

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

OXFORD TOWN HALL, ST ALDATE'S, OXFORD, OX1 1BX

ON

MONDAY 24 OCTOBER 2016
DAY ONE

Before:

Mr Colin Byrne, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

Transcribed from audio by W B Gurney & Sons LLP
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Time Noted: 10 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this, the second public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the South East. My name is Colin Byrne, I am an 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 South East region. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow and I am also responsible, with my fellow Assistant Commissioners Alan Nisbett and Stephen Lawes, for analysing all of the representations received about the initial proposals for this region and then presenting the 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, and sat next to me is Roger Winter. Roger 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 10.00 am until 8.00 pm and tomorrow is scheduled to run from 9.00 am until 5.00 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 South East region. A number of people have already registered to speak and have been given a timeslot. I will invite anybody who has not registered but who would like to speak to do so in the gaps between the booked slots. I would like to stress that the purpose of this public hearing is for people to make oral representations about the initial proposals. The purpose is not to engage in a debate with the Commission about the proposals, nor is this hearing an opportunity for people to cross-examine other speakers during their representation. People may seek to put questions for clarification to the speakers, but they should do so through me as Chair. I will now hand over to Roger, who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the South East region.

MR WINTER: Thank you very much and good morning. As Colin has mentioned, my name is Roger Winter, and I am a member of the Commission's staff. 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 Colin has already stated, he will chair the hearing itself and it is his responsibility to run the hearing at his discretion and take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here today to support Colin in carrying out his 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 parliamentary constituencies, 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 the two constituencies to be allocated to the Isle of Wight. This approach is permitted by the legislation and has been supported by previous public consultation. This approach does not prevent anyone from putting forward counter-proposals that include one or more constituencies being split between the regions but it is likely that compelling reasons would need to be given to persuade us to depart from the regional-based approach we adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

In considering the composition of each electoral region we noted that it might not be possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties. Therefore we have grouped some local authority areas into sub-regions. The Commission's proposals are for 83 constituencies for this region, a reduction of one. Our proposals leave 15 of the existing constituencies unchanged. We propose only minor changes for a further 47 constituencies with two wards or fewer altered from the existing constituencies.

The rules that we work to state that we must allocate two constituencies to the Isle of Wight and neither of these constituencies is required to have an electorate that is within the requirements on electoral size set out in the rules. In Berkshire, two of the eight existing constituencies are unchanged while four are changed only by the transfer of one ward. In Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, Kent and Medway two of the 25 existing constituencies are unaltered and one is reconfigured slightly due to re-warding. A further four are altered only by the transfer of one ward. In Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes one of the seven existing constituencies is unchanged. In Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton three of the 18 existing constituencies are unaltered while a further four are altered only by the transfer of one ward. In the county of Oxfordshire one of the six existing constituencies is unchanged while one is changed only by the transfer of one ward. In Surrey, five of the existing 11 constituencies are unaltered while three of the remaining six are altered only by the transfer of one ward. In West Sussex, one of the existing eight constituencies is unchanged and one is reconfigured slightly due to re-warding. A further five are changed only by the transfer of one ward.

As it has not always been possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties we have grouped some county and local authority areas into sub-regions. The number of constituencies allocated to each sub-region is determined by the electorate of the combined local authorities. Consequently it has been necessary to propose some constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, it crosses the boundary on the south coast, combining the east of the city of Brighton and Hove with Newhaven and Seaford. We proposed one constituency that contains electors from East Sussex and Kent. It crosses the boundary at the Weald, combining the towns of Crowborough and Tenterden. We further proposed two constituencies that contain electors from Kent and Medway, one

crosses the boundary at Higham, combining it with Rochester and the other at Chatham, combining it with East and West Malling.

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 the elections. It is our view that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified and our initial proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes to split wards, strong evidence and justification will need to be provided and the extent of such ward splitting should be kept to a minimum.

The scale of change in this review is significant and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation 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 also available on our website and in a number of places of deposit around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at www.bce2018.org.uk. I do 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 all be asked to provide us with your name and address if you make an oral representation. The Commission is legally obliged to make a record of the public hearings and, as you can see, we are taking a video recording from which we will create a verbatim transcript. The Commission is required to publish the record of the public hearing along with all written representations for a four-week period during which members of the public have an opportunity to comment on those representations. We expect this period to occur during the spring of next year. The publication of the hearing records and written representations include certain personal data of those who have made representations. I therefore invite all those contributing to read the Commission's data protection and privacy policy, a copy of which we have with us and is also available on our website.

Just a couple of housekeeping issues: there are no fire drills planned for today or tomorrow. The fire exits are in the corner over here behind the TV screen (indicating) or back out and down the stairs either to the left or to the right there are fire exits where we came in. If anybody has any mobility issues we will just take you to the top of the stairs and we will help you from there. There are toilets, on this floor there are accessible toilets to the left and to the right when you leave this room (indicating) and there are more complete toilet facilities downstairs on the ground floor, either up the main stairs where most of you probably came up today or through the lift just to the

right of the door where you came in. At this stage I will now hand you back to the Chair to begin the public hearing and thank you for your attendance today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Well, we are running in advance of time, which is always a good thing, so may I first ask Cllr Stanton to make his representation, and if you would not mind moving to the seat to your left and just to remind you we are videoing this so you will need to start by just giving us your name and address. Thank you.

MR STANTON: (Brighton and Hove Conservative Association) Thank you very much, Chairman, I guess this is working, yes? And thank you very, very much for allowing us to come and talk to you. I do also have a copy of my speech which I will leave with you, if that is useful. Thank you very much. My name is Robert Stanton, I am the current President of the Brighton and Hove Conservative Association and the elected council member for the ward of Finchampstead North.

I would ask to refer to the Berkshire --- ie Bracknell in particular during my words. I have indeed already sent in a written response to the Boundary Commission proposals and I supported their recommendations wholly. While I would be happy to repeat those today and I do have them in front of me if you wish to hear them if needed, I assume they will stand as noted on my reference 18844, and I assume you do not need to hear them again. (Affirmative response). However, I see the reason for my journey today as an important addition to express my real concern at a few certain alternative proposals by some others, bearing in mind here I totally supported your original recommendations.

I can firstly deal with the suggestion to move the ward of Crowthorne from Bracknell to Windsor to make up the required voter numbers for Windsor. Crowthorne is a village situated in the middle of the Bracknell constituency and forms an integral part of Bracknell. To remove Crowthorne from the Bracknell constituency would leave Bracknell completely split in two and virtually maroon the southern four wards of Bracknell in Sandhurst with no direct access, no direct route at all, so they would cut a swathe right through the middle. In fact you cannot get to Bracknell from Sandhurst without either a large detour or driving through Crowthorne, which in these proposals would be in a different constituency anyway. Such a proposal would ruin traditional ties, community connections and be a geographical disaster. It would also create an orphan ward miles from the centre of Windsor with no historical connections when Bracknell is so close with all the historical ties.

My second plea is to counter alternative proposals to move Finchampstead from Bracknell to Woking constituency and I speak as the local elected member on that ward, in fact both Finchampstead North and South, it is two different wards, the whole area of Finchampstead being split into two. Both Finchampstead wards, North and South, have become an integral part of the Bracknell constituency and a study of the map will show its proximity to Crowthorne in Bracknell and its cultural ties are much more akin to Crowthorne and Bracknell. Road connections are good to Bracknell, using the well-known Nine Mile Ride, and far less traffic congested than roads into

Wokingham town. In addition the nearest rail connection to Finchampstead, which does not have its own station, but its nearest station is Crowthorne and not Wokingham. Finchampstead has in the recent past been the victim of boundary change and without doubt change confuses residents and indeed another change would be very negatively seen by residents. In addition, while both Finchampsteads sit in the Wokingham Council, so does Wokingham Without, and there are no proposals to move that, and if this proposal went ahead it would leave Wokingham Without as an orphan ward in the Bracknell constituency and the only ward in Wokingham Borough Council in the Bracknell constituency which is certainly against the spirit of the boundary, as indeed you just outlined. It would also split the parish of Wokingham Without into two with some part being in Crowthorne and some part being in Wokingham Without.

In summary, Chairman, I return to my original point, this is really why I have really come here today, and that the Commission got this right in the first place and that it should stand. I congratulated the Commission for a job well done then and I repeat that now. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. We now have an opportunity should anybody wish to ask a question for clarification. (No response). I guess not, so thank you very much indeed for coming and making your representation.

MR STANTON: Thank you very much Chairman. Would you like a copy of the --- (Same handed).

THE SECRETARY: Yes that would be really helpful. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, Cllr Barber are you happy to come and make your representation?

MR BARBER: (Vale of White Horse District Council) Thank you Chairman, I am Cllr Matthew Barber of Orchard View, Church Street, West Hanney, Oxfordshire, and I am leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council. I also fully support the proposals by the Commission for the changes to the boundaries in Oxfordshire. The only addition being a potential change of name for the Wantage constituency to the Wantage and Didcot constituency. That is something that the sitting Member of Parliament has already put into common usage and I think many people in the community believe that to be the name of the constituency. In fact at the last general election I think virtually every single party contesting that seat used the name Wantage and Didcot or Didcot and Wantage in some combination on the election literature, despite the official name being the Wantage constituency, so I think that would simply be catching up with the reality as people see it on the ground.

The proposals that you have put forward, I think, are excellent and demonstrate the least disruptive options for Oxfordshire as a county and are certainly an improvement on the previous iteration that the Commission put forward, obviously, under slightly

different numerical criteria last time round. The biggest changes obviously being around the Oxford West and Abingdon, Henley and Thame and Oxford East constituencies. I believe the proposals preserve the local ties, particularly between Abingdon and many of the villages in the Sandford and Whittenhams ward of South Oxfordshire District Council. I know of many residents from those villages who look to Abingdon for local services and coincidentally in the last couple of weeks received some email correspondence from a constituent raising concerns about the access because they cycle from Abingdon to the Sandford and Whittenhams wards for pre-school with their child every day and there are other school links that cross that boundary. In local authority terms, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Council, of which I am leader, work incredibly closely. We have joined together all of our back office services so that the public have the same experience of leisure provision and waste provision, indeed, housing policy, many of the issues that a Member of Parliament would be dealing with would be dealt with by the same offices under the same policies and politically the two councils are very closely aligned these days. Geographically your proposals unite much of the Oxfordshire green belt, certainly to the south of Oxford, in one parliamentary constituency and utilise the river crossing at Abingdon, which, as I say, is a vast improvement on the previous proposals.

A few words on the counter-proposal from the Liberal Democrats which suggests moving the Sandford and Whittenhams wards and others into the Oxford East constituency; I am not convinced by the argument of the local ties, I think there are very few residents in those wards who would feel that they have any affinity or local ties with the Oxford East constituency and I have already cited examples to the counter elsewhere. On a factual point, the counter-proposal makes reference to the wards that are east of the River Isis in Oxford, I believe they mean the River Cherwell, not Isis, and given that it is a proposal, supposedly, on local merit, getting the name of the river wrong is an interesting anomaly. They also make comment that in your proposal three --- Oxford West and Abingdon only has three wards within Oxford city and only 12,500 electors. The alternative counter-proposal puts only three wards of South Oxfordshire District Council in the Oxford East constituency with only 8,600 electors, so I think if that is a consideration then your proposal is vastly superior to the alternative.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Again, I will ask whether anybody has any questions of clarification. (None). If not, then thank you very much indeed for your representation. So, our next speaker is Mr Nazir Lodhi. So, if you would come down to this seat, because we are having to make a public record of everything, we are videoing it, so if you could just start by stating your name and your address.

MR LODHI: First of all thank you very much for giving me the chance to come and speak here. My name is Nazir Lodhi and I have lived in Slough for the last 57 years. Most of my time was spent in Chalvey where I served in a different capacity. We run a charity called Mustaqbill Future Foundation, the charity works for multi-faith and community cohesion. Our office is based in Chalvey and a number of friends and

colleagues, I know, always felt that [it was] their part of Slough. Chalvey is a very unique town in the whole country with a number of mosques, churches, and not very far, a temple. The majority of the people, or, a reasonable size of the people are Muslims and they go to three or four mosques around there. The younger generation is quite vibrant. Also, changing my hat, I am also the Vice-President of Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, and we believe that Chalvey is part of Slough, Chalvey is a vibrant business community, with Thames Valley Chamber respecting and supporting them, as is Slough Chamber. We also do a lot of community cohesion work and our organisation, the work we did in Chalvey was elected as a community cohesion champion, doing the community cohesion work in the Chalvey area. There is a very older generation --- older people around here, like me, who live there and they feel and they grow that they are Slough, part of Slough. If you look at the composition of Windsor and Slough; two different communities.

And I hope I will not upset anyone saying anything, if we look at the type of community in Windsor and Slough it is distinctly different, if we walk to Chalvey High Street it is different, if we walk to Windsor it is completely different. It would be a shock to the system for the people of Chalvey if they wake up one morning and they see they are in Windsor. And I believe a lot of people will not be very happy about it and I believe that it would be a shock to their culture, the way they do, and I believe that many people in Windsor – I do not want to speak on their behalf – but I believe that they will not be very happy to have them there because of cultural, religious way of living, and I do not know, maybe it is mainly the --- it is completely different, you can walk there on Friday, you will see a lot of people coming out of the mosque wearing their traditional clothes and you do not see that in Windsor. And obviously there is a very good reason you decide to do this, but people of Windsor will not accept that, they may not complain about it at the moment, they may accept it for political reasons, but as far as the community cohesion and cohesive society are concerned putting them together is not a very good idea. So I request, on behalf of my charity, people of Slough, where I have been living for 55 years, people of Chalvey believe they are Slough, and Slough will not be complete without Windsor. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, indeed. And, again, I ask whether anybody wishes to seek a point of clarification. (No response). Thank you very much, that is a very helpful presentation.

MR LODHI: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And now our next --- we will go for Father Stewart. So the camera is there.

FATHER STEWART: My name is Father Alistair Stewart, I am vicar in the parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey, which means I have, in effect, two churches, one of which, should the scheme go through, would be in a different parliamentary constituency from the other. I live in the ward of Chalvey and my concern in addressing this Commission is to plead that Chalvey be not taken out of the Slough parliamentary constituency. Apart from being vicar of the parish and fundamentally embedded in Chalvey life I am also

a trustee of the Mustaqbill Future Foundation. Our Chairman is behind me taking notes on my every word, and part of what we find very significant in Slough is the extent of community cohesion. So, I would say Chalvey is a wonderful parish to work in because most of my parishioners are Muslims, which makes life both interesting and different whereas one goes to Windsor and feels one is going into a different world.

I say 'goes into Windsor' of course, because there is no direct bus route between Chalvey and Windsor, nor indeed is there --- although the railway line goes through Chalvey, from Slough to Windsor, Chalvey Halt, which I think is a good, symbolic representation of this scheme, was built in 1922 to be a station between Chalvey and Windsor, connecting Slough. It was built after the First World War and fell down in 1929 because it was structurally unsound. I suspect that that is a parable for this proposal. So there is no direct transport, so if one does go from Chalvey to Windsor, the only way is to go by bike along the railway line where one suddenly finds oneself emerging as you go through past the tip, the smell suddenly changes from the smell of Chalvey tip, which is the urban waste centre for the whole of Slough, another parable for that parish, and one finds oneself in green fields and somewhat better heeled.

My fundamental concern, first of all, is that it is splitting up part of the heart of Slough, which is Chalvey. Upton-cum-Chalvey is the ancient parish that preceded Slough and now takes up the whole of the central area, including Chalvey. Chalvey itself is an area of significant urban deprivation, as you are undoubtedly aware. So my fear, apart from having my own work made more difficult by working in two parliamentary constituencies is that there will be a democratic deficit for the people of Chalvey, who will be separated, as it were, from easy access to their Member of Parliament, who will be represented fundamentally by a constituency which is unlike Chalvey in cultural and socio-economic means and is fundamentally still a market town rather than an industrial urban centre, which is what Slough is and of which Chalvey is a fundamental part.

My final joke, as it were, of course, is that if the proposals do go through I will be campaigning hard to have the constituency called Chalvey with Windsor.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Again, I ask whether anybody would like to seek clarification. (No response). No, so thank you very much for coming in today.

FATHER STEWART: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And our next speaker is Mr David Knibbs.

MR KNIBBS: Thank you. I find, having heard Father Stewart, that I am really repeating what has already been said, but as I have come here I will say it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And would you mind just, for the record, just saying who you are and where you live.

MR KNIBBS: Oh, I am so sorry. David Arthur Knibbs, I live actually just outside Chalvey but my church is Slough Quakers, which is in Chalvey, and there is a lot of events going on in Chalvey to do with the rest of Slough, so I know Chalvey very well. I really --- we were all, I think, quite astonished that anybody should propose that bits of Slough should be lifted up, as it were, and put in Windsor. It really does not make any sense. Slough is what it is, Upton-cum-Chalvey, which is the original name of the parish, has now got a bit of it in Slough and a bit of it in Windsor, which makes the church's angle rather strange. But much more importantly than that, people who live in Chalvey work and shop in Slough itself, they actually cannot even easily get to Windsor itself, so I do hope you will come back to the conclusion that the original idea was not a sound one and that Slough should be left as it is, if that is alright.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is fine, thank you very much. Again, any clarifications? (None). No, well thank you very much for coming in and making the representation today.

MR KNIBBS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, our next speaker ---

THE SECRETARY: We do not have anybody now.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh, right.

THE SECRETARY: Sorry, can I just check, are you by any chance Dr Hallett who has just arrived? (No).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, we do not have any speakers until 10.50 am so we will adjourn until 10.50 am and reconvene at that point. Thanks very much.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 10.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We were due to restart at 10.50 am but our speaker has not, as yet, turned up so I am going to adjourn for a further 15 minutes to give her the opportunity of attending and we will see where we are in 15 minutes' time. So at 11.05 am we will resume. Thank you.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 11.05 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am adjourning until 12.15 pm, okay?

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 12.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are you happy to talk now rather than at 12.30 pm? (Affirmative response). Okay, so just so you are aware, everything is being filmed and recorded so it is a record of our proceedings and as a consequence I would ask that you state your name and your address and allegiance at the beginning and then we will have up to 10 minutes for your presentation or representations and then at the end if anybody wants to seek a point of clarification they have got that opportunity.

MRS WADE: My name is Elizabeth Wade, I live at 28, Polstead Road, which is in the St Margaret's ward. I am the Liberal Democrat City Councillor for St Margaret's ward and also Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Our leader Andrew Gant cannot be here today so I have been asked to make the official opposition case in his place. This, as you will appreciate, is different from the ruling Labour group's position. St Margaret's is one of a ladder of five wards. They start in the south with Jericho and Osney then they go through North St Margaret's, Summertown and finally Wolvercote. These five wards take us from the centre of the town up to the ring road and the green belt. It is what is known locally as North Oxford, that whole area of five wards. I understand that where it can, the Boundary Commission uses the electoral wards as building blocks for the constituencies and further that it does not take any account of voting patterns, so I will not mention anything to do with either of those factors. But that leaves me with one matter on which you will need evidence from me, which is the extent to which local ties would be broken if St Margaret's ward and North ward were to be moved east into the Oxford East constituency. I would like to make four points on this.

This northern ladder of wards is homogenous in terms of its history and its architecture. I have written a book 'A Corner of North Oxford', which is a history of this area and it has been clear to me over the time when I was writing it that this area needs to be taken as a spine. It has got a great deal of similarities both in its history and its architecture. The southern and central wards, Summertown, North and Jericho and Osney contain an internationally famous conservation area which we are currently fighting to protect, with the full support of the Summertown St Margaret's Neighbourhood Forum. This is a coalition of ward councillors and activists who are creating a neighbourhood plan to encompass both Summertown and St Margaret's wards. This is now in its final draft and ready for public consultation once it has been approved by the City Council. There are four community centres in the five wards and two of them, the North Oxford Community Centre in Summertown and St Margaret's Institute in St Margaret's, are used extensively by the residents in the all the five wards both for day-to-day activities – there are children's clubs, there is a club for people with early dementia, it is constantly busy – and it is also used for celebrations; street parties, hustings, special birthdays and weddings. They form the twin hubs of North Oxford life and this is an energetic, urban community, very articulate and easily roused to action. It is an interesting place to live. If North and St Margaret's were removed from

OxWAb there would be a gap in the North Oxford community and it has evolved organically, I would say, over the last 150 years. It is of a piece.

Another point I would like to make about the area is that while there are close community ties between the five North Oxford wards there are no such ties with Wheatley, Garsington and Horspath, Sandford and the Whittenhams, which are essentially villages, albeit they are overgrown in size. There is no reason apart from personal connections for residents from these eastern villages to come to North Oxford or west Oxfordshire or vice versa. Their inclusion in OxWAb will change the balance of the constituency from combined urban and rural, as it is at the present, to predominantly rural.

Another point is that the St Margaret's county division extends across parts of Summertown, St Margaret's and North wards. If the initial proposal is accepted there would be difficulties for our County Councillor, whom I have discussed this with, in representing wards which would then be in different constituencies.

A further point is if the initial proposal goes ahead, Jericho and Osney would be isolated, islanded, from the rest of North Oxford. This is not in line with its history and I would be grateful if the Commissioners would take into account the recommendation which is about to be made in the current appraisal of the North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area, which is a bit of a mouthful, we usually call it 'The Novsca Area'. The recommendation is that Novsca should be merged with Walton Manor Conservation Area and assuming that this happens, and it seems entirely logical, Summertown St Margaret's, North and Jericho Osney will all form part of the same conservation area.

Finally, OxWAb is at present within 5 per cent of the electoral quota at 75,606. Of course, these figures do not show the people who dropped off the list on the switch to individual registration and we believe that that will have been substantial in the North Oxford area because we have so many students and short term people living here – all the new voters who registered before the referendum. But given the figures we have it would seem reasonable to leave the current constituency boundary as it is.

To summarise, our main arguments against the Commissioners' proposals are:

- (1) The proposed OxWAb constituency would be made up of parts of four different councils. This would make representing this seat extremely complex for the parliamentary candidate elected.
- (2) The proposed OxWAb would include only a small part of Oxford city, and because of the new shape of it, it would effectively split the constituency into two halves so it would be difficult to represent both halves well.
- (3) The proposed OxWAb would contain such a small part of south Oxfordshire, effectively those three enlarged villages, that again, that area might not be well represented.

(4) As I have already said, there are no community ties between the south Oxfordshire wards and the rest of the OxWAb community.

(5) There are strong community ties between the south Oxfordshire wards and both Oxford East and the Henley and Thame constituencies.

(6) Finally, the current proposal is very unbalanced for the city of Oxford between the two constituencies, a revised proposal retaining North and St Margaret's would create an Oxford West and Abingdon seat that contains a reasonable proportion of the city and is more closely identifiable as Oxford West for its Oxford portion.

Thank you for listening to me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Does anybody have a question? (No response) No, okay, well thank you very much for that comprehensive representation.

MRS WADE: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Now, have we got somebody else?

THE SECRETARY: No, not until 1 pm.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Not until 1 pm, okay, so we will adjourn until 1 pm.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 1 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our 1 pm speaker has not arrived as yet but I think we will give him a few more minutes before adjourning. We will just wait and see if he turns up.

THE SECRETARY: Mr Turner has just arrived.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ah, right, that is good. Mr Turner has just arrived. Somebody has booked for 2.30 pm but the previous speaker said that that person, Dr Andrew Gant, cannot attend so I think although there is a booking we probably will not have a speaker at 2.30 pm. Okay, Mr Turner, welcome. If you could take a seat there, I will tell you how it all operates. So, we are videoing everything because it is for the public record and a transcript will be made available so that everybody can comment on everybody else's propositions. So you have 10 minutes to make whatever representation you like, you must introduce yourself, your name and your address for the record and at the end if anybody wants a point of clarification they can ask you to just clarify something. So, whenever you are ready please.

MR TURNER: Tom Turner, address, St Catherine's College, Manor Road, Oxford, OX1 3UJ. So, based on the criteria that I have been given for the Boundary Review I would like to express support for the Oxford area boundaries, so Oxford East and Oxford West. Obviously it is regrettable that it had to happen in the way it did with registration being so low at the time but I do not think there is a better option. So I would like to express support for that.

A few other constituencies around the place; a recommendation on Spelthorne – to keep the Chertsey ward in the current constituency and include the Thorpe ward instead. I do this on the grounds that the two wards have similar kinds of transport links to the Spelthorne area, whilst including Thorpe does not split a town in half, whereas including half of Chertsey does. I also want to mention the possibility of thinking again about the name for the Buckingham constituency, given the inclusion of two wards from Milton Keynes, whether that is something like Buckingham and Wolverton or Buckingham and Stony Stratford. It is something to think about, but I think that given the fact that you are including --- particularly in the urban part of Milton Keynes, I think it is important to acknowledge that.

Another thing that might be worth thinking about in future would be the extent to which you can cross regional boundaries, if it is agreed, which boundaries you are going to cross beforehand, because I think in certain areas – ones that come to mind include Peterborough and Milton Keynes – I think you could get more representative constituencies if you were willing to cross the regional line. For example, areas like Olney would be much better paired up with either a part of Northamptonshire or part of Bedfordshire, with that being a much more appropriate seat than taking bits of Milton Keynes out of that area.

I think I will leave it at that for now, the only other thing – but I accept it will probably be too difficult to do given the extent --- given the fact that you are trying to maintain current boundaries – would be to think about including, I think it is Ardingly and Balcombe, the wards just to the south of Crawley, including Pease Pottage, in with Crawley rather than Copthorne and Worth but I accept that that is very difficult because it means you are splitting the Horsham constituency and you would have to change Horsham and Mid Sussex more than it is perhaps worth, even though I think that arrangement would better represent the communities that feel included in Crawley than the current proposal does.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay.

MR TURNER: I think I will leave it there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thanks for that. I will just give anybody the opportunity who might want a question. (No response). No, so do not forget you can make written representations by 5 December I think it is.

THE SECRETARY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And, you know, if other points come to mind that you want to express, and that just leaves me to thank you very much for coming and taking the time to share that with us.

MR TURNER: Excellent, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks. So, given we do not have anybody else before lunch, I suggest we adjourn for lunch and return at 2.30 pm. And I think we are going to clear the room at lunchtime. Okay.

After the luncheon adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, shall we resume? Welcome to Mr Wilson and Mr Day. So, it is up to you which one of you goes first and you each have 10 minutes to say what you want to say. Because this is an issue of public record the whole thing is being videoed and recorded so at the start of your intervention if you could just give your name and address and who you are and then right at the end if anybody else in the audience wants to seek clarification on a point then we will do that. So, Mr Wilson?

MR WILSON: (Labour Party) My name is Kevin Wilson, I am a councillor in Milton Keynes I am also a member of the Labour Party on whose behalf I am speaking today, on behalf of Milton Keynes South constituency party. And I am also leader of Woughton Community Council, the parish council for part of the area, and I will be speaking on their behalf as well, but I will indicate when I am speaking on their behalf, yes, okay? If that makes sense. Now, we left the papers with your officials, but could you help me just to run through logic of what I am saying if I can leave them with you as well. (Same handed).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR WILSON: I am tempted to start by saying that none of us would have started from where we are or where you are in terms of the rules that govern your procedure and in terms of some of the constraints, and particularly in our case the requirement to stick to a 5 per cent variation on the quota and particularly the edict which is from the Commission rather than the government that actually you are not really prepared to cross regional boundaries. Now, I know that you have said that you would consider in exceptional circumstances but our reading for that is, frankly, it is virtually not worth proposing.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is a high bar.

MR WILSON: Exactly so, exactly so. So we are not proposing to breach any of those bars and therefore that constrains us in what we can say and what alternatives we could produce and that is particularly the case because Milton Keynes, as you will be aware – which I am talking about principally – is at the very north of the South East

region, surrounded in fact on three sides by either the Eastern region or the East Midlands region and that does constrain us. For the last quite a good number of years we have enjoyed two constituencies which have been coterminous with the borough of Milton Keynes. Now, it is quite clear that the numbers this time do not stack up and unusually, despite the reduction in the number of members of parliament, we will have to lose electorate rather than gain electorate, such is the size of the electorates in Milton Keynes at this moment in time.

Now, what I want to do is just to point out what we believe to be the difficulties that that has ensued [sic] and what the alternatives might be. The Commission's initial proposals, if I may call them that, or tentative proposals, have created a constituency, for instance, which is 35 miles in length, from New Bradwell which is in the Wolverton ward in Milton Keynes all the way to Princes Risborough, which is actually in the Wycombe district, not even in Aylesbury Vale. You are proposing that two wards from Milton Keynes, and we concur by the way that it has to be two wards to fit in with all the rules and caveats we mentioned, that the two wards from Milton Keynes which are annexed to Buckingham, if I can use that expression, are Stony Stratford and Wolverton. Now, from much of Stony Stratford and from all of Wolverton the natural road route to Buckingham and the rest of the constituency is actually via Northamptonshire on the A422. So from Milton Keynes you would travel via Northamptonshire through the whole of Aylesbury Vale and eventually to Wycombe, a more difficult constituency and more unnatural constituency you would be very hard pressed to find at any time. And remember, of course, Milton Keynes being a unitary authority, has not been part of Buckinghamshire in local government terms, now, for many years.

Now, the other thing about the Commission's proposals which we want to point out is that they split Wolverton and Greenleys Town Council, Parish Council, into two constituencies. It is actually impossible – and we tried every which way but loose – when you are using ward boundaries as the building block, which were revised in Milton Keynes only in 2014, it is impossible to avoid splitting parishes entirely. But it is always unfortunate when a parish is split into two different constituencies and this particular split we believe is a particularly sensitive division and one to be avoided if at all possible.

Now that brings me to what we are proposing. We believe that a somewhat better proposal than has been produced would be to switch Tattenhoe and Wolverton wards, that is to say that Wolverton ward would move from what you are calling Buckingham to what you are calling Milton Keynes Bletchley, whereas Tattenhoe would move in the opposite direction from what you are calling Milton Keynes Bletchley to what you are calling Buckingham. And that fits electorally and with numbers, as you will see in a moment. If I could just at this stage refer you to the two maps which I gave you, (indicating) on the second and the third sheet, the first map – and I am sorry this is in black and white but I am sure it is nonetheless reasonably visible – it shows the proposals that you have made, showing Wolverton and Stony Stratford ward moving into Buckingham with the rest of Milton Keynes divided into two. And the second map (indicating) shows the fact of the change, or the alternative, that I have just suggested,

that is to say Wolverton going into the Milton Keynes Bletchley seat and Tattenhoe going into the Buckingham seat. We believe that is a much better match for a whole host of reasons which I will come to.

Firstly, and all numbers still work within the quota numbers which you are detailing, and incidentally I show that to be absolutely certain on the final of my four pages showing what the electoral numbers were as of the December 2015 figures. (Indicating). It is still far from ideal but the proposal first of all reduces by about 2,500 the number of Milton Keynes electors that would have to move into the Buckingham seat. Given that Milton Keynes residents will feel and do feel little affinity with the rest of Buckingham or Buckinghamshire as a whole, the lower the numbers that have to transfer, we would contend, the better. As it happens, Stony Stratford and Tattenhoe are the two wards in Milton Keynes with the lowest electorates and therefore by using those two wards it reduces to a minimum the number of Milton Keynes electors that would need to be in Buckingham constituency whilst still working within the maximum tolerance in the two Milton Keynes seats.

Another point we are stressing is that Wolverton ward lies wholly to the east of the A5D, which other than the M1 is the main road that runs through Milton Keynes – the A5 Diversion to be absolutely clear what it is – whereas Stony Stratford ward lies wholly to the west of the same major road. Tattenhoe also lies to the west of the A5D so therefore the A5D, we believe, is a significant barrier which needs to be taken into consideration. Tattenhoe is all very new housing, I mean literally pretty much all within the last five years or so and as such it has got far less historical connections, therefore, with Milton Keynes. It has still got connections but less history there. Although that is not the case with Stony Stratford town itself, much of the Stony Stratford ward is in fact equally new city housing including, though not yet included in your figures, a brand new area called the Western Expansion Area, where 8,000 homes are currently being built as we speak. All, therefore, with less connection with Milton Keynes than Wolverton itself.

Wolverton is largely older housing. It includes the community of New Bradwell right at its far eastern point, which again is old housing with very strong connections and strong historical ties with Milton Keynes. Wolverton lies on the West Coast railway line, as does Bletchley, each with their own stations. Both of them are historical railway towns. Wolverton for its railway works where the Queen's carriages were always made and repaired and Bletchley as a major stopping point, historically, on the West Coast line. And both, as a consequence, have a strong connection one to the other. Tattenhoe, on the other hand, has the best connections of any ward in Milton Keynes to Buckingham, not now via the A422 but via the A421 which is on its southern border and is the closest housing in Milton Keynes to Buckingham, served, for instance, by the X5 bus service, which provides a regular service from Milton Keynes to Buckingham and indeed beyond to Oxford and in the other direction to Cambridge, as it happens.

Now, they are the key reasons why we are suggesting you do this quite small switch. It is worth saying at this stage that we considered a number of other alternatives. We

managed to map nine alternatives to your proposal that worked mathematically. Some of them, however, would produce such odd shapes that I could not possibly suggest them to you. This one we think actually improves the shape, makes it clearer and makes it better. But what I do want to suggest to you is that whatever outcome is determined, whether you stick to your original proposals or whether you take this alternative, then we do suggest very strongly some changes in the names of the constituencies that you have proposed.

First of all, it would be unfortunate in the extreme if the Buckingham constituency did not include a reference to Milton Keynes in its name and we would suggest something like Milton Keynes – or MK if you wanted to be particularly modern in its title – MK West or Milton Keynes West. In the case of Milton Keynes Bletchley, and it is worth pointing out here that Bletchley is but a small part of your proposed constituency, in fact of the three wards in Bletchley, none of them are wholly within Bletchley. All of them stretch outside what is commonly known. In terms of Bletchley East the Newton Leys Estate is commonly thought of as outside Bletchley. In Bletchley Park, Granby Court is commonly thought of as outside Bletchley and in Bletchley West the estates of Furzton and Emerston Valley are commonly thought of as outside Bletchley. So only a small proportion of that constituency is in Bletchley, the rest of the constituency would not associate with the name and we would suggest something like Milton Keynes Central would be a much better phrase for that. And in terms of the other remaining constituency, again, and probably even worse, the name Milton Keynes Newport Pagnell does not resonate and would not resonate with the bulk of the people living in that area. And we would suggest, again, a map reference of Milton Keynes, certainly in that one, almost certainly in Milton Keynes East, would be preferable. And we do think they are very important because if a population does not have affinity because it does not understand and recognise the name and the phrase, that would be quite significant. And Milton Keynes has always enjoyed map compass points ever since the borough was first split into two constituencies. Originally it was Milton Keynes South West and Milton Keynes North East, following the boundary changes in 2010 it became Milton Keynes South and Milton Keynes North, the map references in both cases to Milton Keynes, and we are suggesting that that pattern should continue.

Can I just turn, briefly, to my representation as a Woughton and Fishermead ward councillor and also as the leader of Woughton Community Council, which encompasses all of that ward except for the estate of Fishermead, which is the very northern bit, which seems to stick out. We are, frankly, disappointed to find ourselves in the constituency that we are and would wish to be co-joined with Central Milton Keynes and Bletchley. However, we have not been able to find an alternative proposal to meet the rules that would allow all of those combinations, so with some great, great reluctance we are probably suggesting to you that is as good as we can find. However, we would want to double emphasise the point that I just made about the name: for Woughton and Fishermead to be in a constituency which is essentially called Newport Pagnell would be an anathema and a ridicule one step too far. So the names are important to the representations that we are making.

I do not think --- I mean I think that will probably conclude what I needed to say. I am more than happy to answer any questions or clarification or anything that you may wish.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Does anybody have a question? Yes, please? And do not forget to say who you are and where you are from.

MR KINGSWOOD: My name is Kingswood, I am from the neighbouring county of Berkshire, so Windsor constituency, which is a piece of arithmetic that is --- right. You have mentioned two wards that you are recommending to go into a Buckingham county constituency, one is Tatten [hoe], pardon my hearing is not good, and the other one beginning with a W --- was it ---?

MR WILSON: No, just to clarify, the Commission themselves, for initial proposals, put two Milton Keynes wards into the Buckingham constituency ---

MR KINGSWOOD: Yes, agreed.

MR WILSON: --- one being Stony Stratford and the other being Wolverton. We are suggesting that Stony Stratford is as per the Commission's proposals but that Wolverton stays in a Milton Keynes seat and that as quid pro quo that the ward of Tattenhoe moves into the Buckingham constituency.

MR KINGSWOOD: So, Tattenhoe comes into a Milton Keynes ---?

MR WILSON: No, no. Tattenhoe would move from Milton Keynes Bletchley, as they have called it, to Buckingham.

MR KINGSWOOD: Yes, but that is your MK Central.

MR WILSON: And Wolverton would move from, the proposals would have it, in Buckingham to, the proposals would have it, which is what I have called Milton Keynes Central.

MR KINGSWOOD: Right, that seems clear. Okay, and you are suggesting compass points which are a clear, understandable and neutral ---

MR WILSON: Absolutely.

MR KINGSWOOD: Thank you.

MR WILSON: In all three cases.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I wonder if I might ask just one question?

MR WILSON: Of course.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You mentioned that Tattenhoe is all very new housing and also that Stony Stratford has a large western expansion area; those two large scale developments, presumably, are part of the Milton Keynes development plan?

MR WILSON: Yes, and so is Stony Stratford and so is Wolverton.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR WILSON: The area of the new city, that was designated as long ago as 1967, included the vast bulk of Milton Keynes, including Bletchley, Wolverton and Stony Stratford and New Bradwell. It did not, interestingly, include Newport Pagnell. But frankly, the residents of that boundary have now largely disappeared, the Statutory Development Corporation has long since gone, etcetera, so you just take the example of Wolverton, it has lots of regeneration and lots of linkages with Milton Keynes, lots of historical connections, and it was an important objective of the then masterplan in 1967 that Milton Keynes encompassed the older towns, which I have mentioned, and, as it were, all the development that has taken place in between them to join them up together. And I am actually making the observation that so successful has that been that the older towns feel a much stronger Milton Keynes connection than some of the new areas, which I think will do over time, but at this moment in time for the new people just moved in from all over the country, probably feel less Milton Keynesian than those that have been there a long time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much. Now, our next speaker is – if I get the right piece of paper – Paul Day.

MR DAY: (Labour Party) Thank you. Yes, thank you for seeing me. I am Paul Day, I am Chair of Milton Keynes Labour Party, on whose behalf I am speaking, and because of our constituency base, I am speaking on behalf of Milton Keynes North. So, thank you very much for having the opportunity to give feedback today. We have listened, since the proposals have come out, to our members and to the wider population and I would report to you that there is a big resistance to any part of Milton Keynes having to leave Milton Keynes and we do our best to explain to people why that is. And so really part of what I am going to say is talking about how you get that communication out as well and generally if we can help assist the Commission in doing so we would like to do so and we are well aware of the challenges you have got in fixing the rules and --- or fixing to the rules, rather, and what those rules are. So there are clearly multiple options that affect Milton Keynes and as my colleague said, we have looked at a number of possibilities.

What the public do not get from the proposal is why that option has been chosen and if there is a mechanism when the second proposal comes out to explain why that option was taken. I think that would be helpful in getting that communication out, that would be our suggestion and if we can help with that we would like to. But we have looked at multiple options that affect just the three Milton Keynes constituencies, we

have --- in our look, we have tried not to bump Buckingham so that it moves down the rest of the region because we understand that would be hugely complex.

So, in terms of the identity of Milton Keynes, many people do not know which constituency they are in, they do not know if they are in the North or the South. If you ask the average person in Milton Keynes I would argue that they would not know, because the identity is very much Milton Keynes. People know, 'Oh, I am in one of the two Milton Keynes constituencies', and in fact even the local media talk about them as if it was a two MP double constituency, that is the way that it is represented to the public. And so it would be unfortunate for any of the wards that have to leave and join with the Buckingham – as I will call it – constituency, but we understand, absolutely, that is the rules of it.

So, looking at your proposal, there was a number of factors which we absolutely commend. There was lots of speculation before your proposal that you might suggest that Bletchley be split, and we would highly commend the fact that you have not split Bletchley in your proposal and really encourage you, should you be looking at alternatives having gone through this consultation process, not to accept any that encourage a split of Bletchley. Similarly, Newport Pagnell, again, absolutely right that Newport Pagnell's two wards are connected and a proposal to split those would not be popular locally and would not be understood locally. So again, we highly commend that.

So understanding that some wards must go, understand that Stony Stratford is a good candidate to go. As my colleague has indicated there is a massive development, that western development area, so that population of 8,000 households do not exist yet. As human beings they exist but they are not in Milton Keynes so they do not have the affinity to the rest of Milton Keynes yet, they are new, whereas the villages in that area on which this development is being superimposed do have quite an affinity and quite a lot of similarity with the rest of the villages which move their way from Stony Stratford all the way across to Buckingham. So in the current status it makes sense for it to move across and in the future status because that will be a new development, it does make sense. And it is worth noting that the number of households being built in that area is equivalent to the number of households in Newport Pagnell. This is a very, very big development of houses.

But there is elements of the proposal which we are unhappy with, or which we would recommend you look at again, particularly the regional boundaries. I happen to be, I am not speaking on their behalf, but I happen to be a Newport Pagnell Town Councillor and whilst I am very proud to live in Newport Pagnell the rest of that constituency does not associate itself with Newport Pagnell at all and it will be similar for Bletchley, so those geographic compass point names – whatever they might be once you have got your final proposal, North, South, East, West, North East, South West, whichever they might be – is going to be a far better set of names, in our view, and will be understood by people. And also they will understand the division by that.

In terms of the identity of Milton Keynes, as I said, everybody in the borough thinks of themselves as Milton Keynes, there are some people who have lived a long time in the villages who still think they still live in those villages or towns but the Milton Keynes identity is very, very strong. Within the new city development, which you touched on a little while ago, there are what we call locally 'grid squares', so you will be familiar with the road system [which] cuts the area up into grids with vertical and horizontal roads in between. Each grid square has an identity, but also in Milton Keynes we have villages in the rural areas that have a certain identity and we have those towns. Now, I have already talked about Newport Pagnell and Bletchley, two of those key towns, and your proposal keeps them together, which is fantastic. Olney is a key town but it sits within its own ward so no solution would split Olney. Stony Stratford sits within a ward so whether it comes or goes into either constituency at least the town sits together. But it is Wolverton that your proposal seeks to split and we think that is a big issue for the community of Wolverton because there is that Wolverton Town Council identity for the local community and to have two MPs would be complex and difficult to understand we think.

So, by our calculations, the option if Stony Stratford is going is that Tattenhoe is the other ward that goes to meet the rules of the Review. There are benefits, or there are reasons why it would make sense for it to go but numerically and by the rules of the Review we calculate that it is only that ward, if it is Stony and another that must go, it seems to be Tattenhoe is the other one that goes. And we do think the shape, the positioning of the ward, it is a tidier boundary it will be understood locally very, very much. So that was really it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That was very helpful, thank you very much. I am just looking to see if anybody has questions. (No response). No, so thank you very much for coming today and making those representations.

MR DAY: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Now, we have one more but they are not here I think.

THE SECRETARY: Not as yet.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Not as yet, so we will hang on for five minutes or so to see if our next speaker does in fact show up.

After a short adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You have ten minutes to make your presentation or representations. Ah, I have to wait. My second point will become obvious. So, welcome. Because these hearings are recorded in the public record so that everybody knows what is going on, we are doing that by means of video and audio recording, so in starting your presentation if you could just say who you are, who you represent and where you live, that would be great. And then at the end of your 10

minutes it is possible that if there is anybody else in the chamber, or myself, we might ask for a point of clarification, not to debate what you say but just to be clear. So the floor is yours.

CLLR BAKER: (Conservative Party) Okay, thank you. I am used to being recorded. My name is Keith Baker, I am a councillor, I am the leader of Wokingham Borough Council and also the leader of Woodley Town Council. So, good afternoon and thank you for giving me this chance to speak to you. At the outset can I say that both these councils fully endorse your recommendations, which only impact a single ward within Wokingham borough. This minimal change greatly helps the leadership of Wokingham borough, which already has to manage an interaction with four local MPs. Whilst the bulk of the borough is within the existing Wokingham constituency, the remaining few wards in adjacent constituencies are small wards, either single member or two member wards, reflecting their size. There is one notable exception, which is the town of Woodley, which is predominantly in Reading East. As leader of the town council I am very pleased that you have suggested leaving it exactly as it is. Let me explain why I believe it is essential to keep as much of Woodley together from a parliamentary perspective.

Woodley town is a thriving and self-sustaining town. It is built around a key town centre with major banks, supermarkets, chemist, restaurants, a library, doctors' surgery and independent retailers. The town centre rarely has many empty retail units, reflecting the demand for retailers to enter the town. A thriving town centre events operation is in place with markets and various functions taking place throughout the year managed by a fully funded town centre manager. Close to the centre is a small country park containing a lake, grassed areas, leisure centre, major sports facilities such as football, cricket pitches and tennis courts. The town centre and the rest of the town are serviced by a strong bus network linking it to Reading and other areas. The town is managed by officers and politicians based in a relatively new building which houses community rooms and a small theatre. This building geographically links the town centre with the small country park. Any changes to the make-up of the town from a parliamentary perspective would seriously impinge on the cohesiveness of the community and would effectively strain these local ties. Whilst there is already one small two member ward, that is not in the Reading East constituency, it is located on the northern edge of the town and is really too small to have any effect on the community.

Now let me turn to your one suggestion of moving the Maiden Erlegh ward from Wokingham into Reading East. Whilst I strongly support leaving Woodley as it currently is I do not have a problem with this proposal. This ward is part of Earley town, which is a bit of a hybrid combination, unlike Woodley, which is a solid community. This town is really split into Lower Earley, Maiden Erlegh and Whitegates area. The bulk of it is Lower Earley, which was at its time of building one of the largest new housing projects in the UK. Tacked on to it is the smaller wards of Maiden Erlegh and Whitegates, and Whitegates is actually part of another ward. This housebuilding approach has restricted the development of a town centre, which there is none, and a community for the whole of Earley. This is in total contrast to Woodley. On that basis, the local ties for the Maiden Erlegh ward are not as strong as those of Woodley and

the impact of moving that into Reading East is minimal. In terms of geographical location this ward is adjacent to the existing boundary of Reading East on both the Reading side and the Woodley side. This makes it a very easy task of simply expanding the then boundary to incorporate the Maiden Erlegh ward.

As I close can I can reiterate my position as leader of Wokingham Borough Council. We already have to deal with four different MPs, as I have already explained, with one MP having the huge majority of our geographical area, and the other three on the edges with smaller areas. The difficulty of dealing with four MPs is not as bad as it might appear but it is a fine balance which at the moment is manageable. However, any large scale changes to this existing balance, for example moving many more wards into constituencies other than the existing Wokingham one would alter the balance significantly. That, in turn, would increase the complexities of dealing with issues which are of a national nature where an MP's involvement is critical to resolving them. The current split across those four MPs works well for our residents and therefore I am extremely pleased that your proposals do not impact that balance, which is why I fully support them.

Finally, a brief word on the naming of the main constituency, Wokingham. Many residents, and indeed councillors too, feel that a name that focuses on a single town within that constituency creates totally the wrong impression. The constituency other town, Earley, and many parishes, all feel unrecognised through the current name. This is an issue that the borough has as well, and we have – through your good works – an opportunity to address this once and for all for the parliamentary constituency. Therefore I do support my party's recommendation that it should be renamed Mid Berkshire. Thank you for listening.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Questions? (No response). No, well thank you very much indeed for coming, we very much appreciate it.

CLLR BAKER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Now, we will adjourn until 5 pm.

Time Noted: 5 pm

After an adjournment

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think it is very important to put on the record that we are going to adjourn for another hour until 7 pm. But that is likely to be our last adjournment, provided nobody shows any interest. Righto, good, good.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 7 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, it is 7 pm, nobody is booked in, so we will adjourn until tomorrow. Do you want to just tell us who is booked in tomorrow? Or how many people at what ---

THE SECRETARY: So we have four people booked in for tomorrow from 2.30 pm, but obviously we will be here from 9 am for anybody who wishes to come and speak to us.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, well, those of you who have enthusiasm, we will see you tomorrow.

Adjourned until 9.00 am on Tuesday 25 October 2016

Time noted: 7.00 pm

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