Any reduction of seats should therefore fall, in my opinion, within those two areas of Gateshead and south Tyneside not, rather, Sunderland and would result in Sunderland retaining three seats rather than going from three seats to two seats.

Also the current boundary proposals would split Sunderland's three seats, current three seats, into parts of six seats and when you bear in mind Sunderland Central is one of the four seats in the region that is untouched, it basically shows you the extent of the carve-up of the other two that we go from three seats to six in total.

Also Washington would then be split from currently being as a town in one constituency, it would be split across three constituencies, which after being split but named in two when I was first elected in 2005, it was then unified into one seat in the boundary changes of 2010 and the residents were thrilled about it, and I could show you so much evidence of the reaction when people were coming together into one constituency and the difference that made to cohesion of the town of Washington. But it would now be split into three seats and it would not be named in any of those three seats or recognised in the constituency title, something that the folk of Washington will not take very kindly to at all.

With all this in mind I have played around with how I think the Boundary Commission could have tackled this situation. Again not touching Sunderland Central and

keeping Sunderland with three seats and, importantly for me and my constituents, keeping Washington intact and going back to a version of my original seat, which is a Washington and Gateshead East-type seat.

I have also come up with proposals for the adjoining seats in Sunderland, Gateshead and South Tyneside that keeps them all within the plus or minus five per cent whilst making the reduction of seats fall within Gateshead and South Tyneside which I believe the numbers would dictate that this is where the reduction should fall. I have attached a copy of my proposal on the excel sheets enclosed that you should have and I have also made the submission online as well as a map of the new proposed Washington and Gateshead South East constituency as I would propose it would be called. That is option one.

I am also supportive of the proposal by Dave Anderson in Blaydon CLP, which I am calling option two, with regard to the Washington West ward as again, like my option one proposal, this would reduce the number of splits for both Washington and Sunderland down to two and five respectively.

Option two, therefore, would transfer the Washington West ward from the proposed Gateshead constituency into the proposed Sunderland West constituency. The transfer of the Birtley ward from the proposed Sunderland West constituency into North Durham and Chester-le-Street and I know divisions in the current proposals set out by the Boundary Commission there is none across the country, but I am working on the assumption that when you come to try and compromise and find agreement across the county, maybe across the country, you may have to take into consideration split wards, so this would propose dividing the Lamesley ward as I have outlined.

The above proposal would greatly improve the local ties situation across the three proposed constituencies particularly in respect of not dividing the town of Birtley, reducing the division of the town of Washington and also it would reduce the number of constituencies at Gateshead, and Sunderland would cover across their boundaries from five each to six each.

Moving onto option three, my last option, that would involve moving Washington West from the new Gateshead constituency into the new Jarrow constituency and then also recognising the name of Sunderland in the new Jarrow constituency by renaming it something like Jarrow and Sunderland North or similar. It still does not rectify Washington not being in the name, although it would split Washington into two rather than three. Then also, to rectify the numbers in Gateshead, you would have to move Wardley and Leam Lane from Jarrow into Gateshead. This would have the effect that the town of Washington is split in half rather than into three. The new Jarrow seat covers two local authority areas at the moment, it would cover Sunderland and South Tyneside in the new seat rather than three under your proposals, which are Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead.

The new Gateshead seat is exclusively within the borough of Gateshead. The City of Sunderland is split across one fewer Parliamentary constituencies, five instead of six. I have represented Washington West continuously since I have been an MP in 2005, so the continuation with that ward would, depending on whether I secured one of the new seats, of course, there are no knock-on effects for other constituencies

that I can discern and the numbers are within range and this is a very localised and self-contained proposal.

Finally, although the best option for the people of Washington would be one that kept the whole of Washington together is one inside a new redrawn constituency, I recognise there are other options and you might indeed have some yourselves when you look at this all again. This keeping Washington together is certainly something that residents and the community groups in Washington, who I have met with already and spoken to about this, the Rotary Club for one are wanting to make representations. I do not know if they have already. I have already had many letters, emails and phone calls on this from concerned Washington residents and when you think this is still quite a niche issue and not out there much in the public domain, I certainly have not done any press or a call in the media for any support yet, because I think I do not want to sort of scare people unnecessarily because these are just proposals, so I hope the Boundary Commission will consider my alternative proposals and maybe find a better solution themselves, certainly for the town of Washington and the City of Sunderland. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that very useful submission. Would there be anyone present who wishes to seek clarification only on the issues that have been raised?

MR PRATT: Thank you very much indeed. Roger Pratt. I am slightly at a disadvantage because obviously I have not seen your option one, your option two and your option three, but if I get it right, your option one is a radical solution.

MRS HODGSON: Yes.

MR PRATT: Is it all worked out?

MRS HODGSON: Yes, in terms of the numbers.

MR PRATT: With all the knock-ons?

MRS HODGSON: Yes. Apart from, as I said, a small knock-on into Durham, just a very small knock-on that I have not worked that all out, but I figured they would easily be rectified. It was very small. I do not have the detail in front of me now, but the major changes were within Tyne and Wear and I think there was just the small, it is probably Lamesley, if I remember rightly, and Hetton because Hetton goes into Durham and I think some of the Lamesley goes into one of the Durham seats, so it might just be that, but it sort of rectifies it and keeps all of Tyne and Wear within Tyne and Wear, I think there might be a small bit that would still go from -- anyway it is all there and it has all been submitted.

MR PRATT: Okay. Your option two relies on ward splitting. Is that right?

MRS HODGSON: Yes, in Lamesley, which I know there is no ward splitting currently anywhere in the country, from what I am aware, although in the guidance from the Boundary Commission that could be an option that could be considered, so I am thinking probably in meetings like this around the country there might be lots of people putting forward proposals for splitting wards that, although are not currently

anywhere on the current proposals anywhere in the country, might have to be considered in order to get compromise and sign-off across the country.

MR PRATT: Your option three is much less radical.

MRS HODGSON: Yes.

MR PRATT: It is contained. That is all worked out?

MRS HODGSON: Yes.

MR PRATT: There is no ward splitting in option three?

MRS HODGSON: No.

MR PRATT: Okay. Fine. I do not know whether the secretary of the Commission might be able to supply us with details of what you have sent so we can have a look at it. Thank you very much indeed.

MRS HODGSON: Thank you.

MR MCDONALD: My name is Dennis McDonald, I am from Fulwell in Sunderland. I have a great deal of sympathy with the opening remarks because actually since the 1994 Boundary Commission this will be the third time this seat has changed hands and changed names from what was originally Houghton, the seat, and represented between 2005 and 2010, and obviously the seat you represent now.

Unfortunately, given its semi-detached nature geographically from the City of Sunderland and its proximity to the Gateshead constituencies, whatever the Commission may say, Washington was always going to be part of any distribution argument in terms of equalising the constituencies. Sadly - and I agree with you, it is sad for Washington constituents - they seem to have no near certainty in where they belong. Unfortunately, it is one of the prices we have to pay for equalising constituencies.

MRS HODGSON: Yes. It does seem rather unfair though that Washington is always, how should I put this, used as the cash cow, if you like, to fill the gaps everywhere else and when we came together as one, we hoped that that may be the end of being used to fill the gaps, if you like. That is up to the Boundary Commission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Is anybody else seeking further points of clarification more than commentary at this stage?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Andy Blanchflower, North East England Green Party. It is nice to see you again, Sharon, on a personal note as a friend of over 30 years, but we are here on business, so I will get down to that.

Do any of your three options keep all the five Washington wards in the same constituency?

MRS HODGSON: Yes, option one.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Right. The Green Party option does that as well.

MRS HODGSON: Excellent. Very good. There are two options that will keep Washington together. Very good. Thank you, Andy.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that observation. Is there anybody else who wishes to raise an issue of clarification?

MR HINDLE: Thank you. Frank Hindle, Liberal Democrat. We are also proposing Washington wards be kept together, but the question for clarification is which, in your option one, were the Gateshead wards you are putting with Washington, please?

MRS HODGSON: The Gateshead wards that go in with Washington? Right. Washington and Gateshead South-east would come to 75,261 and it would be High Fell, Windy Nook and White Hill, Lamesley, Birtley and then the five Washington wards, and then Chowdene. Sorry, I have not done this in the right order. It would be High Fell, Windy Nook and White Hill, Lamesley, Birtley and the Chowdene, which on a map makes a very tidy, I think on the map that I have submitted, if you can have that, makes a very tidy (off microphone).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, indeed, I should have reminded you.

MRS HODGSON: I am ever so sorry. Yes, I am holding up the mic and it makes a tidy, sensible constituency with no sort of odd going off to any, you know, strange little dog legs or anything like that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The information that has been relayed there has been presented into the hearing, so it should be available to yourself as well. It has been itemised in a table. Anybody else wishing to seek any additional clarifications? Okay. In light of that, thank you very much for that presentation.

MRS HODGSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It has been very helpful today. Thank you.

MRS HODGSON: Thank you very much and good luck with your deliberations. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are now going to have a break for lunch until 2.30 and we will resume the hearings then.

After the luncheon adjournment

Time Noted: 2 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, everybody. You are very welcome this afternoon to the resumption of the hearings into the Boundary

Commissions proposed Parliamentary boundary changes. I will do a brief resume on the introduction that was carried out this morning by myself.

My name is Eileen Brady and I am the lead chair independently appointed alongside my fellow Assistant Commissioner Adele Bomgard. Together we will be hearing the views expressed, assess the information and potentially making recommendations. That is our role in the process today and tomorrow. Then we will resume the hearings in Darlington later on in the week.

In light of that, we have completed this morning's listing satisfactorily and now we are moving onto the afternoon sessions. In light of that, we will proceed to call Anne-Marie Trevelyan. I must also point out at this stage that we are being recorded for the purposes of the record and highlight that you must speak your name into the record and your address, please.

MRS TREVELYAN: (MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed) Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I am Anne-Marie Trevelyan, I am the MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed and my address for the purposes of this is the House of Commons.

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my views on these initial boundary proposals for my constituency of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

I have received a very large number of messages from constituents which I will try and summarise in my ten minutes. There are some key concerns that the initial proposals are creating a large and unwieldy set of communities where rural and urban communities are trying to be spliced together in a way that does not make sense to those living in those communities. Rural Northumberland towns, villages and hamlets can often feel isolated anyway from the wider North East, but they work well within the constituency in that they have similar characteristics. The initial Boundary Commission proposals split those communities apart and leave groups together which have little or no connection in terms of community cohesion. The proposals also would mean that some of the communities would be separated from the services that they presently rely on, areas with vastly different and competing needs would require very different priorities from whoever the Member of Parliament was for the proposed Berwick and Ashington seat which the Commission has put forward.

There were three parts to this draft proposal that I would just highlight in terms of the illogicality of the split being proposed. One is the removal of the Longhorsley division from the present Berwick constituency to the Hexham one. Longhorsley is quite a large, rural division and it looks to Morpeth for its schools, for its transport for its shops and for jobs. The rural parts of Longhorsley are small agricultural holdings for whom relationships work across the existing constituency with livestock being taken to Acklington Mart, for instance. The Longhorsley division also has the river Font running through it. Now the river Font runs through the valley and to Morpeth out to sea and all the agricultural frameworks that live in that valley are predicated in that Longhorsley-Morpeth line.

Looking at the question of taking the Rothbury division out of the existing Berwick seat and again attaching that to Hexham, Rothbury looks east. Rothbury is obviously the main village within the whole division, but it is a large, large number of

very small villages that run up the Coquet Valley and north of it. All of these small villages share some very similar issues, poor broadband, very small rural schools, patchy at best transport links, lots of complications with school transport and access to medical facilities. The Coquet Valley is one of the most rural and isolated communities in England. Again, if you look at the geography of that whole community, the river Coquet and the valley runs from the Scottish border in the west running out through the valley to Amble and out to sea on the North East coast. It has very, very little to do with Hexham, there are no major road links of any description from the Rothbury division south towards Hexham. It is a community that looks entirely towards Alnwick for its schools and for its shops and transport systems. We have one bus service which takes communities to Alnwick. It is a very isolated patch and it only looks east-west.

Conversely, as part of the increase in Berwick's numbers, the Commission has proposed to add the town of Ashington to the existing seat, but this has little in common with those rural communities that I have mentioned and Berwick and Ashington are over 50 miles apart and a 90-minute drive away. Ashington is an urban centre with a fine coal mining heritage and a new and developing identity as an industrial centre for new business, but it is focussed towards Tyne and Wear and commuting territory. There is a new rail link going in, it is not agricultural, it does not have that flexibility and the links between Ashington and Berwick are non-existent. This is a very strange combination of towns which makes no sense to the communities who are in both of those and they have raised that with me extensively.

I think beyond Northumberland the proposals as they stand at the moment mean that natural communities and even in one case a housing estate where the proposal is to put Denton ward into Blaydon have split different constituencies and it is my contention there is just no need to extend the Northumberland seats outwith the county boundary. I believe that we can do it within the existing local authority and county boundary that exists at the moment.

The Commission has stated that you have tried to retain existing constituencies where possible and I would propose that if it was possible to return to the present constituency boundary of Berwick-upon-Tweed and then add to it rather than breaking it up first to take the existing one and to add Morpeth town and the proposal of Bothal and Choppington which are, if you like, suburbs of Morpeth, together because then we would have three county towns working together. Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth county towns would fit as ancient rural towns with those satellite villages that feed into each of those communities. We would reunite those rural communities and their services which would then make much more sense to those living in them.

The key arterial road which runs through Northumberland, the A1, is due north-south, it goes from Morpeth through Alnwick and up to Berwick, and the satellite villages feed in and out of it including those from Rothbury and from Longhorsley.

I think putting Ashington and Blyth together would make much more sense. They are two like-minded communities, similar needs, similar focus, linked with similar transport. School relationships work between those two towns and they have little in common with north Northumberland, that most rural part of England.

Under the proposal I would suggest that Hexham gains Cramlington, rather than Rothbury and Longhorsley, and reunites Ponteland East. We would then see Northumberland having three natural constituencies comprised of like-minded communities that use the same services together and we would not be crossing outside the county boundary.

In terms of the numbers, which I know is very important in this particular review, my proposal would give Northumberland three constituencies, Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth, which would have 77,098 constituents. Hexham and Cramlington, 77,480, and an Ashington and Blyth constituency with 77,870. This would work within the local government boundary, it would not cross into Tyne and Wear and it would ensure that rural north Northumberland was kept together, rural west Northumberland and the River Tyne's developing industries through to Cramlington work together as a cohesive whole and that the Ashington and Blyth south-east urban centre of Northumberland was able to work as one single unit. I present that and hope that that may be considered.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That was a very useful presentation. Could I now invite any members of the audience who wish to seek clarification only on the points that have been presented? Any takers? It does not appear that anybody requires any further clarification at the moment, so in light of that, thank you very much.

MRS TREVELYAN: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That completes that. We can then move onto the next presenter, which would be Mr David Rixon, if he is present. Would you, for the purposes of the record, state your name and address, please?

MR RIXON: Okay. My name is David Rixon and I live at 21 Newton-on-the-Moor, Morpeth, Northumberland. I wish to speak about the proposal for the new Berwick and Ashington constituency. Unlike the previous speaker, I will concentrate on that constituency and leave the Commission to think out other areas.

In 2013, you made a proposal for a new constituency of Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth and that was perfection because it put together the three market towns together with the rural areas in north Northumberland. The latest suggestion of the constituency of Berwick and Ashington is totally alien to the geographical and the interests of the population, pushing together a mainly rural area with an urban environment.

Considering the rural aspect first, the new proposal omits lands to the west of the present constituency with major areas like Rothbury and the Longhorsley division being placed in the Hexham constituency. Geographically and socially this goes against historic links. Communications run to Alnwick and Morpeth. Bus services run to Morpeth. Secondary education is provided in the two market towns. The population and trade flow to the A1.

If you look at a map you will see there are very poor road links to Hexham with the main road south often closed during the winter as a result of snow and ice. There

was once a rail link that was proposed by the Wansbeck Railway Company and finally operated by London North-Eastern Railways, but this was closed, first of all, in 1952 to passengers because of the lack of passengers and finally, in November 1963, not because of Lord Beeching, but because of the lack of passengers and freight.

The Ashington area has a completely different profile. Once described as the largest mining village in the world, it has problems which are totally incompatible with the rural areas. I worked in Ashington for more than 20 years when it was a thriving mining area, but the pits closed down and its largest manufacturer, ALCAN, stopped trading in 2012.

The area has desperately been trying to gain a new identity and the present MP has had his time fully occupied trying to help the town. I was a councillor with Alnwick District Council in 2007, we were told that the government had decided to make Northumberland a unitary authority. The district council spent most time and money trying to persuade the government to allow a two council solution; one for the urban and south-west and one for the rural areas, but this was rejected. The new council established in May 2008 and since that time the rural areas have dramatically declined. Public transport has had swingeing cuts with the majority of villages completely cut off from the bus network. Even the town is limited, the last buses leaving Newcastle at 9 pm, so preventing people going to the theatre and concerts unless they have their own transport.

As a result of the poor infrastructure, the market towns are finding fewer people shopping and visiting and are being badly affected. As a result, many are relying on internet shopping to fill the gap leading to an increase in delivery vehicles using the roads which are riddled with potholes and in many cases impassable.

The elderly, unless they have access to private transport or can afford taxis, costing up to £67 for the largest hospital from our area, are unable to visit their doctors or hospitals for medical attention. Superfast broadband, which has been suggested as a solution, is still very patchy in the villages and the farming areas.

Ashington is a different story. Since 2008, £125 million has been spent or committed to build a new leisure centre and relocating County Hall. There are regular bus services to Newcastle now the destinations to the south-east. Talks are in progress to reopen a rail link from Newbiggin and Ashington to Newcastle at an estimated cost of £100 million. Superfast broadband, needless to say, has been available for many years.

Why is this important when considering the new constituency? I feel it shows the completely different demands of the two areas. Both have large problems, but demand different solutions. A large amount of attention has been given to the urban areas by the unitary council while the rural areas have been starved of funding. The problems are completely different and are conflicting. You hear people in Ashington saying "The rural areas are loaded with money having large houses", even though there are more farmed cottages and substandard housing than anywhere else, and "everybody runs around in 4x4 vehicles". I would suggest these essential if you work on farms and drive on rural roads. For the record, I drive a Suzuki Alto.

Deprivation and poverty is acute in the countryside, many elderly people are lonely and have no way of contacting their family or friends. There are still places in rural Northumberland without electricity or water supply.

The demands of both Berwick and Ashington are completely different. Over the past 12 months many people in the north of the county have been trying to raise a petition to the government to establish once again two unitary authorities; one for the urban, one for the rural, because they feel their areas are being ignored.

Please do not add to the problem by establishing this on a natural marriage of two competing areas. I am sure you would not bring Newcastle and Sunderland together. The recent failed combined authorities prove this is impossible, so please abandon your attempts at bringing Berwick and Ashington together and revert to your original excellent idea of the three market town solution and establish the Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth constituencies. Thank you for your time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. I will now turn to the audience and see if there is anybody wishing to raise any points for clarification arising from that presentation. It seems that no one is seeking any clarification, so in light of that, thank you again, that completes your presentation.

MR RIXON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will now turn to Tom Forrester, if he is present. I will remind you as well that for the purposes of the record, state your name and address clearly. Thank you.

CLLR FORRESTER: My name is Tom Forrester. I live at 33 Church Street, Berwick-upon-Tweed, and I am grateful to the Commission for allowing me the opportunity to speak today.

I sit as a town councillor on Berwick Town Council and I am speaking in a personal and as an individual councillor representing the views of the residents within my ward who have approached me concerning the Commission's proposed recommendations. It would be a fair comment to say that the Commission's recommendations took everyone's breath away in Berwick when they were announced. It was without doubt completely unexpected.

Berwick is an ancient market town whose history is well documented in the conflicts between England and Scotland. Our mayor is the third senior mayor in all of England, after London and Europe. Ashington is a large industrial town whose proud history has revolved around coal mining and heavy industry. Neither town has anything in common.

Berwick already feels under threat by the actions of the unitary authority where local investment in Berwick is in single digit millions, yet investment in Ashington is almost ten times that. Berwick's natural affiliation is with Alnwick and Morpeth who, as rural market towns, face similar issues of infrastructure, social cohesion and rural diversification.

The East Coast Mainline railway and the A1 join these towns together in a natural

and workable way. Under the Commission's current proposals, the quickest and safest way to Ashington is via the A1, crossing through another constituency. Berwick has very many differences from Ashington in education, NHS cover and ambulance availability, poor public transport links. The proposed constituency would be almost 60 miles from end to end and, as I have mentioned, getting from Berwick to Ashington would be very difficult.

Ashington's needs are totally different to Berwick's and this would be a challenging task for any Member of Parliament. It is my view and the view of those residents in my ward that I have spoken to that they earnestly ask that the Commission keep the current Berwick constituency together and augmented by adding Morpeth, Choppington and Pegswood, this forming a truly rural constituency of like-minded souls who share common rural values. The Berwick and Alnwick and Morpeth constituency, which was previously proposed by the Commission, should be adopted. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Once again, thank you for that very valuable presentation. I would now turn to the audience to ask does anybody seek to put any points of clarification? Very well, we have one. Thank you.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Andy Blanchflower, North East England Green Party. Sir, would you also include in this constituency both parts of Longhorsley which at the moment are separated?

CLLR FORRESTER: Yes. I wanted the current constituency to stay together.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further request for clarification? It does not appear that anybody requires any further explanation, so that is very good. Thank you very much for that.

The next person who could be dealt with at this stage is Barry Flux, if he is here. Yes, thank you.

CLLR FLUX: (Cramlington Town Council) My name is Barry Flux. I live at 39 Langdale Drive, Beaconhill Grange, Cramlington, Northumberland NE23 8EE.

Commission, I am making a submission in support of the Conservative Party's submission for the North East region as presented earlier today, so I understand. In particular, I wish to support the Conservative Party's submission for the Hexham and Cramlington seats which I speak about in a personal capacity as a ward member for Cramlington West and Northumberland County Council and a ward member for Cramlington West and also on the Cramlington Town Council.

The Conservative submission has many advantages over the Commission's initial proposals. The link between Ponteland East and Stannington ward and Cramlington West is far greater than Ponteland East and Stannington's link with the City of Newcastle. This can be supported with the following evidence.

Firstly, there is a Banks open cast mining site which crosses the boundary between

Ponteland East and Stannington division and Cramlington West division. Before this operation was in situ, there were a number of campaigns in the local area that were united in raising concerns about this operation. I understand that the residents of Cramlington were joined by residents in Shotton and Stannington in raising concerns.

Now that the operation is in place, Banks is a large employer in the local area who no doubt draw staff from both Cramlington and Ponteland areas. They also operate a local Community Benefit Fund and Community Liaison Group. These both draw community interests from the Ponteland East and Stannington wards as well as from the Cramlington.

The road connection here is strong and is well used. Whilst, just looking at the map, Blagdon Lane, which starts at the Snowy Owl pub, looks like a small road. It is not. It is a heavily used link road for Cramlington residents who travel to Blagdon, Stannington, Shotton, Berwick Hill, Wootton Grange and Ponteland. Along this route are a growing number of pubs, restaurants, businesses, employers and enterprises. These all have strong use from both residents in Cramlington and in Ponteland. These are very well linked together.

Also located in this area is the Northumberlandia land sculpture. This has become a significant tourist attraction which straddles the border between Cramlington West and Ponteland East and Stannington. This is expected to attract even more significant numbers of tourists and as such will have economic impacts on the link communities in Cramlington and in Ponteland East.

To move onto the Blyth and Ashington seat which has been proposed here, what has been proposed here by the Conservative submission is sensible. The Conservative proposal includes Cramlington East. I would point out that Cramlington East is a separate village settlement from Cramlington itself. It is within very close distance of Seaton Delaval, it is separated from Cramlington by the A189 spine road, it has a bus service, the number 57, linking it right to the centre of Seaton Delaval. Should the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line be built, which we all hope will be fairly soon, the nearest stations to this settlement will be in Seaton Delaval. I have no doubt people would commute from this stop on this line rather than travelling to Cramlington to the main line station here. From what I read, the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line will have a more regular service than Cramlington in terms of the trains.

Furthermore, drivers in Cramlington East are more likely to travel into Newcastle using the A189 which will be similar to drivers in both Blyth and Ashington. Drivers in the ward I represent, Cramlington West, are more likely to use the A1 in common with residents in Shotton, Blagdon, Stannington and Clifton in the Ponteland East and Stannington ward.

The Conservative submission also has the advantage of keeping the whole of Northumberland unitary authority contained in three Parliamentary constituencies with no crossing of the Northumberland authority border. This is advantageous to the communities in Ponteland which would be reunited. The argument for uniting these areas is strong. It is clear to me that the very rural villages, such as Ogle, Shotton and Stannington in Ponteland East and Stannington ward, have more in

common with the rural areas of the ward where I am a councillor, like East Hartford and Fisher Lane, than they do with the inner city of Newcastle. That is where I finish my submission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Anybody wish to seek clarification on any points that were raised? Okay, it does not appear so. Thank you very much for that.

Our next person listed is Richard Dodd and, if he is happy enough to proceed, he is very welcome. Thank you.

CLLR DODD: (Ponteland Town Council) I am Richard Dodd, I am from Ogle Hill Head, Belsay, under the address of Newcastle, like many people, but it is in Northumberland and the post code is NE20 0DR. I speak as a neighbouring councillor to Ponteland East which is where I want to concentrate my contribution. I am also a resident of Ponteland East, although I could probably hit a golf ball three or four times and it would land in Ponteland North. It is my fields, so I am a farmer and I know the lie of the land.

As residents, we are different, we are different sort of people, we have different problems in Ponteland East and North. It is rural and the crime is rural. I seem to spend one night a week chasing poachers who come from not round here.

Deprivation. Deprivation in certain areas of Newcastle is very different to the deprivation that we have in the rural areas. It is there, it is just disguised. Links, what links do we have out in the sticks, as we call it, to Newcastle? I have thought long and hard and there is only one and that is those brave souls who go to watch Newcastle United every other week, and that is the only link and a lot of footballers live out in my division and beyond. Michael Owen used to fly his helicopter over my house when he was there and he used to limp into the local shop. Never mind.

We are in danger of becoming a backwater in a big constituency that is ultimately urban, with urban problems, we will become forgotten about.

I said I am a councillor, I am a town councillor of Ponteland Town, I am county councillor and I stood for the Stannington seat way, way back in 2001 and lost it by eight votes, so I do know the areas quite well.

Belsay and competing parishes were once nicknamed the Alsace-Lorraines of the county, Northumberland county because they switch between Hexham and Berwick every so often and the people there would often say "Well, who are we voting for this time? Which division are we in? Which Parliamentary constituency are we in?"

We have different problems out here, we have the green belt threats around Ponteland, which seem to be similar to Newcastle but in different numbers and different voices. We have schools, the schools are going to be rebuilt in Ponteland, yet a percentage of the pupils come from Newcastle and different areas. Same with the sports provision, so we could be talking to two different MPs on different sets of problems.

They vote differently in Newcastle. They vote in a different way that says the

turnouts are quite low across Tyneside, so we realise these things and we have the problem with roads in Ponteland, a by-pass is on its way, but I also speak wearing a different hat because I am one of the members of the Congress of Europe. What is the Congress of Europe?

The Congress of Europe was set up by Winston Churchill in 1947 and it has 47 countries of Europe, that includes Russia, all the 'Akhstans' and all those sorts of new places, Iceland, Norway, everywhere that is called Europe. 47 countries. There are still 27 or 28, I am not sure what the number is in Europe, but those on the outside take great care to get in. It is their only foothold in Europe, which is where we are heading for if Brexit takes place. It was set up after the two world wars, Churchill said "We are not going to go through this again, we want to make sure there are no more dictators in Europe and we have democracy". We go out monitoring different countries of Europe and when we do that, we see some of the problems. Apathy is not just here, it is throughout all parts of Europe, but there has to be some sense of belonging, keeping communities natural, fair and keeping them where they want to be and who they belong to.

The people in Ponteland East are different to Newcastle, the problems are different and the geography is very different. Simple things like policing is different. We are just different people. We need to recognise that and make sure we get this process correct. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. That is very insightful. Would anybody like to raise any points for clarification? It appears that there is no further clarification sought. Thank you very much for that.

Would Wilfrid Flynn be available? Thank you.

MR FLYNN: (Jarrow Constituency Labour Party) Wilf Flynn, I am Secretary of Jarrow Constituency Labour Party. The address is 56 Pine Street, Jarrow.

When we discussed the boundary proposals we came on it from the point of view that we appreciate the government are reducing Members of Parliament by 50, so we cannot sit in Jarrow and have no change, but Jarrow is part of the south Tyneside local authority and it comprises basically of Jarrow and South Shields.

For South Shields to gain the Parliamentary numbers required, it would follow that they would have to take from Jarrow and we expected that to happen, but what we did not expect was that Jarrow would actually take from South Shields. What we are looking at is the Commission's proposals to remove Boldon, Cleadon and East Boldon from Jarrow to South Shields, but to move from South Shields Simonside and Rekendyke ward and that really cuts into the heart of South Shields. We oppose that part of the proposal and our alternative is to leave Simonside and Rekendyke in South Shields and to take part of another ward, the Bede ward, and remove that back into South Shields and that would make the numbers. The reason we mention the Bede ward when the Commission do not is because that part of the Bede ward has only been in Jarrow since 2010, so we support the removal of Cleadon and East Boldon into South Shields, but we wish to retain the Boldon Colliery ward in Jarrow.

Now that summarises the simple argument in the borough and because we are suggesting you leave Simonside and Rekendyke in South Shields, it does not affect anyone, it does not affect any neighbouring constituencies. South Shields is bordered by the River Tyne, it is bordered by the sea, so it has to take from Jarrow, but there is no logic in Jarrow taking from South Shields. We have to look beyond that because the rest of the proposals for Jarrow is to return the Pelaw and Heworth ward to Gateshead, which has probably been in Jarrow for some 20 years now, but because of the numbers, we support that returning to Gateshead.

There are three wards coming from Washington and Sunderland West, Castle, Redhill and Washington North, and we accept them, we simply take the attitude of Sunderland do not have a problem losing them, we do not have a problem taking them because again we need the numbers. We are aware, but we are not factually aware, that alternatives have gone in on that part, so if there was any proposal to remove ward Leam Lane out of Jarrow, we would oppose that and we put that in the submission.

We do not support Simonside coming into Jarrow and we do not support Boldon Colliery going into South Shields, we support part of the Bede ward, polling district LC, to make the numbers up for South Shields, but as regards the rest of the proposals from the Commission, we accept them for Jarrow. I believe there are other submissions along similar lines, but it is up to them to turn up and put them.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that presentation. Would anybody seek to make any points for clarification? No, it would appear not. Thank you very much.

I know we are a bit ahead of schedule here and it is really a matter whether it is convenient to the next speaker, who is listed until half past three, Paul Tinnion. Is he present and would you be happy to come ahead? Thank you very much. Once again I remind you to state your name clearly and details.

MR TINNION: Paul Tinnion. Lots of history, but I put them all in a written submission anyway. It is a good job I came early from the pub, is it not?

I have submitted my scheme for the North East to the Commission. I have been around a very long time, so I know all these areas almost too well, I feel. All I want to do today is to reiterate some of the points I have made and add a few more. My scheme is based upon three main principles, minimum change, you are going to hear the word "minimum" a lot, minimum crossing of local government boundaries and minimum division of communities.

I divide the region into what I call four chunks. I am baffled as to why the Commission did not do the same. I really do think that that the North East got the Friday afternoon job, frankly, when you look at the others and when you look at the North East.

In the North West, where the Commission has divided the region into four sub-regions, there they say:

"We first considered whether and how the local authority areas could usefully be

grouped into sub-regions. We were mindful of seeking to respect, where we could, the external boundaries of local authorities”.

Later on they say:

“We considered that Lancashire’s entitlement to 14.06 constituencies demonstrated that there could be no justification or purpose in the crossing of the boundary with Greater Manchester”.

Hear, hear. Yet here, the Commission proposes to cross the Gateshead-County Durham boundary as well as the South Tyneside-Sunderland boundary, as we have just heard. Both are completely unnecessary and undesirable.

My proposals. I agree with the Commission on Darlington, North Tyneside and Tynemouth, so that is two little chunks out of the way. My third chunk covers Northumberland, Newcastle, Gateshead and South Tyneside, nine constituencies, entitlement 8.95, which is very close to a whole number, you would have thought the Commission might notice that, but still.

I regret to say I have to support Anne-Marie Trevelyan because that is who I have just heard, because I campaigned against her in the general election. Anyway Berwick constituency will be extended southwards along the A1 to form a Berwick and Morpeth constituency. I think this is the obvious and natural way to extend Berwick. I add Bellingham to make up the numbers, so that I do not, unlike Anne-Marie, divide Ashington or New Biggin communities. The constituency would be based around the three market towns along the A1 of Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth. I oppose an Ashington and Blyth, which has close historical, economic and social links, it is south-east Northumberland. The parish of Seaton Delaval I do divide, but not any of the communities within the parish.

Then I propose a Hexham and Cramlington and I am sure you will be told, perhaps by the MP for Hexham, that Hexham has little connection to Cramlington. On the other hand, Morpeth, as proposed by the Commission, does not have that much. There is a modern folk song which I have heard, the subject of which is the lack of a bus service from Hexham to Morpeth. I kid you not. I do not want to hear it again.

I reallocate some Newcastle wards to create revised Newcastle East and Newcastle North constituencies. My Newcastle North would certainly have a better boundary than the current one. I speak as a former agent to the current MP.

I do take two wards out of Northumberland, the two Prudhoe town wards, and add them to Blaydon. Very simple to form a Blaydon and Prudhoe constituency.

The A695 Ryton by-pass connecting these areas in my home in Wickham is a road I travel every week. This is a sensible and fairly minor westwards extension of the Blaydon constituencies south of the Tyne. I do divide the Prudhoe parish, if anyone would be interested in that, but not any communities.

Now the difficult bit, I suppose. I propose to reinstate the Tyne Bridge constituency which existed perfectly happily, whatever else you may be told, for 27 years. As someone who knew this former constituency area very well, I was the chairman of

housing for most of that time or half of that time in Gateshead, there is no doubt in my mind that crossing the Tyne in this more central area is greatly preferable to a crossing further upstream.

The case for a Tyne Bridge constituency is actually much stronger now than it was in 1983. Then it was viewed as mixing chalk with cheese. That is putting it politely. There was a certain Newcastle snobbery, I kid you not, in those days and perhaps there is still a little. Now we have prestigious cultural venues on both sides of the river. There is the Sage, because Newcastle turned it down. Thank goodness. We have impressive new hotels both sides. Northumberland University in Newcastle has student accommodation blocks in central Gateshead in Trinity Square or Tescolopolis, as some people know it as.

I propose a Jarrow and Gateshead East constituency and I agree with the Commission's revised South Shields. I am sorry, Wilf, a councillor for 28 years, I would not split a ward. I am sorry, it is not worth it, and it makes things just too complicated.

Moving onto my final chunk, County Durham and Cleveland, which I think is entitled the 13 constituencies, 13.1 entitlement. Starting - and I suppose we must, as a Newcastle season ticket holder - with Sunderland I propose fairly limited changes. The Washington and Sunderland West constituency would be brought up to the numbers by adding Shiney Row. The existing Sunderland Central would be unchanged as proposed by the Commission. Most of Houghton and Sunderland South constituency would be combined with the Seaham area of County Durham to form a Houghton and Seaham constituency. You will see from the map - and I have had great difficulty running off a map incidentally, anyway never mind - that it irons out for Parliamentary purposes and only to some extent the very strange boundary between Sunderland and County Durham which was introduced in 1974; the sort of Hetton-le-Hole peninsula.

In the far south I propose minimum change. Again that word "minimum". Redcar constituency would be made up to quota by adding two wards along the coast, Saltburn and Brotton. The constituency would thus still fall within one local authority area. Why not?

The remaining Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency would in turn be made up to quota by adding the rest of the east Middlesbrough wards. This constituency does look strange on the map and I can see the temptation to change it, but it has been that way a long time now, 33 years, including under its previous name of Langbaugh. I see no case for more radical change, just leave it and change it a bit.

The remainder of Middlesbrough would be combined with five Stockton wards to form a Middlesbrough North and Thornaby constituency. This reinstates to a considerable extent the former Teesside Thornaby constituency which did exist briefly and I was a subagent there in 1979, believe it or not.

I propose a new Stockton-on-Tees containing all the areas regarded as Stockton proper including Norton, plus Yarm and Eaglescliffe.

I would add two County Durham wards to Hartlepool to make up the numbers. I see no case for dividing Hartlepool and I wonder anyone would want to. I could think of one or two reasons, but anyway I think it is silly to want to divide Hartlepool. I propose a Billingham and Sedgfield constituency. You could call it Billingham and Newton Aycliffe, which I think would be reasonably acceptable and a better option, I repeat, than dividing Hartlepool.

I propose a revised Easington based upon Peterlee and Spennymoor. I propose minimum change to North Durham constituency by adding two wards, Burnopfield and Dipton and Esh and Witton Gilbert. I note that Sacriston, which is currently in North Durham, is very close to Witton Gilbert, a couple of miles away, which I would add.

I propose a revised City of Durham constituency containing all the core city areas, plus some additional areas to the south and west. Crook and Willington and Tow Law and, I am afraid, Coundon to add up the numbers. Crook and Willington are cheek by jowl, they are all along the same road. They really run into each other from my memory, but the Commission divide them. Not sensible if you can avoid it. The remaining areas of County Durham were to form a new West Durham constituency based upon Consett and Bishop Auckland. Not the best, but much better than the Commission's proposal.

Generally I submit that my proposals are simple, consistent and easily understood. None of them contain three elements of three local authority areas, as one of the proposals by the Commission does, it is minimum change, why not have minimum change if you can fit it into the numbers and that is what I propose. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. If you would remain for a moment to see if anybody wishes to seek any points for clarification.

MR FLYNN: I appreciate you have put a lot of effort into that, Mr Tinnion, but I appreciate your comment on splitting the ward, but on what justification do you support Simonside and Rekendyke being removed from South Shields, then replaced by two from Jarrow?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, could you just bear with us, and state your name just as you finished your question there for the record?

MR FLYNN: (Jarrow Constituency Labour Party) Sorry. Wilf Flynn, Jarrow, 56 Pine Street.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MR TINNION: I cannot justify it, Wilf. I think it is very undesirable, but at the end of the day they are urban wards within an urban area for the most part, so it is not the same as the Commission splitting Birtley, for instance, which is just ridiculous and various other areas it splits. Although it is undesirable, I tried, I tried, you know, all kinds of ways to avoid it, but I could not, not without splitting wards, as you obviously have done, so I am sorry, some things cannot be done in my opinion.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Anybody else? Thank you. Please

mention your name at the start.

MR PRATT: Roger Pratt from the Conservative Party. That sounded a very interesting proposal, but obviously we have not seen it in front of us to have that examined. I wondered if you had a copy.

MR TINNION: Yes, certainly.

MR PRATT: That one could we see because I would certainly like to study it and see if we can amend any of our suggestions to what you have done?

MR TINNION: Certainly. Will do.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Further, there is another one, another taker?

MR BLANCHFLOWER: Andy Blanchflower, North East England Green Party. Yes, you have obviously worked very hard, Mr Tinnion, on this.

MR TINNION: I am retired.

MR BLANCHFLOWER: I am retired myself and I have worked equally on this. I would also like for the Green Party a copy, you know, maybe you will agree to the Commission publicising it.

MR HARTLEY: Jumping in there, obviously for the record all the representations will be available when we publish them next spring. If the speakers are happy to distribute them now, I am happy to do so within reason. The Commission cannot go through individually sending out different representations. In this case, sir, if you want to send us a copy, I am happy to distribute them to the parties this afternoon or as soon as you can get it to us.

MR TINNION: Yes. Yes, I will do that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Does that complete the takers for clarification? Thank you very much. We are ahead of schedule, efficiently ahead of schedule, and if there are any persons here who wish to speak who are due to be scheduled after half four, please come forward now and you are very welcome if you wish to make a presentation at this stage. If not, that is fair enough.

We are going to take a break until 4 o'clock and we will see who else has attended and maybe we will be able to bring the schedule forward then and get ahead of the timeline. At 4 o'clock we will resume the hearing. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 4.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon again. We are now going to resume the final listings for this afternoon's hearings and Mr George Smith has very kindly agreed to speak today. He had been scheduled for tomorrow morning, but we are able to accommodate him today. Thank you.

MR SMITH: My name is George Smith of 5 Kensington Court, South Shields. I am a member of the Conservative Party and I am president of the South Shields Association.

I would like to suggest to the Commission that Simonside and Rekendyke, which is proposed to be moved to South Shields, should remain in South Shields. There are electors of 6,314 and the Boldon Colliery ward, which is proposed to move to South Shields, should remain in Jarrow, and the number of electors there, 7,358.

Historically Simonside and Rekendyke for over 120 years has been part of the constituency of South Shields. Rekendyke was one of the ten wards of south county borough of South Shields when it was formed in 1897. Part of the ward such as High Shields, Laygate, Frederick Street shopping area and the dock land along the river front has always been known as part of South Shields. The land along the river is now ripe for development, some of which will be used for housing.

For cultural and historic reasons, my proposals are overwhelmingly in the interests of all electors at Jarrow and South Shields. I want Simonside and Rekendyke to remain in South Shields and the colliery ward to remain in Jarrow.

There will be a problem if this is agreed to that there will be a shortage of the threshold of 71,031 votes. The shortage will be 922 electors. There is growing house building in South Shields and in Simonside, so this will shortly be rectified, it will be rectified before the Commission's proposals are issued, so I do not think the Commission should shut their eyes to this future development.

Even if the threshold is not met and if there is an overriding desire to keep to the threshold, then our proposal is that a polling ward present in the Bede ward, which is known as LC and is known as the Brockley Whins, they have electors of 1,324 if that was moved into South Shields, then there would be no shortfall.

Alternatively, there is a polling district LB which has 650 electors. That is not quite making up for the 922, but this ward would mean that the whole of Winskell Road, which is cut off between Jarrow and South Shields, will all remain in South Shields. Henderson Road, which is another road which is cut between South Shields and Jarrow, that would remain in South Shields. Included in this area is a street known as Peel Gardens, which was named after a former councillor in South Shields, Ayrey Avenue, which is in this area was called after a former town clerk, Harold Ayrey, so there is a strong historical connection between LB ward polling district and South Shields.

In view of the community of interest, I think either of these would be acceptable. I think the Labour Party have said earlier that they were quite happy that Simonside and Rekendyke remain in South Shields.

None of these proposals cause any political parties any problems with political parties or the registration office as a big part of this Bede ward and the polling districts are known as the postal districts in South Shields.

I believe that on balance these proposals of Simonside and Rekendyke remaining in

South Shields and colliery ward remaining in Jarrow is overwhelming and I think it is in the interests of South Shields and Jarrow. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. It was very useful. I will invite members of the audience if they would like to come forward and seek any points for clarification. Okay, it does not appear anybody requires that. Thank you again.

MR SMITH: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Next listed on our schedule is Alan Birkmyre. If you are happy enough to come forward, that would be very useful. Thank you.

MR BIRKMYRE: I am Alan Birkmyre, I live in Gosforth. I submit my initial comments in a private capacity as a resident of Newcastle North constituency, though I am also a Deputy Chairman of Newcastle Conservative Federation.

Exactly five years ago today I stood in front of the Boundary Commission imploring you not to go ahead with the proposal to split Ponteland into two different constituencies. I was happy that your final proposal kept all of Ponteland intact in the Hexham constituency. Therefore, I was disappointed to find that the new proposals revert to dividing Ponteland between two constituencies, Hexham and Morpeth, and the proposed Newcastle North West where I live, so I repeat the comments which I made five years ago.

I moved to the North East over 40 years ago, therefore I like to think that I see local issues from a fairly dispassionate perspective. For the first 20 years I lived in Ponteland, which in those days was referred to as a village. Although it may now be a small town, I believe it should be kept as a single entity. There is little or no community link between Ponteland and Newcastle, so other than to achieve the target numbers for constituency electorates, I can see no logic in moving the small Northumberland ward of Ponteland East and Stannington into a Newcastle constituency.

I believe that the target numbers can be achieved without this. I suggest not moving Ponteland East and Stannington ward into Newcastle North West constituency, but adding Denton ward. I have stood as a candidate in Denton ward for the last several years. From my local knowledge I am confident that the addition of this ward would fit well with the other Newcastle wards which you have proposed for Newcastle North West constituency.

The benefits regarding Newcastle North West constituency are that the whole constituency would be within Newcastle City Council and not split with Northumberland County Council, and that the electorate would be pretty much on target at 75,338 compared to only 71,279 as per your proposal. I appreciate that there would be a knock-on effect for your proposed Blaydon constituency by removing Denton ward from it. I believe that this could be addressed by adding the one Gateshead ward of Dunstan and Teams. Certainly the Blaydon constituency appears to be an imperfect necessity straddling the River Tyne as it will and covering some parts of Newcastle and Gateshead.

I see no way round this if the voter numbers are to be met in the region as a whole. We learnt to live with the old Tyne Bridge constituency, which covered some of Newcastle and Gateshead, so speaking now for Newcastle Conservatives, I can say that we would support such a constituency adjusted by the wards I have mentioned. However, we would like to see Newcastle being included in the name, perhaps Blaydon and South-west Newcastle. Also speaking for Newcastle Conservatives, we support the proposals for the constituency of Newcastle East. That is mine.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That completes your presentation. That is very good. Would you mind waiting a moment to see if anybody is seeking any clarification on the points you have made? It does not appear so. Thank you very much for that, it is very helpful. Thank you.

MR BIRKMYRE: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: According to our schedule the next speaker is listed to present at 4.50, so in light of that, we will take a break until then. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 4.50 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening, everybody. We are going to resume the end stages of the presentation hearings this evening. The person who is scheduled to present next is Hilton Dawson. If you would not mind coming forward, please, and outlining your name and details for the purposes of the record.

MR DAWSON: (North East Party) I am Hilton Dawson, I am the General Secretary of the North East party. Do you want me to carry on?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, you present.

MR DAWSON: I will present away. Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you give an address as well, please?

MR DAWSON: 36 Morwick Road, Warkworth, Northumberland.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Just proceed to detail whatever facts you want to highlight this evening.

MR DAWSON: Thank you very much.

As I have said, my name is Hilton Dawson, I am the General Secretary of the North East Party, which is a registered political party which campaigns for regional devolution and the same level of democracy and investment enjoyed by our good friends, those good folk and fellow citizens who live just north of the border with

Scotland.

My party is sanguine about the overall reduction of constituencies which underpins this review as we consider that members of Parliament representing north-east England, like those of Scotland and increasingly Wales, should only be deciding reserved matters such as foreign policy, macro-economics, international development, and not policies on education, health, social care, employment, economic development, which would be more properly decided by an elected regional government with proper powers properly funded established much closer to home.

Anyway I am not here to debate such matters and our Chairman, John Tate, will be making representations on behalf of our party about the boundary proposals in the south of the region when you move to Teesside. I am here simply to talk about the proposal to create a Berwick and Ashington constituency and to support that proposal. I speak as a resident of the area. From Warkworth, as I have said, as a native of the area as well from Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and as a former labour Member of Parliament for the mixed urban and rural seat of Lancaster and Wyre from 1997 to 2005. Relevant also are the fact that I am now chair of a pioneering family history project, the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Genealogy Project, which has researched and documented some 32,000 people over the past 400 years in that part of Northumberland. I work occasionally as a civil funeral celebrant, mainly with families throughout the area, between Sea Houses and Guide Post. I travel around and meet a lot of people and have done so for the last three to four years.

This proposed constituency covers a very large geographical area, but it is not so large that an assiduous Member of Parliament could not serve this constituency very well. Obviously, the overall elector numbers are within the decreed range at 74,891. I note only that they are less than the 78,000 people I served in Lancaster and Wyre. In my former constituency, I undertook five or six constituency surgeries per month in a variety of towns, villages and venues. Constituencies surgeries are a vital means of not only meeting constituents face-to-face and hearing about the real issues of their lives, but they also ensure that the MP gets out and about and is seen to be getting out and about across the communities they serve. Constituency surgeries build confidence and credibility on all sides. They are the epitome of the MP's public service role, usually unremarked for that in the media, but enormously valued by those whom the MP represents.

There is no reason why a Berwick and Ashington MP could not provide an excellent service to their constituents from monthly surgeries in, say, Berwick, Alnwick and Ashington and by monthly surgeries in places such as Sea Houses, Amble, Wooler, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Lynemouth and across varying smaller rural locations.

There are those who will argue against the creation of this seat on the grounds that it combines two very disparate parts of the county of Northumberland; for want of a better term, the rural north and the urban south-east. As a family and community historian of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, I would say that people are too ready to overlook our fairly recent history. Newbiggin-by-the-Sea has very close historic family links right up the coast with Creswell, Amble, Hauxley and Boulmer through the fishing families of Armstrong, Brown, Taylor, Stanton and Robinson, which persist to this day.

Ashington became the biggest mining village in the world because so many people moved from the rural areas of north Northumberland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In my experience, there are actually very few substantial differences between the needs of people from urban and rural areas. Everyone needs equal opportunities and the ability to work and learn. Everyone requires decent housing, health and social care and good access to transport and communications. Everyone benefits from a clean environment, sustainable energy and food production. Everyone is entitled to a say in how their community is run and to be represented accountably and openly by elected representatives irrespective of how they vote.

One of my concerns in Northumberland, as it was in Lancaster and Wyre, is that sometimes those who talk about a rural urban divide are expressing social and political prejudice rather than addressing real policy issues. As a native, a resident and someone who loves Northumberland, I deplore the snobbery and inverted snobbery which sometimes disfigures our debate on important issues, whether they are urban or rural or much more often just matters which should concern us all.

The most important aspect of a new Berwick and Ashington constituency is that it will require any politician who wants to win the seat to appeal to constituents throughout the whole area for their support. They will need to seek votes across the board if they are to be successful in any election. By the nature of the electorate and the electoral arithmetic, they will be required to take heed of and represent the constituency as a whole.

As well as being good for democracy and good for social cohesion, this is a constituency which combines the duty of hills, coastline and islands, the profound cultural historical, religious significance of the Lindisfarne Gospels, the vitality and industry of a coal mining tradition, the courage and resilience of fisher folk and the supreme world class sporting brilliance of people like Bobby Charlton from Ashington. Berwick and Ashington could be the finest constituency in the land and I commend your own proposals to you. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much that was a very insightful presentation. Can we turn to see if there is anybody in the audience who would like to seek clarification on the points you know have made? Would anybody like to raise any issues? It appears not. You have satisfied the needs there. In light of that, thank you very much for that.

MR DAWSON: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That was very well done. Thank you.

We are going to have a short break for ten minutes until the next presenter comes along. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 5.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are going to resume the hearings. At the moment, we do not appear to have the next speaker who is listed before us. In light of that, our next scheduled presenter is at 5.40, which is 20 to six, so we are going to take a break until then. Thank you.

After a break

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. We are resuming the hearings and the next person scheduled to present their views is Janine Pierce. If you are ready to proceed, we are ready. (Pause) It appears that the person that was listed or scheduled for making an oral presentation now wishes to submit a written presentation and that has now been provided to the hearing, so that would conclude that particular presenter's evidence before the hearing.

That would mean that we are going to have another short break and await the final listed person at 6.15. Thank you.

After a short break

Time Noted: 6.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening. We are resuming the hearings concerning the Boundary Commission proposals and I believe we have another speaker who has attended and wishes to make a presentation.

Mr Bourne, would you like to come forward? You are very welcome this evening and thank you for attending.

MR BOURNE: No problem.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you would like to give your name and address for the purposes of the record, please, and then you can commence your presentation.

MR BOURNE: Certainly. My name is David Bourne. I live in the City of Sunderland constituency of Houghton and Sunderland South. I live at 14 Peth Green, Easington Lane.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR BOURNE: This is coming today to speak about the sort of carving up of the town where I live at the moment. The actual plan is for the Hetton ward to be become part of the City of Durham which in itself geographically is not a massive problem that I have got. What the plans are that in Hetton-le-Hole you have what you call the Copt Hill ward which is due to form part of, I believe, Easington and Houghton or Houghton and Easington.

What has actually happened is the Commission have used the actual ward boundary

line which directly slices the town of Hetton-le-Hole in two. If there are maps available, it is the boundary line forms Caroline Street in Hetton. You can see there where the boundary line forms. Okay. You can see there so the Eppleton Colliery you will see round about there, so Copt Hill forms, what we know locally as Copt Hill is this area here, but the actual boundary line comes down to the Hetton Front Street, which is at the bottom of Caroline Street. Now the A182 runs all the way through to Easington Lane, which again the City of Sunderland boundary would, I imagine, be about there and Merton in County Durham is just across the way there. My main concern is that historically Hetton and Houghton-le-Spring, which is literally just north on the A182, the two towns are inextricably linked socially, culturally, historically. We have always had close links with the two. The actual Hetton Town Council would actually be situated in the City of Durham. On this site, I think Hetton Town Council is round about there, the Council offices, whereas Hetton-le-Hole covers all this area here and all the way down to, I believe, the boundary line is there for Hetton-le-Hole, so a big swathe of Hetton will actually be cut off and actually form part of the Easington and Houghton area.

My understanding is that, for example, if there was social disorder in the High Street, you would potentially have two MPs covering that particular area. Administratively in a time when you want to be saving money, I do not think for a town that is potentially not far from the actual border, from the Houghton and the 182, going south two or three miles or four miles tops, you are going to have two MPs covering this whole area.

Also as well, Hetton-le-Hole will be the only City of Sunderland ward or constituency in the new City of Durham area and it goes far south-west as Tow Law, which again you are going right across the other side of Durham, which is a considerable distance. Again culturally there has never been any links and Hetton-le-Hole forms the most southern border of the City of Sunderland.

The new area, if we could zoom out just slightly, what seems to be happening now is that we are going to form areas, this area here, my suggestion would have been that places that I think just outside the city, just south there, there is a place called Coxhoe, which, when I have looked at the figures for the actual size, how it has to be, I believe, between 71,000 and 75,500 roughly, yes, there are places within the Coxhoe area that could actually join the City of Durham and actually that would mean a collective move round of constituencies in that area, but it would actually keep Hetton-le-Hole in one, so there would be one MP covering the whole of Hetton-le-Hole and actually that would also keep it within a kind of City of Sunderland-based area within the new sort of guidelines that you have actually have drawn up.

Again I did not know roughly whether it would be a Q&A session, I do not really know, but my presentation was really on the basis that a town the size of Hetton would end up having two MPs which, again it seems very, very strange, it would simply be drawn up on the actual boundary, like a ward boundary, not the actual constituency boundary.

If you obviously go also down, I think in the actual correspondence that came out it actually said that it made sense to pull in East and West Rainton, which is on the A690, which East Rainton is actually in the City of Sunderland. I think if you go

across. Yes. West Rainton is actually currently in the City of Durham. East Rainton is in the City of Sunderland, so all this area here, all this area, is actually Hetton Town Council. Literally all this down to the Rainton Meadows Business Park where N Power have their business is actually in Hetton Town Council's area and in the City of Sunderland, but it is actually going to form part of the new City of Durham and I know the sitting MP, Bridget Philipson, has actually done a lot of work with N Power in the City of Sunderland area. She is no longer going to have any say in what happens in that particular area, especially as there is a lot of development happening within the Rainton Bridge area as well. It just seems a shame that, like I say, it would be carved up based on existing ward boundary lines rather than the main lines that you can see.

I did have some suggestions on potentially how the numbers could actually be made up. I was going to suggest Hetton remains in its current format of two wards, which is Copt Hill and Hetton. I think it has been skewed by the fact that one is called Copt Hill, it is Hetton-le-Hole locally. The Copt Hill area with Hetton, which includes Eppleton, Broomhill, Gillas Lane, a lot of that is actually locally, historically and it is Hetton-le-Hole so it is being carved up.

Hetton would move to the new Easington and Houghton CC as part of the plans, and I would suggest then that one or more of Shotton and South Hetton, which has 6,413 electorates, or Coxhoe, which is 9,280, Trimdon and Thornley, which is 9,411, or Wingate 2,913, they would move into the City of Durham CC from East Durham, which is a new area that is being formed, and then the knock-on effect from that is one or more of Easington, which is 5,559, Seaham, 5,270, Houghton, 5,809, Murton, 5,820 or Dawdon, 5,868, one or more of those would move into the East Durham CC from Easington and Houghton CC.

Again, some of the places I have mentioned there, historically, culturally are actually classed locally as East Durham. I mean, you cannot get more East Durham than Seaham, Horden and Dawdon, they are actually on the east Durham coast. At the moment it would make more sense to have them in an east Durham area as well.

I think, basically to highlight and close really, the main crux of what my main objection was that the fact that such a town, as you can see, Hetton-le-Hole. Even though the red line and the boundary makes it look quite skewed in the fact that you take it down to Hetton Town Council level that you do have all those places that you can see on this particular area here, right the way down there, all this and north of the Copt Hill boundary line, all that is Hetton Town Council, which I do not even know how administratively that would work after the event, and it was just to highlight that fact that to have two sitting MPs controlling a town council of, say, three or four miles tops from north to south, it did not make sense and it made more sense to keep the two together and move them into the Easington and Houghton area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What you are saying is the council matters will have to be dealt with by two separate MPs on the one council?

MR BOURNE: Absolutely. I think just purely based on the size of the town that does not make any administrative sense at all, because Houghton-le-Spring has a town council as well and Hetton and Houghton work locally on a lot of local issues and a lot of community policing is actually between the two, so one MP, Bridget

Philipson, would sit on both committees. We have a local police station within Hetton-le-Hole, a community police station, as well as Houghton and Bridget would actually work between the two. Easington Lane in the south, again that is a ward of Hetton there. Yes, just there. I think the actual Easington Lane borders round about there, but all this again is Hetton Town Council.

Going north I would imagine that it is actually the same geographical area roughly, north and south of the border, the Copt Hill border line at Hetton. This area. It is splitting it. I cannot see a great reason why you want to split a town. Sunderland Council would still actually be the overriding local authority for that particular area, but again for the new MP, which I believe at the minute is Roberta Blackman, for one town she would have to deal with the City of Sunderland and then Bridget Philipson would have to deal with the City of Sunderland for the other part of the town. It makes no sense for residents and MPs and for people's workload for something that very locally - and you can see there where this area here would make it - would just seem as though it has simply been drawn up on ward boundary lines, it just seems a bit as though Hetton should remain as it is at the minute, Houghton and Sunderland South, to the new East and Houghton district. Because like you say, Hetton is the most southern lying part of Sunderland and then you are carving it off to be part of a Durham constituency which, if you can see the mouse, you can see geographically how far it goes west to Tow Law, which I believe there is a lot of rural issues I would imagine that the MP is probably tied up in that area.

Hetton-le-Hole is a different kettle of fish and it makes more sense for a local sitting MP who is aware locally of what is going on in that particular area, then they have to give up that. I think it is Roberta Blackman, like I said, will have to deal just with one tiny ward in a City of Sunderland area, it made more sense if we could reconsider that particular aspect of moving Hetton. Like I say, geographically Hetton and Durham, I think it is about five or six miles geographically, to the City of Sunderland centre again six or seven miles, it just made more sense purely on finance, administrative, just to keep it as it is tied with Houghton and, like I say, that is what I wanted to highlight.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. It was very useful.

MR BOURNE: No problem.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would you remain and let us see if there is anybody in the audience who wishes to ask any questions concerning your presentation?

MR BOURNE: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Just for clarification, would anybody like to ask any questions? Okay, it appears that that is it concluded. Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that.

MR BOURNE: Okay. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Now we are coming towards the end of

the evening's hearing, although we will wait for another while before we conclude completely. Would there be anybody in the audience who wishes to make a presentation who has not come forward yet?

Would you like to come forward and outline your name and address details for the record?

MRS PIERCE: Hi, I am Janine Pierce, 76 Dunsgreen, Ponteland, Newcastle.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MRS PIERCE: I am here today to oppose the following proposals. The ward of Ponteland East and Stannington is moved out of the Hexham constituency and Hexham constituency adds Longhorsley and Rothbury to the Berwick constituency.

One of the main reasons I oppose the proposals would be because the constituency of Hexham and Morpeth would become one of the largest geographically in England. I believe that the proposals will have a detrimental effect on these areas. Ponteland East, Stannington and Whalton are primarily rural areas. Whalton, Ogle and Belsay do not connect any of the Newcastle boundary lines and if Ponteland East and Stannington ward is removed from Hexham constituency, these areas would be represented by a primarily urban Newcastle-based MP. It would mean that local important ties would be broken as the town of Ponteland would literally be split in two causing issues throughout the village. Not only would the high school, middle school and leisure centre, golf club and some of the town centre be represented by a different MP to the other representing MP representing the rest of Ponteland and Darras Hall, the dividing line would mean that the Northumberland MP representing one half of a street, Eastern Way, and a Newcastle MP representing the other, basically where the proposal is it completely splits Ponteland.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would you like to use the highlighter and just take your time there and let me see it. Thank you.

MRS PIERCE: The proposal is, if you zoom into Ponteland slightly, so this is the village of Ponteland here, obviously this is the proposal line now. Where you can see Callerton Lane, this one here, this is the high school here which all of the residents in this area all go to. Up here, up here, all this. No one from this area would attend these schools or very little. The residents here, so on this on very line here, it would mean that Eastern Way, which is a street, one half of the street, would be represented by a Newcastle-based MP and the other half by a Northumberland. Not only that, in terms of the gentleman that was speaking before, obviously we have some anti-social behaviour issues which would mean in terms of the residents of Ponteland and we would have again two MPs representing the same issues that are arising. Obviously, there is concerns about this area here, it is a very rural area and if this was to be moved to a Newcastle-based MP, it is thought that the rurality would possibly change and the acceptance to possible developments would be accepted, more so than a Northumberland MP.

My daughter attends her primary school, so if you zoom again, I will show you my street. If you can zoom back again. Dunsgreen, this is where I live, my daughter goes to school basically there. It would mean again - and there is a lot of people will

be in the same situation - people who live further down into the village, their children go to school at Darras Hall First School. The first school is then a feeder for the middle and the high school, so it would mean the first school is completely represented by different MPs.

In summary, basically I think the main changes will impact on schools, local businesses, obviously the people in the village compared to one side of the village and the other are represented differently. Geographically the access to and from the village may be affected, there are concerns about development work and the damage it might cause to rural areas that surround us. A breakdown in the community, I think that is a big feeling that a lot of the sense of the loss of the village as a whole. Obviously they do have a very big community and a good community feel and there are a number of concerns that those ties would be lost.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What you are really saying is that community severance is the issue.

MRS PIERCE: Yes. Me, personally, we have recently moved to Ponteland for the very reason of schools, good community, more rural lifestyle and I believe that if these proposals go ahead, those could change. I accept there is a need for change and we need to expand to reach the new electorate quotas, I support the proposals to maintain the current Hexham constituency as it stands with Ponteland East and Stannington, but I do believe further consideration should be given regarding neighbouring towns and villages. I do not believe splitting the village of Ponteland makes reasonable sense for the community and the families that would live within it and the cost that would be associated.

A number of community residents have come together to represent our feelings regarding this and we had a large group photo taken and that should be submitted as part of the consultation.

I believe an alternative set of proposals have been drawn up with the involvement of the local councillor Eileen Armstrong, Ponteland East and Stannington, which I support and hope the Boundary Commission will also support.

I hope you will consider proposals as they have been drawn up locally which would see the Hexham constituency maintain all the existing wards including Ponteland East and Stannington, and expand to take some areas of Cramlington. The Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency would then take on Morpeth. These proposals fit with the Boundary Commission's requirements on equal voter numbers and I believe this makes much more sense from a geographical, economic, cultural and historic perspective taking account of local ties.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. That was very useful. We appreciate you taking the time to present that. I know you have already submitted it in writing, but it is useful to have a first-hand account.

Could you just remain for another moment, please, so that we can check to see if there is anybody who wishes to take any time to seek clarification regarding any of those points that were made? Okay, it does not appear that anybody does. Thank you again.

MRS PIERCE: Right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: At this stage it appears that we have completed our schedule and listing. However, we are prepared to adjourn matters until half past seven to see if anybody else wishes to come forward and make a last minute presentation. We are open and available still. However, if nobody has appeared by half past seven, that will be the conclusion of today's proceedings. Until half past seven.

After a short break

Time Noted: 7.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good evening, everybody. We are just resuming the final stage of today's proceedings. It appears that we have no further people who have attended to present any additional views this evening. In light of completing our list and our schedule, we will close the proceedings for tonight. Thank you very much. We will resume tomorrow morning, Tuesday, 9.00 am. Thank you.

Adjourned until 9.00 am on Tuesday, 15 November 2016

Time Noted 7.00 pm

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