

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

TUESDAY 25 OCTOBER 2016
DAY TWO

Before:

Mr Colin Byrne, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

Transcribed from audio by W B Gurney & Sons LLP
83 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HW
Telephone Number: 020 3585 4721/22

Time Noted: 9 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, welcome to day two in Oxford. As you can see, the house is packed, but nevertheless we are going to adjourn until 10 am.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 10 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is 10 am, and the news is, wait for it, we are going to adjourn until 11 am.

Time Noted: 11 am

After an adjournment

THE SECRETARY: Whenever you are ready, sir.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, adjourned until 12 pm.

Time Noted: 12 pm

After an adjournment

THE SECRETARY: Ready when you are, sir.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. So shall we reconvene ---?

THE SECRETARY: I think now we would reconvene at 2 pm? Yes, I think --- lunch is at 1 pm.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I was thinking maybe 12.45 pm.

THE SECRETARY: Just in case, yes?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Because after 1 pm you know there is nobody --- you know, people ought not to come.

THE SECRETARY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And then we will have from 12.45 pm until 2.30 pm. Is it 2.30 pm?

THE SECRETARY: We have our first speaker at 2.30 pm.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So we can reconvene at 2.15 pm or something?

THE SECRETARY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, we are adjourned until 12.45 pm.

After an adjournment

Time Noted 12.45 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, so we are going to resume at 2.15 pm. Thank you.

After the luncheon adjournment

Time Noted: 2.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, welcome, so we are on day two and you are our first participant, so thank you for coming. I believe Mr Lawrence Renshell is going to speak first. If you would not mind coming down to that position there? Everything is recorded for the public record and so if you would not mind just saying who you are where you are from that would be great. Do feel free to sit down.

MR RENSHELL: (Conservative Party) Will it work better if I am sitting as opposed to standing?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think so.

MR RENSHELL: Okay, that is fine.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So there is ten minutes and if we have got any questions of clarification we will ask you at the end or if anybody else wants to ask you a question of clarification then that is fine. So, over to you.

MR RENSHELL: Okay, my name is Lawrence Renshell and I am currently the Chairman of the Buckingham Conservative Association. I live at Stonecroft, 1a Spring Lane, Great Horwood, Milton Keynes, MK17 0QP, and I have lived there for 30 years but have lived in the constituency for more than 50. I am submitting this statement on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Buckingham Association, who met last week to discuss, among other things, the Commission's proposals for this constituency. Over the years there have been a number of boundary reviews, mainly because of the rural nature of the constituency, I believe we are the largest geographically within the county. We agree with the proposal put forward by the Boundary Commission for the north of the constituency, that the wards of Stony Stratford and Wolverton are moved back into the Buckingham constituency but have one minor change in the south which we hope you will consider.

I will put forward the submission for supporting the Commission's proposals to include Stony Stratford and Wolverton in the constituency and I have asked our agent Evelyn Joy to submit the case for returning the Wing ward in Buckingham and moving the Waddesdon ward into the Aylesbury constituency. Now, Stony Stratford and Wolverton were part of the Buckingham constituency as far back as 1918. We believe they have a strong historical link to the constituency. This was in the days of the rural districts which ran from 1918 to 1950. They continued to be a part of the Buckingham constituency even when the rural districts changed to the urban districts in 1983 as part of the new borough of Milton Keynes. It was not until 1992 when a rare interim review of the constituency boundaries led to Milton Keynes being split into two separate constituencies, North East Milton Keynes and Milton Keynes South West. At this point Wolverton and Stony Stratford moved from Buckingham to the part of the Milton Keynes South West which has continued until this review.

As for the proposed boundary changes for 2015, which did not take place, the Labour Party argued that Stony Stratford and Wolverton should be treated as one and not split from each other. We agree with the sentiment and we continue to agree the current Boundary Commission's recommendations that they become part of the Buckingham constituency and are treated as a whole. Both Stony Stratford and Wolverton predate the new city of Milton Keynes and we feel that they have more in common with the long-established towns and villages of North Bucks. Also, the secondary modern school, the John Radcliffe, draw the majority of their students from both these areas. I have been advised that residents of the old Buckingham constituency, including residents of Stony Stratford and Wolverton who are unable to make representations today will be writing to the Commission to back the proposals.

Finally, we wish, as agreed, to be called the Buckingham constituency, the constituency runs from Turweston, which is near Brackley, in the north, to Princes Risborough in the south, and Boarstall in the west, which runs virtually to the M40, to the proposed Stony Stratford and Wolverton wards. The constituency covers a large area and we feel that the continued use of the name of the Buckingham constituency takes all areas into account. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Any questions from anybody? (None). No, thank you very much.

MR RENSHELL: Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And for the historical perspective. So, Mrs Joy? So, whenever you are ready.

MRS JOY: Thank you. My name is Evelyn Joy and I am the Conservative agent for the Buckingham Conservative Association and have been since October 1997. I live at 34, Buckingham Road, Winslow and have lived there since 1998. Part of my job is dealing with local residents who probably do not have any political affiliation to anybody but who contact the office for assistance from their Member of Parliament or

their local councillors. Boundary changes are never easy to explain to residents, if in need of help or advice they get used to dealing with somebody and relying on their support. This review, however, is the exception to that rule, as it is understood by most, and accepted, that the proposed is to equalise the amount of residents a local Member of Parliament is responsible for. Our Chairman has outlined in great detail why we strongly support the Commission's proposal for the north of the constituency and it is for similar reasons, using our same principles, that we would ask you to consider one small change to the proposal in the south. Our proposal would be to keep the Wing ward in the Buckingham constituency and return the Waddesdon ward to the Aylesbury constituency. The Wing ward consists of 2,321 electors and the Waddesdon ward, 2,196. The change would mean a change in the constituency figures as follows: Buckingham would have 77,205 and Aylesbury 77,590, and both would be within the Commission's quota.

The reasons we are asking for these changes are as follows: Wing, like Stony Stratford and Wolverton has historic links to the Buckingham constituency, in fact it predates the rural and urban districts going back as far as 1918; Buckingham is also probably one of the very few constituencies that have retained the same name in that time, and that name in actual fact can be traced back to 1885 so it is quite historic. I believe the residents of Wing look to the towns in the north, like Buckingham, Winslow and more recently the town of Milton Keynes, for all their shopping and leisure activities. The addition of the Leighton Buzzard bypass takes them into Bletchley on to the A421 straight into Buckingham, Winslow or Milton Keynes. This has also made travelling to London much easier as it gives them access to a mainline train station in Leighton Buzzard. I also believe that retaining the Wing ward would form a natural division between the Buckingham and the Aylesbury constituencies. As far as Waddesdon is concerned, the Waddesdon ward is situated on the A41, probably 10 minutes' drive away from the centre of Aylesbury and that ward only moved into the Buckingham constituency in 1983 when there was a pressing need to form a third constituency in the north of the county. The new Riverside ward in fact links Aylesbury and Waddesdon together and with the possibility of further development in Fleet Marston you will soon see Waddesdon being the continuation of the residential development from Aylesbury and making it part of an urban sprawl. The new Aylesbury Parkway station on the A41 gives residents easy access to London and the vast array of large retail stores opening up, again, along the A41 and the new theatre in Aylesbury would be where the residents look to for their shopping and leisure activities. Also, because of its close proximity to Aylesbury it is not unusual for local residents to contact the Aylesbury Member of Parliament first when they need help or advice, because they actually believe they are part of that constituency.

And finally, I realise that it would make the Aylesbury constituency look a bit of an odd shape, but I believe the links and ties that Waddesdon has with Aylesbury far outweigh the shape, and for this reason we hope that you will give it some serious consideration. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Could I just ask one question, I am aware that Aylesbury is an expanding town so is an area of development, then,

out at that north west end of Aylesbury, is that where a lot of the new housing is going to go?

MRS JOY: The area is called Berryfields, and that is just on the Aylesbury border and it is gradually coming along towards Fleet Marston. There is also possible future development going to happen in Fleet Marston although I do realise you cannot take possible development into account. But certainly the Berryfields estate is continuing to expand and actually almost links it now.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is very helpful, thank you, and thank you very much for coming.

MRS JOY: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: (After a pause). So, we are recording everything for the public record, so when you start your presentation you just need to say who you are and where you are from. You have 10 minutes, though if you want to go over we would not object, and at the end we may ask some points of clarification or indeed anybody else in the audience may ask.

MR BALE: Sir, because I have cut it down to seven minutes so you could ask me some questions you have got the benefit of the fact that I thought I had only got ten minutes full stop!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is because we are not overwhelmed with representations today! So, whenever you are ready please.

MR BALE: My name is Roger Bale, I have lived at Wenlock, Upper Warren Avenue in Caversham for 34 years, and I am here to object to the transfer of Mapledurham ward from Reading East parliamentary constituency to Reading West parliamentary constituency and to suggest alternative transfers which achieve the object of increasing the electorate of Reading West by the approximate number of Mapledurham ward, which is 2,500.

Firstly I am going to put forward the alternatives that I would ask you to bear in mind as I proceed. The transfer of a single councillor ward from another constituency contiguous with Reading West, i.e. both Kidmore End and Whitchurch, which are in South Oxfordshire and the Henley constituency, or Basildon in West Berks and the Newbury constituency, should be considered.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could I just ask you to repeat those, just so I can make a note?

MR BALE: Yes indeed. The two alternatives I am putting forward but without any supporting evidence is Kidmore End and Whitchurch in South Oxfordshire and that is the Henley constituency and Basildon in West Berks and the Newbury constituency.

The reason for those is that the Whitchurch one in particular is contiguous with Pangbourne and can be reached simply by crossing an existing river bridge.

I believe also that the Commission can consider transferring polling districts as well as complete wards and there are three wards in Reading East contiguous with Reading West, namely Abbey ward with Battle ward, Katesgrove ward with Minster ward and Whitley ward with Southcote ward, where in community terms the ward boundaries are of little or no significance because these communities straddle those boundaries.

Secondly, I am going to put the objections to transferring Mapledurham ward, making the following points and observations:

(1) Electoral factors: electors living in the same house in Mapledurham ward who have lived there for the past 43 years have been eligible at various times to vote in elections in Berkshire County Council, Henley parliamentary constituency, Mapledurham civil parish, Oxfordshire County Council, Reading East parliamentary constituency, Reading Borough Council Mapledurham ward, Reading Borough Council Thames ward, South Oxfordshire District Council, and that list will grow if Reading West parliamentary constituency is added to the list. I would not be in the least bit surprised if at the next parliamentary boundary review Mapledurham ward will return to Reading East. Why is this so? Reading East, unlike its neighbouring constituency, has no green land available for the sort of housing developments that have been recently mooted in the locality; 200 homes in the Henley constituency where it borders Reading East and 15,000 homes in Grazeley, which is to the south of the M4 south of Reading. Reading East is reliant largely on gaining wards or polling districts from other constituencies and Mapledurham ward is patently the best fit, the simplest mathematical solution. The ward has been a boundary football and the current proposal looks to extend the match into extra time, perhaps, as they say, to infinity and beyond. The match started back in 1911 when Caversham, a large Oxfordshire village which had since 1891 been governed by its own urban district council, was, despite the strong objections of 9,800 inhabitants, merged into Reading. The inhabitants of the Oxford villages that now surround Reading voice similar objections to this day, and that includes living in the village of Mapledurham, the inhabitants do not relish being urbanised or even suburbanised. Like Peppard ward, Mapledurham ward takes its name from an Oxfordshire village, which is in the Henley parliamentary constituency. Indeed, in 1977 part of Mapledurham civil parish, bordering Reading, was merged with the Borough Council. There was little resident opposition to this as the residents of the area involved looked, as they do to this day, to Caversham and Reading for their services. They were already urbanised. The land acquired included Mapledurham Playing Fields, which is the main recreation for the residents of Mapledurham ward and the adjoining Thames ward. It is also the site of The Pavilion, which is the only publicly owned building serving as a community centre for the two wards. The Pavilion is now closed due to its dilapidated state, it is in trust for the residents of the whole of Reading Borough Council and the residents of Mapledurham civil parish. Reading Borough Council, that is, its elected councillors, is the trustee. The Pavilion repairs are on hold until the outcome of the plan formulated by the education funding agency to build a Free School on part of the playing fields,

when that comes to fruition. But there are still many hurdles to clear: planning, charity commissions and a very vocal group of residents. For the ward with the playing fields within its boundaries now to be hived off into another parliamentary constituency will further militate against the whole community coming – perhaps I should have put the word ‘back’ in here – coming together to get its much-needed local school and to rebuild the community spirit.

(2) The ward’s geographical location: simply put, it is north of the Thames, none of its riverside land is in public ownership, to reach Reading West one has to cross the river to the north west at Whitchurch and to the south east by traversing two other wards at Caversham Bridge and then through another Reading East ward.

(3) The ward’s community location: as a community the residents of Mapledurham ward patently do not look to any part of Reading West unlike the other three pairs of wards I have referred to when suggesting polling district transfers. Residents of Mapledurham ward have only one civic facility within its boundary, namely Mapledurham Playing Fields. There is one local shop. For other local shops, supermarkets, petrol stations, post office, doctors, dentists, banks, building societies, libraries, schools, churches, clubs and pubs, Caversham is the destination. The central Reading shops in Broad Street, the Oracle, the Broad Street Mall are in Reading East, as are the train and bus stations, and so are the highest-scoring schools, Reading School and Kendrick School.

(4) Impact on local government: I am aware of the parameters of your remit, but being logical creatures, our decisions are not always grounded in the past so that in determining which of two parallel options we should choose, other factors will determine our choice. At the time of the 2002 Local Government Boundary Review, in order to have equal numbers of electors in each of the existing wards, it would have been necessary in Reading Borough Council to have a ward straddle the River Thames, this was considered an unbridgeable factor. In the review which led to Mapledurham ward being carved out of Thames ward in 2004, there were two main options on the table for the electorate north of the Thames, namely to have four wards, two of three councillors and two of two councillors, or three wards of three councillors and one ward of one councillor. It was the latter proposal that prevailed, making Mapledurham unique in Reading Borough Council. If this had not happened, I doubt very much that I would be here today, because the transfer to Reading West of a 6,000 or 9,000 electorate would not be a mathematical fit. The loss of Mapledurham ward from Reading East would be a hugely complicating factor in any local government reorganisation of Reading Borough Council because of the logistical difficulties that would arise from it being in Reading West.

I can say more but I will not.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. I just have one question. In the alternatives that you put forward you mentioned transfer of polling districts from Reading East to Reading West and you mentioned the wards of Battle,

Minster and Whitley. Do you have specific polling districts that you consider should be transferred across?

MR BALE: I had not considered that. I mean, if I make a further submission, I mean if that is a point worth carrying forward I would indeed do so. But, I mean, just, clearly looking at the map, if you look at where those two wards --- the boundary between the two, you can see that the communities in fact, on the whole, cross that boundary. Whereas if you look at Mapledurham it is patent that there is no way in which that boundary can be crossed other than by getting in a car, frankly, because the bus service is such that you could not do it. Or swimming. Or perhaps they could build our third bridge which we have been arguing about since, I think, when my grandfather was Mayor of Reading in 1936, they had been going at it for about 20 years then!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If only that was in my power!

MR BALE: I know!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, thank you very much for your submission and we look forward to the written submission that you are going to make.

MR BALE: Okay, thank you very much for your time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, we will adjourn until 3.30 pm.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 3.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Let us adjourn until 4.30 pm.

After an adjournment

Time Noted: 4.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, welcome and thank you for coming.

MR McCULLAGH: (Fringford Parish Council) Not at all, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The whole proceedings have been recorded and videoed by the camera there so when you start your presentation, if you could just say your name and where you are from and then you have 10 minutes to make your presentation or your representations and at the end we might ask a question of clarification.

MR McCULLAGH: So you are not --- yes, any clarifications, not a response as such?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, no, it is just if there is something that you have said that we would just like you to expand on a little more or we do not understand.

MR McCULLAGH: Certainly, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Then we will just ask you, and indeed the one member of the audience may also ask you a question if he so desires.

MR McCULLAGH: Right, okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, whenever you are ready, please, off you go.

MR McCULLAGH: So do I need to look anywhere, or ---?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, no, you can just ---

MR McCULLAGH: Okay, fine. Right, good afternoon, my name is David McCullagh, and I am the Chairman of the Parish Council at Fringford. The reason I am here this afternoon is that we are at the extreme end of the proposed new constituency boundary and we feel that we are just going to be so far removed from Henley that the practicalities are not going to work terribly well. I mean we are clearly, council-wise, in Cherwell District Council and it seems to me that the fits very well with the Banbury connection, if I can call it that, with Victoria Prentis.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR McCULLAGH: And after today's announcement about Heathrow, and I am sure that much of the preoccupation of the Henley MP is going to be trying to stop that happening, which is really, while a very laudable course of action, it is not really going to be top of our priorities, and I think we just want to ensure that we have got the local contact that we have had and we do not want to be right down this huge long strip that runs round the east side of Bicester and just feels so far removed from Henley that we are not attached at all, and that is really all I would like to say, but if there are any questions you would like to ask me on that I would be happy to try and respond to them.

MR WALDEN: Good afternoon, Julian Walden. A point of clarification if I may: the Member of Parliament for Henley is John Howell not Boris Johnson who you just referred to, I think, implying that he would be involved with Heathrow. Boris Johnson is now the Member of Parliament for Uxbridge. Thank you.

MR McCULLAGH: Sorry, I am fully aware that Boris Johnson has moved to Uxbridge but I still would have thought that for Henley, the Heathrow issue is still going to be a major problem and the MP there will be spending a lot of time trying to sort that out over the next 10 years.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is very helpful, thank you for your representation. And do not forget you can write in as well by 5 December.

MR McCULLAGH: Yes, right, and what is the response process then, now?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, once all the representations have come in the Boundary Commission will publish all those representations so that you can see what everybody else has said and then you have a period of four weeks, sometime in the early spring, you will have four weeks to make further representations on everybody else's representations.

MR McCULLAGH: Right, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And after that the Assistant Commissioners will consider both the representations and the representations on the representations, if you follow me, and the Boundary Commission will publish some revised proposal summer time, late summer, early autumn?

THE SECRETARY: Yes, we would aim to publish our revised proposals in late summer next year.

MR McCULLAGH: Right.

THE SECRETARY: There will be a final consultation period before we then publish our recommendations.

MR McCULLAGH: Right, and when will it actually happen then? That is to say, the realignment of the constituencies.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Assuming elections go by the five year period and that there is not one in between then it will be for that next election in 2020.

MR McCULLAGH: Right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If there were, for whatever reason, an election before then, then the existing boundaries would be used for that.

MR McCULLAGH: Yes, fine, okay, could I just ask the gentleman what his interest is or is he just a member of the public?

MR WALDEN: Yes, my name is Julian Walden, I work for the Conservative Party.

MR McCULLAGH: Right, well that is okay then!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, well thank you very much indeed for coming in.

MR McCULLAGH: Thank you very much indeed, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And I draw this meeting to a close, then, and we shall see everyone in Portsmouth on Thursday.

The hearing adjourned

B

MR BALE, 6, 7, 9

J

MRS JOY, 4, 6

M

MR McCULLAGH, 9, 10, 11, 12

R

MR RENSHELL, 3, 4

T

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12
THE SECRETARY, 2, 3, 11

W

MR WALDEN, 10, 12