

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND

HELD AT

THE PRINCE RUPERT HOTEL, SHREWSBURY

ON

TUESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2016
DAY TWO

Before:

Ms Margaret Gilmore, The Lead Assistant Commissioner

Transcribed from audio by W B Gurney & Sons LLP
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Time noted: 9.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, gentlemen, lovely to see you again. Our first speaker is at 9.30, and the speaker after that is at 10.50 and then we have got an absolutely full stream to lunch at that point, and then we have got a few this afternoon. So I will adjourn until about 9.20 or until the moment that our first speaker arrives.

Time noted: 9.01 am

After a short break

Time noted: 9.30 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning again, gentlemen. My name is Margaret Gilmore, I am the Lead Assistant Commissioner for the West Midlands. I have Gerald Tessier here who is leading the staff who are supporting us this morning, and I would like to reconvene this meeting. Just a reminder that we will need, when you come to the podium, we will need your name and a full address, and I would like to call our first speaker, who is Stephen Reynolds, please. Mr Reynolds, we will probably put a map of Telford up here, so if you want to, there is a pointer and you can point, if you choose to, it is entirely up to you. If you speak into the microphone and give us your name and address first, thank you.

CLLR REYNOLDS: (Oakengates Ward) Right, good morning. My name is Stephen John Reynolds, 57 Springfield Road in Trench, in Telford. Right, I am in general support for the Commissioner's draft proposals for Telford and Shropshire. I am the borough councillor for Oakengates and Ketley Bank within Telford and Wrekin. The principle that Donnington, Hadley, Leegomery are to come to the constituency of Telford and Wrekin is welcome, for these areas are of historic and industrial heritage of the area and rightly brings it with the other key towns of the area, Oakengates, Dawley, Madeley, St Georges, and another little towns within the Telford and Wrekin constituency.

This ward, or the ward of Oakengates and Ketley Bank, spans the constituencies of the Telford and Wrekin, and this makes it difficult for residents, as the ward covers parts of Hadley, but confusion arises over who their MP is. There is no geographical boundary between Trench, Wrockwardine Wood and Hadley, and this very much forms the same community. By bringing Hadley and Leegomery as per the Boundary Commission's proposals, this will therefore benefit Hadley considerably. Similarly, the boundary between Telford and Wrekin, demonstrated between Trench and Donnington, is literally either side of the residential road, and Donnington, like Hadley, is an integral part of Telford, one of its industrial communities. Donnington also brings the MOD into the area of its supply chain, and industry and community ties between the various areas.

2018 will see the fiftieth anniversary of Telford new town and by adopting the Boundary Commission's recommendations this will grow the community identity and the pride in the town and the constituency of Telford and Wrekin. It also including Hadley and Leegomery it will include the demographics and the community make up of the area, and this will make the constituency complete, joining Hadley and Leegomery and Donnington with the rest of Telford.

Another point is that the school catchment area for Donnington means that the students go to the Priory Academy in Wrockwardine Wood, which also gives a greater tie with that, with the North Telford area.

Other points are that the reduction of the number of MPs from 650 down to 610, or whatever it was, there is no reflection within the draft proposals, that there is no reflection of the increased population of the area, considering that the local plan for Telford and Wrekin for 2016/2031 signifies an increase in the population of the area over the next 15 years. The increase will also increase the workload for the respective MPs under these reduced constituencies. The constituency parameters of 71,000 and 79,000 people will also be exceeding in various areas of the borough.

If I can just conclude that I am in general support of the Commissioner's draft proposals, and if there is any questions please do ask. Thank you.

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, I think - are there any questions from the floor at all? (No response) No, I think that was very clear and helpful, Mr Reynolds, thank you very much, and thank you for coming to give your support. It is always very useful to us so that we get the balance right, and who is supporting and who is objecting, that is very useful, thank you very much. I believe, Mr Sahota, you are down to speak but much later, we do have some space now. If it suits you, you can go now or you can go later, entirely up to you. You are down for 11.40, but we have space now. So we will need your name, your address, you are being filmed, and you are going to be speaking about which area?

CLLR SAHOTA: (Malinslee and Dawley Bank Ward) Telford, I am here to speak about Telford constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Lovely, and if you want to point at the map please feel free, there is a pointer in front of the microphone, but you do not need to.

CLLR SAHOTA: Basically I am just here in support---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I will need your name and address before you start.

CLLR SAHOTA: My name is Cllr Kuldip Sahota, I have been a councillor in Telford and

Wrekin for the last 16 years, and before that, from 2011 up to 2016, up to about two, three, four months ago I was a leader of the Telford and Wrekin Council as well. Now that you ask me, you know, I have lived in Telford for the last 50 years. My father moved to Telford back in 66 from the West Midlands, and I always asked him why, what was the reason moving from the West Midlands down to Telford, and he said, well, when he got the job in GKN Sankey it was a £1 more compared to wherever he was working. So I always tell a story that the reason my family moved from the West Midlands to Telford was for £1, I think that was a big enough reason for my father to move.

Yes, my father moved to the UK in 1957, I came as a youngster in 1966. I went to school in Hadley and Telford and the local college, and local, I worked in a local GKN Sankey, in a local factory and so on and so forth, I do not want to go to it, and over 50 years in Telford, and I think I know Telford pretty well, that is the point I am trying to make.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Your address now is, where do you live now?

CLLR SAHOTA: I live in Ketley, in Telford.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We need your address.

CLLR SAHOTA: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

CLLR SAHOTA: Right. What I wanted to say basically is that Telford was formed, what, you know, over 50/60 years ago and with this new proposal of Telford constituency I think Telford completes itself. Now it is really truly a Telford, and I will give you my reasons in a minute, because Telford starts from Ironbridge, Brookside, Dawley, Hadley, Leegomery, Ketley and so on, but for whatever reason when they drew up the boundaries back in 1997, or before that, before the 97 election, they somehow left Donnington and Hadley and Leegomery out of it, and yet they were the integral part of the Telford and they should have been with the Telford. Why? Because the central Telford, the South Telford, the Ketley bit, but somehow Hadley I always thought, Hadley, Leegomery and Donnington were that industrial one community which somehow somebody sort of left it out, and Donnington, as my previous speaker was saying, had a big MOD base there for the last 80 years, and most of the communities from around, not just from Donnington but from Dawley and the other parts, worked there, and then next door in Hadley, which is Hadley is only about half a mile from Dawley, from Donnington, we had a GKN Sankey. When I worked there in the 1970s and early 1980s 7,000 people worked there. Well, it is still there and it still has well over a thousand people working there, and it was one of those typical manufacturing area

where people actually thought of themselves as being industrial and urban part of Telford where it should have been, but somehow, like I said, before 1997 the boundary was drawn up, Hadley, Leegomery and Donnington were left out, and lots of people in the last 50 years always said, well, "Why aren't we part of the Telford constituency", and I always said to them, "Well, it's nothing to do with me, it was the way the boundaries was drawn up".

So in Telford even at this moment, when nationally the manufacturing is about 10 per cent, but in Telford it is almost 20 per cent, 19.8 or something like that, it is, and that is why I always sort of thought, when 2012 it was decided that Leegomery, Hadley and Donnington should be a part of the Telford constituency, and I was very pleased about that, and the reason I am here is to support that proposal, that it should remain as it is. Yes, there are other towns in Telford and Wrekin, such as, you know, the Newport, and the neighbouring areas like Albrighton, even though it is not in the Telford Wrekin council, but they are on the peripheries of it, but they have more of a rural sounding, not sounding, but economy to it, and that is why I always thought they ought to be more in a Wrekin and then perhaps in Telford and Wrekin.

The other thing I just wanted to, a bit more on the personal side, Telford has something like a 8 per cent BME community, and they moved from the West Midlands, like my father and the other member of the other family, because there was this manufacturing jobs there, and they had a certain urban feel about them, they did not work in the farms or the similar industry, and that was the reason that they moved there in the sixties and the early seventies because it was a manufacturing urban and has industrial feel to it. You go to work in a morning and you come back at five o'clock. So 8 per cent BME community, that is why it all came in.

So I would like to strongly urge that we stick to what it was recommended back in 2012, that Telford should have a free standing, its own constituency, including the Donnington, Hadley and Leegomery. Yes, there is a new part of Telford as well, which is Broseley, and that does work well with it along with Dawley, Hadley, Leegomery, Dawley and Malinslee, and Brookside and Woodside. So I would strongly recommend that we stick with what we have, we decided in 2012. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, that is very useful. Obviously not everybody in Telford is totally supporting that, although we have had a lot of people speaking for it. Have you come across the counter-proposal, which would not involve Donnington going, or not?

CLLR SAHOTA: Have I come across a counter-proposal?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, that is what I was asking.

CLLR SAHOTA: Well, when I was a leader of the council the most of the people in

Hadley, Leegomery and Donnington, they always said to me why were we not Telford constituency, and, like I said a few moments ago, and I always said I do not know. Yes, the people in Hadley, because Hadley has the largest BME community, we have a Sikh temple in there for the last 50 years, and that is where I attend every Sunday, and has a large Muslim, Sikh and West Indian community there as well, and this is where they always used to say, "Why aren't we in the Telford", and I never had no answer for that. So hopefully that Hadley, Leegomery and Donnington will stay in Telford constituency and then I can go and tell them that now you are truly and really part of the Telford.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed.

CLLR SAHOTA: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is really, really useful, and thank you for showing us support as well as we have objections, but it is good to get your support as well, thank you. Thank you very much indeed, our next speaker is not due for a while so what I am going to do now is adjourn until 10.50, if that is okay with you. Thank you.

Time noted: 9.47 am

After a short break

Time noted: 10.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and we are now reconvening this meeting, thank you for coming along this morning. My name is Margaret Gilmore, I am the Lead Assistant Commissioner for the West Midlands, and we are here to hear your views on the initial proposals drawn up by Boundary Commission for England staff, and the job today is to hear how it will affect communities and to hear your views and allow those views to influence the plans and we can change them if necessary. We are restricted by the law only to consider the boundaries and not other considerations about the way in which we have to work on the data we have to use, or the number of constituencies, that has all been dictated and we have no say or influence over that. Everybody who comes to the podium here must give their name and full address, please, we are being filmed, and we will put the map of where you are talking about up here. There is a pointer and if you want to you can point at it. So, let us call our first speaker in this session, and it is Hilary Wendt.

MS WENDT (Green Party): So I would like to say thank you for the opportunity to speak today and we thank the Commissioners for the work that they have put in to try to balance so many factors. I am Hilary Wendt and my address is the Walcot, Lydbury North, Shropshire, SY7 8AX. I am the coordinator of the South Shropshire Green Party,

and I am speaking on behalf of myself, the executive of our local party and our members. We have shared our views with the West Midlands Green Party and we are aware that they have made a comprehensive submission on our behalf and that of our other Green Parties in this region. I hope here to highlight some issues, both general and specific, that affect the current Ludlow constituency which we cover.

My first general point, and one which we are aware the West Midlands Green Party has also made, whilst largely outside of your control but we want to be certain that our concern is on public record, and we hope you can take it into account. We are very concerned indeed at the use of electoral registration data from December 2015. As you know, December 2015 was a particularly low point in electoral registration, as a result of the Government's introduction of individual voter registration. Research has demonstrated that at that point in time a significant number of people, particularly within certain demographics, were missing from the electoral register, particularly people from more deprived backgrounds, black and ethnic minorities backgrounds, students and private renters. People from such background tend to vote for some parties significantly more than the party in government now. It is not right that the Government has essentially worked to force the Boundary Commission for England to use electoral data that will most favour one political party. We are aware that the Government chose to speed up the registration timetable against independent advice from parliamentary committees and the electoral commission, so we hope that the Boundary Commission for England may wish to feed back to the Government that in future boundary reviews take into account the voting population rather than the number of registered electors in a constituency.

You may well be aware that the electoral reform society recommends use of census data, supplemented by citizenship information provided by passport data. We hope, however, that paragraph 40 in your guide to the 2018 review, which says the Boundary Commission of England is not obliged to shut its eyes entirely to growth or decline in the electoral register that has occurred since the review date, will be something that you feel actively able to mobilise, to help redress the unfairness created by the missing of swathes of potential voters, of potential electors. The use of skewed figures from December 2015 will mean that at the 2020 general election many constituencies will be over sized and we believe this is evidenced by the proposed Ludlow and Leominster constituency as it currently is articulated, which, at 77,533 electors, would be 974 below the maximum. The proposed new constituency we have to say is absolutely enormous, physically by far the largest in the West Midlands, and possibly in all of England. We think this is way too big for a rural and sparsely populated county or counties, as Herefordshire also shares these characteristics of Shropshire, and so our comments here in general terms also applies to the proposals for three very large constituencies in Herefordshire, and in Herefordshire as the case crosses two county borders.

Shropshire, like Herefordshire, is a sparsely populated rural area with very limited public transport. This we think is an issue in the current constituency, but would be

aggravated given the very large size of the proposed new constituencies. We are also concerned that the proposed Ludlow and Leominster constituency crosses current county boundaries which militates against local ties and amplifies the challenges of case work for any MP. Although Ludlow and Leominster are quite close and well connected by road the same cannot be said for the whole constituency as proposed. It would take over an hour to drive from Kington in the south west to Middleton Scriven in the North East, for example. This must make it difficult for any MP to conduct case work and exacerbates the trials of seeking to ensure liaison with and representation of such sparsely populated areas.

We ask that the Commission take into account, when making determinations about these proposals, the very real trials posed by transport times in our areas and create, and so we are asking you to not create constituencies that are so near the maximum size permitted.

Under the current proposals Leominster would be linked to Ludlow and Shropshire and Ledbury would be linked to Malvern in Worcestershire. While these towns do have good links, they are not nearly so strong as the links between Leominster, Ledbury and Hereford. We are concerned that the links between half of Herefordshire's population and Hereford itself, as the centre and capital of that county, would be undermined by these proposals, and it seems to us that under the proposals the interests of Ludlow and Malvern would naturally tend to dominate over the interests of Leominster and Ledbury, as these proposals divide them from each other as well as from their county town.

In terms of specific local ties, there are close links between Bromyard and Ledbury, so it would make sense we believe for these towns to be in the same constituency. Because of our belief that the Herefordshire border should only cross into one other county, and that crossing into Worcestershire would be preferable, we propose combining Ludlow and the south of Shropshire with some wards in the Wyre Forest district of Worcestershire. So an alternative perhaps to the enormously sized Ludlow and Leominster seat could be a new Ludlow and Stourport on Severn seat.

I would add that the Ludlow constituency feels under represented as it is. Our county has significant areas of deprivation which seem already to struggle in terms of their allocation of national fiscal and policy resources. For instance, the Ludlow constituency as it currently is has a dispersed rural population that is older than the national average but our ambulance, community and social services have all experienced significant cuts, and these also extend to the NHS, exemplified by struggling GP practices, the potential loss of one of our A&Es, and the dispersal of routine care. Shropshire's largely rural nature means that there is a high number of difficult to heat pre-1919 houses, and approximately 36.6 per cent of households were off the gas grid, a shocking total of circa six and a half thousand houses in the county have inadequate, defective or no heating systems, and nearly a quarter of tenants in Shropshire's private rented sector

are in hard to heat accommodation. Public health monies in 2015/16 were £35 per head per annum in Shropshire, this is lower than the national average, and significantly lower than the £134 per capita allocated to Kensington and Chelsea in the same period. This suggests to me and my colleagues that our one MP in South Shropshire, while having a stellar personal career and moving up the ministerial ladder, fails to be an effective advocate. Perhaps in a very safe seat, such as this, under the current voting system, he has no need to be.

On behalf of the South Shropshire Green Party I ask you to note that we feel strongly that change to our discredited voting system from first past the post to proportional representation would be a more effective remedy for the troubles faced by the people of our area, and the better way to ensure the effective enfranchisement of all people of voting age, rather than in the redrawing of constituency boundaries in a way that creates yet more safe seats for one particular political party.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, and to make the views of the South Shropshire Green Party and our concerns for the citizens of South Shropshire known, and thank you for your work and your time.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. If you stay there a second, Ms Wendt, that would be great. Do I have any questions on the proposals or any points of clarification? (No response) In that case I have just a couple of things to double check with you. Am I right in thinking that you are suggesting putting Bromyard into the Malvern side of things, in other words bringing the border down and taking it out of Ludlow and Leominster?

MS WENDT: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, and given the proximity of, and if you cannot answer this do not worry, but given the proximity of Malvern and Ledbury, which are currently split at the moment, do you see any merits in bringing them together?

MS WENDT: To be honest I am not the right person to ask that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: All right, that is absolutely fair enough. In that case, thank you very much indeed, thank you for your time and coming along, that is very important we hear your views.

MS WENDT: Thank you very much for the chance.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are just looking up a couple of statistics there.

MR TESSIER: Sorry, to just to clarify in terms of the largest constituencies that we have

proposed, the largest one is Hexham and Morpeth in the North East, the next is Penrith and Solway in the North West, and then in Yorkshire and Humber Thirsk and Malton, and then this one. So it is not the largest, but it is the fourth out of the 501 that we have proposed.

MS WENDT: Okay, but again my point is that it is sparsely populated, and the transport is really difficult.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great, thank you very much, that is good clarification, and that of course is England only. Let us call our next speaker, who is Mr Leon Murray. Mr Murray, you are going to be filmed, and we would love to hear your name, and your address, please.

CLLR MURRAY: (Hadley and Leegomery Ward) Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity for speaking. My name is Cllr Leon Murray, I represent the ward of Hadley and Leegomery in Telford, and my address is 63 Haybridge Road, Hadley, Telford, TF1 5JL. I come to speak on behalf of my constituency and the view of the boundary changes.

I want to bring to your attention that the Hadley and Leegomery ward in Telford is one of the largest industrial area in the Borough of Telford and Wrekin. Apart from the giant GKN works which have been there for long before I was born, we have the massive new industrial estate of Hortonwood, which form part of my constituency. In addition to that, most of the rest of Telford, Oakengates, Ketley, and round there, are massive historical mining area before it became developed as it is today. So in that sense we welcome the view for a Telford constituency, because Telford, both north and south, and in the middle, have a great deal more in common than the rest of the county. So we would welcome a Telford constituency, because it constitute both the new and the old industrial area of Telford, and so we welcome that.

Happily we would rather, if you are creating another constituency, that that goes with the so called new constituency of Bridgnorth and Wellington, and we would rather it is called Bridgnorth and Wellington, it should be called the Wrekin and Bridgnorth, in that sense we would be able to regain the historical name of the Wrekin, incorporate with the Bridgnorth. Having said all that, madam, for most of us we wonder why the parliamentary boundary throughout England needs to change, and it seems to me creating a constituency including Bridgnorth, Broseley, Much Wenlock, Wellington, Shifnal and Newport and Albrighton, any MP that comes in that will need Harry Potter magic coat to get round, because it is a very large area, and with MP remote as it is from their constituency, and with one day in their constituency, then in my book they need a Harry Potter magic coat to get around in order to see their people, and one wonder why this boundary changes is taking place.

Having said that, madam, Hadley, in my constituency, have got the largest proportion of BME people living there. Many, like myself, have come to the United Kingdom 50-odd years ago as youngsters, though we are getting on, but it is the largest part of the BME community in Telford and may I say in Shropshire, and apart from all that there are needs like everywhere else, not everybody is wealthy, and we have got our own particular need there, and while we support Telford boundary, a Telford constituency, which incorporate the entire new town of Telford, and the old bit like Hadley, Donnington and Oakengates and things like that, while we support that as a constituency we still, like many of my colleagues and people in the borough, and indeed, may I say, because I travel a great deal throughout the United Kingdom in things that I do, wonder, and I said it before, why do we want to spend millions on boundary changes when that money could be spent in other guise down there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, Cllr. I cannot answer that because we have a remit that says that we have to work within the law, and the law has told us to reduce the number of constituencies, and has told us which data to be used and Parliament has decided that we must go through this process, so that is all we can influence.

CLLR MURRAY: I am not blaming you, madam.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is not a problem.

CLLR MURRAY: You have got a job to do and what seemed very curious to me, when the Government's own statistic tells us that the population of United Kingdom will rise to over 73 million and now they want to reduce the representation of the people is beyond me, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Before you go away, thank you, stay there, any questions, any points of clarification? (No response) No. Just a couple of things for me to ask you about the matter in hand, which is Telford. There has been another suggestion that instead of bringing in Donnington and Hadley, that Apley Castle ward could come into Telford instead. Again, you do not have to comment if it is not your area of knowledge, but do you have any view on that?

CLLR MURRAY: Well, it is very close to me, I walk my dog in the woods there all the time, and my idea that Apley should go into Wellington, at the moment it is part of Wellington, and that we should, as you propose for the boundary to be Telford include Hadley, Oakengates and Donnington and things like that down there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is there a reason for that though, that, what, is it a different type of community?

CLLR MURRAY: Well, to me one of the main reasons is that most of these areas is

industrial, ancient and still are, and Donnington have got the gigantic army base, and it been enlarged, and it has been there for a long time, you know, more in common than the other places.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, and also the importance of the name of Bridgnorth, which has not been named in a constituency before, you mentioned that, keeping that rather than Wellington, there have also been other suggestions that the constituency simply be called the Wrekin, do you have a view on that?

CLLR MURRAY: Yes. Well, what we would like, if it is going to come about, is instead of Bridgnorth and Wellington it should be called Bridgnorth and the Wrekin. The Wrekin got the big hill there and it has got an historical meaning and work to the local people around, that part, and Bridgnorth and the Wrekin would incorporate that quite well.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, thank you for your time. That was very useful, very useful for us to get this local view on some of these plans. Could we now please hear from Mr Steven or Steve Hale.

MR HALE (Green Party): Hi, my name is Steve Hale, I live in 41 The Wintles, Bishop's Castle, Shropshire. I am a member of the South Shropshire Green Party and I am going to be a prospective candidate in next May's elections, but these are my own views. They happen to coincide with some of the things that Hilary has already said but they are my own views.

Firstly, I understand your remit and what you can and cannot do, but I also wanted to place on record that I am very concerned indeed on the use of the electoral registration data from December 2015. I appreciate this is outside of your control but that was a particular low point in electoral registration, as a result of the Government's introduction of individual voter registration, IVR. Research has demonstrated that at that point in time a significant number of people, particularly within certain demographics, were missing from the electoral register, particularly people from more deprived backgrounds, black and ethnic minority backgrounds, students and private renters. People from such backgrounds tend to vote for some parties significantly more than the party in Government now. It is not right that the Government has essentially worked to force the BCE to use elector data that will most favour one political party. The Government chose to speed up the IVR timetable against independent advice from parliamentary committees and the electoral commission. The BCE may want to feed back to Government that they may wish to consider in the future allowing for future boundary reviews to take into account the voting population rather than the number of registered electors in a constituency. The electoral reform society recommends use of census data, supplemented by citizenship information provided by passport data. So the use of skewed figures from December 2015 will mean that at the 2020 general election many constituencies will be over sized because there will be more voters registered than you

are working to at the moment. Unfortunately that will not reflect well on the Commission and the narrow margin for permitted constituency size will mean a further boundary review, so repeating the task that you are going through at the moment. I should quote, however, paragraph 40 in your guide to the 2018 review, which says “The BCE is not obliged to shut its eyes entirely to growth or decline in the electoral register that has occurred since the review date”, and I do hope you will bear that in mind when that comes around, and look at those figures again.

My second point, I am or will be in the Ludlow and Leominster constituency, and the idea of making all constituencies a similar size in terms of the number of voters suggests a one size fits all approach to democracy, which I do not believe it does. It makes our constituency, which has really poor transport facilities, and it is already very large the area that we live in and are represented by, it becomes unmanageably large, and therefore difficult or even impossible for an MP to manage meeting their constituents, and vice versa, so us meeting them. Where I live in Bishop’s Castle we are not on the A49 corridor, which means we do not have train services, we have a once a week bus to Ludlow, which is on a Monday. It gives us something like two hours in Ludlow before it turns round and goes back again. Our MP’s surgeries are held on Thursday in Ludlow, so using public transport to get there is just not feasible, and once it gets to the size that it is, as Hilary has already said, the distances that we are talking about are just enormous, with virtually no transport other than up and down that A49 corridor.

My next point is that boundary changes I believe should be neutral in terms of the likely impact on the number of MPs a party is projected to win or lose. The proposed changes indicate a net gain of 30 MPs for the Conservatives. This is unfair and calls into question both the impartiality of the Commission and the motives of the Government, particularly in the constraints that the Government have applied to the remit of the Commission. Furthermore, reducing the number of MPs to 600 from the 650, whatever it is now, impairs the democratic process, since it puts fewer MPs in charge of our country, and therefore answerable to their constituents. In addition, the proportion of MPs to cabinet members gets smaller, thus making the cabinet more powerful since there are fewer non-cabinet MPs to hold them to account and to query Government policy.

Final point, all of this adjustment of boundaries and their number of electors simply does not address the main political issue of our time, the patent unfairness of the first past the post system. It limits the value of a vote to just a small number of people in marginal constituencies, no more than a few hundred thousand who eventually decide which party will form a majority government. Most people’s votes simply do not make a difference, and thus encourage voter disengagement. I have lived all of my life with no representation in Parliament, simply because my vote never resulted in my MP representing my views. At the last UK general election the Conservatives were elected with just 23 per cent of all registered voters, which means that 77 per cent of the

registered electorate are not represented in government, nor Parliament. Furthermore, they were elected to govern us with only 36 per cent of those who actually bothered to vote, leaving 64 per cent of actual voters without representation in government or Parliament for five years. This is changing. Today the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Assemblies are elected by a form of PR, this means that every voter is represented in those assemblies. They have a voice, their vote does really count. PR is also used in elections for city mayors, the London Assembly and our police and crime commissioners. So all of these significant legislative and administrative elected bodies, acting for millions of citizens like us, each include the proportional representatives for which people actually voted. I have heard all of the arguments in defence of first past the post but none of them are truly defensible. How is it possible to defend a system which results in a majority government based on just 24 per cent of the electorate, and where over one million voters are represented by just one MP, Caroline Lucas? I thank you for your time and for the work you are putting in.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. Obviously again on the PR, that is outside our remit.

MR HALE: I understand.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: But it is on the public record, as you say. So do we have any questions, any points of clarification from the floor? (No response) No. Just out of interest, to give us an idea of the scale, and I do know this area a little bit, I can see where you live, in Bishop's, yes, and if you were to drive to Ludlow, which is, you know, about not---

MR HALE: I would have to go down here, through Kempton, across here and down here, it is a half an hour drive.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That takes half an hour, just to get that, so if you were going down to Leominster it would be?

MR HALE: To get to Leominster I would add another 20 minutes or so.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR HALE: So it is the best part of an hour.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, so that gives us an idea, but if you were going across country?

MR HALE: If I was going across country, it takes forever to get across country, because this is the main arterial route, the A49, that is where the train goes, and that is where the

bus services go. So getting from east to west is incredibly difficult unless you have your own transport.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much for that, that gives us a good idea of the point you were making, thank you for your time. Right, I think we are ready to move on, and our next listed speaker is Mr Paul Uppal, the former Wolverhampton South West MP, if I am correct. Are you ready to speak at the moment? Is Joy Squires here yet? Are you happy to take the podium now? Absolutely, please do, and just a reminder, that we need your name and your address, you are being filmed. There is a pointer if you want to point, we will make sure we get the right map up, and if you stand in front of the microphone. So name and address, please.

CLLR SQUIRES: (Worcester City) Joyce Squires, 133 Lansdown Road, Worcester, WR3 8JW, so I am here to speak about the proposals for the Worcester constituency. Okay, thanks very much indeed. The proposals for the new Worcester constituency fulfil the criteria set out by the Boundary Commission in terms of numbers but in my view do not take into account the natural affinities and natural communities with which the two wards it is proposed to add to the current Worcester constituency would naturally have.

I would start by saying that it makes sense to add Norton and Whittington ward to the current Worcester constituency, and if I can just point. So we have Worcester here, and the proposal is to add the Norton and Whittington ward, which is this one here, and then to add in Drake's Boughton down here, which is near to Pershore just below. So I would contend that there is a sort of natural community that exists between Worcester and Norton and Whittington. I say that because I know that people living in the Norton and Whittington ward use Worcester schools, their NHS services, leisure facilities, sports facilities, shopping facilities, and to all extents and purposes consider themselves to live in Worcester and will say "we live in Worcester", even though they live just outside the city council's administrative boundary.

The Norton and Whittington ward also has a number of new housing developments that have been built just on the Worcester constituency, the Worcester city administrative boundary, which currently coincides with the Parliament boundary. There are housing developments that have already been built here and more that are planned for this area here, which again will create a population that will look to Worcester and to be part of Worcester in terms of all their services and all the needs that they have. Those housing estates that have already been built and the ones that are being built through the urban extensions that I have alluded to, are specifically designed pretty much to meet Worcester's housing needs. So Norton and Whittington ward is to all extents and purposes, you know, in everybody's deliberations, particularly around housing and services, in Worcester. To that extent I would argue that this is the natural community, if you like, for the new Worcester constituency.

I think a further point I would like to make is that although it is not something that you have been able to take into account for this boundary review, within a very short time of these proposals coming into force, if the Worcester constituency follows the lines that you have proposed, and takes in Drake's Boughton, then you will very soon be well above the upper limit of electors within the ward because of the urban extensions that are planned and because of the housing developments that are planned within Worcester itself, and that then, if I might be so bold, would lead to a further review in five years' time, which I think would be quite destabilising for this part of the country.

Drake's Boughton ward, which just, sorry, top one, to remind you is this ward here, is much further away from Worcester, is a very different area to Worcester, which is urban, and Norton and Whittington now is largely becoming more and more urbanised, this is a very rural part of the county. It looks to the local market town of Pershore for all its services, all the services such as schools, NHS, all of that is based in and around Pershore. Most people living in Drake's Boughton ward would say that they live in or near Pershore. They certainly would not say that they live in Worcester or near Worcester. It is a place they come to but it is not a place that they necessarily define themselves against. The local economy and housing patterns in Drake's Boughton are very significantly different to the urban Worcester and Norton and Whittington ward, and in my view this ward is much better suited to the proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency, with which it forms a much more natural community.

So my contention is that if change has to happen it makes sense to include Norton and Whittington ward, that would create a very natural community and extension of the current constituency. To add in Drake's Boughton skews the nature of the constituency and really would not be helpful to anyone living in the constituency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Obviously there would be a numbers issue ---

CLLR SQUIRES: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: --- for us, and our problem is very often this ripple effect, where if you start moving that into the next constituency, then that is going to have a knock-on, et cetera, et cetera.

CLLR SQUIRES: It has been a very difficult process, I am sure.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, yes. So if you have got a view on how we could settle that we would be very interested to hear that. A reminder also that your views can be submitted in written form, but the deadline is the 5 December, so please for everybody, do be aware of that, it is quite soon. Are there any points of

information? We have one question over here. If you just remember to give us your name again.

MR RILEY: It is Ian Riley. Cllr, there is, during the course of the hearing there has been a counter-proposal submitted, which is about adding some wards to the south of Worcester to Worcester.

CLLR SQUIRES: Right.

MR RILEY: In particular, I think it was Kempsey and Ripple wards, which run due south from Worcester, along the River Severn, down to the county boundary with Gloucestershire.

CLLR SQUIRES: Right.

MR RILEY: Could you comment on whether those wards have a stronger affinity with Worcester, or Norton?

CLLR SQUIRES: I am surprised to hear that that proposal has been made, because, and it is the first time I have heard that is today. Again, there is, despite the building of the urban extensions, Kempsey sees itself very distinctly as separate to Worcester, and the other ward you have mentioned I have not heard of. Ripple. Yes, I do not know it at all, and would not---

MR RILEY: It is with Kempsey.

CLLR SQUIRES: Right, okay, sorry. Right, yes, I see it, yes. We are into deep rural Worcestershire/Gloucestershire and again you can just see from distance, that I would imagine, from my experience, that people living in that part of the world are looking much more closely to Tewkesbury and Gloucester in fact for their natural communities, their natural schools, shopping and all the rest of it. As I said, I am not familiar with Ripple ward, it is not something that has ever, I have ever come across before, I am sorry to have to admit my ignorance to that. Kempsey obviously is a largish village to the south of the city, but again with a very distinctive character, and one that it likes to protect, and there have been a lot of protests from people in Kempsey about housing developments and things like that, on the edge of Worcester.

MR RILEY: It might help, the main community in Ripple ward is Upton upon Severn.

CLLR SQUIRES: Oh, right, okay. Right. Upton upon Severn of course I know of, and again I would have imagined that anyone living in Upton would be up in arms at the thought of coming in with Worcester. This is going to sound incredibly parochial, and I know that it is a difficult task to decide these constituencies, but when in the past there have been proposals to extend the local authority boundaries to include neighbouring

villages there has been a really severe backlash against that, because people have wanted not to be part of what they see as an urban area that is very different to themselves, and again Upton upon Severn, very small market town, which has greater affinity looking south than looking north.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is very useful, thank you very much. Any further points of clarification? (No response) Thank you very much for your time and your presentation, that was extremely useful. Mr Uppal.

MR PAUL UPPAL MP: I will just introduce my name, my name is Paul Uppal, I was the MP for Wolverhampton South West. I think I will probably hopefully help the Commissioners today by not taking my full allotted time, I will try and be brief.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You are very welcome, we do need an address for you, please.

MR UPPAL: My address is, I live locally, my address is Pine Hurst, and I live in the West Midlands. Do you want my postcode as well?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We normally do need it. We are supposed to take it under the law.

MR UPPAL: Okay, B62 0LJ.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MR UPPAL: I, as I alluded to earlier in my comments, basically speak in support of the proposals for the Wolverhampton West constituency. Hopefully I think we can bring it up, which will comprise the Tettenhall Wightwick, Tettenhall Regis Park, Merry Hill, Penn, Graiseley wards, which were in my old constituency of Wolverhampton South West, and would take in the wards of Blakenhall, Bushbury North and Oxley.

Just to reinforce some of the ties, particularly my time as a Member of Parliament, I would find, I will just see if you can get it up on the map, but I will reiterate the point, I would find, certainly from my conversations with constituents who were in the Graiseley ward, and particularly in the Penn wards, would find a natural affinity with the Blakenhall ward, which is coming into the constituency, and similarly with constituents just on the border, because I am a trustee on the second largest Sikh temple in Wolverhampton, and perhaps some of the people who may not necessarily be aware of the functions of the Boundary Commission, certainly from my conversations from them, who perhaps are not the most literate people in the world, certainly found it quite odd that as Blakenhall there were not considered part of the South West constituency. So I think from the Blakenhall perspective there is a natural fit that is there.

Going towards the north as well a similar sort of argument from the Tettenhall wards in terms of going towards Oxley and Bushbury North. Through all my conversations as a Member of Parliament with constituents, there was a natural affinity there, and certainly I do not think there would be any hesitance or any reticence in terms of those new wards coming into the constituency.

On a broader point, I did represent one of the smaller constituencies, just in terms of numbers of electors, I was under 67, under 60,000 probably I think at the time when I was Member of Parliament. It varied between 57 and 58 thousand depending on which year you looked at in terms of electors, and I just want to make the point that I think it is actually important that in terms of myself having an under represented constituency, that to seek to equalise a constituency is actually a very good point, and was something that was actually endorsed by a lot of my constituents, regardless of their political background. So this was something that a lot of constituents had picked up on, so I think the equalisation of the constituencies and working towards the sizes that have been alluded to this morning, and obviously the Commission is well sort of versed in terms of the overall size of the electorates here, I think is actually a good move, so I positively wanted to endorse that.

The only other points I would really make is in terms of the adjacent constituencies. Obviously one is referred to as the Wolverhampton South and Coseley constituency. The one next door, where St Peters ward, which was in Wolverhampton South West, is going into the Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency. This will include the Wednesfields in terms of Wednesfield South, Wednesfield North, Four Links Park, Bushbury South, and Low Hill, Heath Town, which are from Wolverhampton, and then Willenhall South, Willenhall North and Short Heath from Walsall. The only element of a slight regret is that there is not perhaps a reference to Wolverhampton there, but I think from my understanding of the city as a whole, and certainly from constituents who were in Wolverhampton South West, I think the fact that Wednesfield residents and Willenhall residents have the recognition and have quite a distinct identity in the fact that they will be in one constituency is a positive factor and I think actually probably outweighs the fact of the omission of the Wolverhampton name, but it is just a personal reflection, I do think that is slightly sad. But besides that, I come back to my original point, I am very supportive of the proposals as put forward by the Commission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I just have a little question, we have had discussion on this over the last two days about Wednesfield and Willenhall, there is also been a feeling that if you have three names in there that really is too much. Would there be any other way of getting Wolverhampton in, in your opinion?

MR UPPAL: Well, as you say, I do not have a particular issue with three Ws, obviously some people do. I mean, the fact that I think that Wolverhampton is bringing in five of the wards, the majority of the wards, in some way to recognise, it is difficult and I appreciate that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you were looking at the two other names, you know the area certainly better than I do, Wednesfield and Willenhall, would it be possible to lose one of those?

MR UPPAL: Well, of the two I would probably plump, and you would expect me to say this, for Willenhall, but I gather, it depends on your priorities, whether you are adamant on keeping just two names.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR UPPAL: Then it is going to be Wolverhampton and Wednesfield probably would cause quite a bit of concern for Willenhall residents.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Something like North East, Wolverhampton North East, that would not work?

MR UPPAL: Yes, well, that is the crux of the constituency as it is, but I appreciate it is a difficult problem. I was quite open to the idea of it being three, but if that seems to be the problem, and that is above my pay grade, and your problem not mine.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Absolutely. Are there any points of clarification, questions from the floor? (No response) In which case, that has been very useful, and good to hear from you, thank you very much indeed. Thank you for your time. We have a little gap now, but I believe our next speaker is in the room, is Mr Mountcastle here? Would you like to speak now, are you happy to speak now, Mr Mountcastle? You are due in 15/20 minutes I think. Take your time. Get yourself together, and when you are ready we will hear you. Thank you. Is there anyone else in the room who wishes to speak at all while we are here? In that case we will just sit quietly for a couple of minutes, and then in a few minutes I will call Mr Mountcastle again. (Pause) Okay, thank you very much indeed, this is the podium, Mr Mountcastle, and just a reminder, we will need your name and your address, and you are being filmed, and there is a pointer there. We will make sure we get the right map up and if you want to point at anything you can do that from where you are standing. So if you could start with your name and address, please.

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: (Bridgnorth Town Council) Right, my name is Graham Mountcastle, my address is 11 The Shambles, High Street, Bridgnorth. So I am here as a resident of Bridgnorth and a member of Bridgnorth town council, and I am also the chair of the local Labour Party branch, Bridgnorth and Highley. So I have come to generally speak in support of the proposals as regards to the constituency that is Bridgnorth, and then round to the east of Telford and includes Wellington. I support the proposals because it maintains the links that Bridgnorth has with other towns or small towns in the east of Shropshire, Broseley, Shifnal and Much Wenlock. Bridgnorth is a

very old town which has an economy that is quite dependent on tourism and visitors with markets, a very ancient market in the town in the High Street, and there is also, certainly with Broseley and Much Wenlock, a history that links them together. The only slight disappointment I have in terms of the detailed geography is that Coalbrookdale and Ironbridge are not included because they would have a historical link in promoting visitors and tourism.

The constituency surrounds Telford, obviously would have very close links with Telford and Telford and its constituency can work together in promoting the area, particularly in terms of economy and jobs.

Bridgnorth is sort of the eastern most town in Shropshire and has close links particularly with the visitors and markets with people who live in the Black Country, people who come from Stourbridge, Dudley and Wolverhampton are visitors, and obviously a lot of people from there retire in the area as well, and there would also be useful as a constituency to have a relationship with the other constituencies in Wolverhampton and Wolverhampton council, Dudley, in terms of working together promoting the area.

So, as I said, I wish to support the proposals as they are now, and have presented, they also have similarities between Bridgnorth in the south and Newport as well as similar towns within Shropshire, market towns, who have similar issues that need to be addressed. The Telford link is also important for transport with the M54, and the edge of, Telford is probably only about six or seven miles from Bridgnorth itself, so there are a lot of links there. Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is lovely, thank you very much. I was just going to ask, I was interested to hear you talk about Much Wenlock, which is obviously quite close. Again, you would be going through a different constituency if you were driving there, by the looks of things on the map. There has been one counter-proposal, one suggestion that Much Wenlock should go back into the Ludlow constituency, I wonder what your views on that are? I am quite interested in you talking about ties between Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth.

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: Well, Much Wenlock is quite close, and the fact that there are closeness in terms of school attendance as well on the primary school side. The road to Shrewsbury obviously, and then after Much Wenlock goes through a different constituency, but I cannot speak for people in Much Wenlock directly, but the mileage is only about seven or eight miles, I think, between Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth. Having just driven through Much Wenlock I saw a sign that said Church Stretton about 12 miles, I would imagine Ludlow is about 15 miles or more from Much Wenlock. So I would not support that change.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, and actually looking at it, the situation at the moment is that they are both in the same constituency.

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And that would continue to be the case.

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: That is right. I think obviously the Ludlow constituency, most of it will be still together linked with Leamington, and Highley does have links with Bridgnorth, but that would be in that new Leominster/Ludlow constituency as I found it. The River Severn is a natural boundary along there, so the east side of the Severn goes further south, does it not, within this new constituency, not that far from Kidderminster.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great, thank you very much indeed. We will take a question, a couple of questions from the floor if you are happy to do that, via me. It must be obviously sort of points of information really rather than any debate. Fire away.

MS WENDT: Okay, two comments. One, just from our perspective we would also support Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth being together because we think that is a natural connection. We were just wondering, looking at the shape of that constituency, that it is very long north to south, do you think that poses any issues in terms of liaison?

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: Possibly, but it does not compare with being in the same constituency as Clun and Bishop's Castle, as we are now, the size of South Shropshire or South Ludlow. Can I just say, the other link that is quite close is Much Wenlock and Broseley. So the three, Broseley, Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth, have a lot of contact and are only a few miles apart.

MS WENDT: Yes, and we would support that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any other questions? (No response) I have one further question, which I meant to put to you, which is the name that we have given to the constituency, I just wondered what your comments were on that?

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: Well, obviously Wellington Bridgnorth is a significant part of it, I am okay with the name, you have got three names?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, one or two people have suggested that that is too long, Bridgnorth, Wellington and the Wrekin is all too much and a little bit wordy. How strongly do you feel about keeping Bridgnorth in, Wellington in? Is Wellington the Wrekin anyway? Do we need Wellington? I do not know whether you have views on any of that.

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: Well, obviously I have to say, would I not, I support the name of Bridgnorth being part of it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I thought you might say that.

CLLR MOUNTCASTLE: It was interesting that the constituency as it is now, that is Ludlow, is called Ludlow, Bridgnorth is bigger than Ludlow in terms of population. So I would, I can see there might be a logic in Wellington and Wrekin not both being there, they do overlap in a sense, but I have not got any strong views on that. It could be Bridgnorth and the Wrekin.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine, thank you very much indeed, very useful. Thank you for your input, and I have said this several times, it is important that we hear objections, new ideas and also support, so that we do not go off on a tangent, because we have not heard that there is support for somewhere, so thank you very much for your time. Is there anybody else here who wishes to speak this morning? In which case, we are now going to adjourn and we are going to adjourn into our lunch break, and resume here when our next speaker is due, which is at two o'clock. Thank you very much. So adjourned until two.

Time noted: 11.51 am

After a short break

Time noted: 2.00 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, welcome, it is lovely to see you here this afternoon. We are drawing to the closing stages of our consultation here in Shrewsbury looking at the surrounding area, and we have three speakers now in a row this afternoon. Just a reminder that you will be filmed so that we can put this on the record, and we will need your name, and your address before you give your presentation. We will put a map up of the area that you are speaking in and there is a pointer over there that you can use if you want to show us anything. My name is Margaret Gilmore, I am the Lead Assistant Commissioner here, and with a colleague we will be analysing what local people have been saying, what people have been saying at these consultations, and seeing whether we could improve in any way on the plans that we have put before you, that the Boundary Commission have put before you, and I am helped in this task with Gerald and Roger here, who are from our staff, who can give us any detail that we might need or deal with any process or admin points. So the first speaker this afternoon is Mary Lewis.

MRS LEWIS: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I am Mary Lewis, and I live at 14 Severn Drive, which is in Wellington, Telford.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. I think we are just going to move the microphone a second.

MRS LEWIS: Right. Are you all right with that? Do I have to say it again?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, you are fine.

MRS LEWIS: As a resident of Wellington and the Wrekin constituency I would like to support the proposed changes for the following reasons, but I would also like to mention that I am a former member of Wellington LA21, which is an environmental group, formed after the Rio summit that was held, and although I am not speaking on behalf of the group I have used some of their information.

The first point I would like to make is about the historic economic and social links to Bridgnorth and surrounding rural areas. Wellington is a historic town, with an ancient market, awarded a Royal charter in 1244. It retained its medieval patterned streets leading off the market square, and has much in common with other market towns in East Shropshire, including Bridgnorth and Newport. To this day the market has flourished, selling produce such as vegetables, cheese and eggs, sourced locally. This was the case in the past and is still the same today as the now covered market opens on a Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Designated farmers markets are held monthly on a Saturday in the market square, I am trying to indicate our rural connections.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, absolutely, it is interesting.

MRS LEWIS: There were cattle fairs held dating back to medieval times, that led to a large cattle market being formed in 1855, which only ceased to exist in the 1960s/70s, I cannot remember exactly which. This was a highlight of the week for farmers who networked with other farmers whilst their wives and children shopped and met up with others in Wellington. Similar things would have been happening in Newport and Bridgnorth.

Wellington and the rural areas were bound together economically and socially for a long, long time, and it still applies today.

Links. The second point is about the links to the area of outstanding natural beauty and the conservation areas. Wellington was known at one time as Wellington under the Wrekin, which gives us an idea of our close links to the rural aspects of Shropshire. The Wrekin is part of the area of outstanding natural beauty, which stretches from the Wrekin via Wenlock Edge to the South Shropshire hills. Wellington is often talked about as the gateway to the Shropshire hills, which Bridgnorth is also. Wellington in the north and Bridgnorth to the south. To the west of Wellington the Tern Valley is another rural treasure we are proud to be linked with. Charlton Castle was built by Sir John Charlton, who was valet to Edward the Second. He owned land at the Tern Valley, Dothill, which is Wellington and Apley and the Weald Moors, which is to the north of Apley. Parts of

Dothill, including the lakes, ponds, Bean Valley, Bean Hill Valley, the Millennium Wood, are linked to the special area of the woods in Apley called Apley Woods. This applies to the Weald Moors too. These wetlands are, to quote from a book by LA1, 'Explore the Weald Moors', are an endearing stronghold for some increasingly rare wild life. A vital part for this area of the wild life corridor.

These areas, namely Wellington, Wrockwardine and Apley, which have much community involvement with the management and preservation, and they need to keep their special links. Therefore, for the geographical, social and environmental cohesion I am happy to support the current proposals and look forward to the future links that could be enhanced. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, Mrs Lewis, and, yes, there are a couple of little questions for you, but first of all is there anybody on the floor who wants to raise any point of clarification? (No response) No. In that case, just a couple of things, it would be really useful, there is a pointer in front of you there. Yes, that, and the top button, if you point it, do not move away because we can still hear you then. Now, would you point us to exactly where the Wrekin goes at the bottom here. The Wrekin. Yes.

MRS LEWIS: I am not quite sure, my sight is not very good, but, yes, it is sort of this area, is it not.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, that is useful. That is fine, that is lovely.

MRS LEWIS: This is Much Wenlock, along here is Wenlock Edge.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Now, I was going to ask you about that, because we have had some people come here today who have suggested that Much Wenlock should be put in with the Ludlow constituency, and I just wondered what you thought about that. If you do not have a view on it, that is fine.

MRS LEWIS: Well, I think it is part of the link down to the Shropshire hills, and it does have links with Wellington, and we have celebrated things together at Olympic time, you know, celebrated the Olympics and things like that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What about its links with Bridgnorth, which obviously it is linked with at the moment, and the plan is to keep the link with Bridgnorth rather than Ludlow.

MRS LEWIS: Yes, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: How strong would you say they were?

MRS LEWIS: I cannot see any reason for it not to be in this area.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, okay, and then one final question.

MRS LEWIS: They are very sort of similar, that is the market town.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Then the final question is, we have also heard discussion in this room in the last couple of days about the name and whether it is necessary to call it Bridgnorth, Wellington and the Wrekin, or whether it would be best served as Bridgnorth and the Wrekin, or we even had one suggestion just the Wrekin, and since you come from Wellington it would be interesting to know what you felt about losing the Wellington in this particular title.

MRS LEWIS: Well, no, I have no particular wish to retain the Wellington, it has never been in a constituency name as far as I know. I can see where keeping the Wrekin as the name would be linking back, giving that link and consistency to the past, and I think the Wrekin is a special way of identifying the area, in that it is known quite throughout the world, well, quite throughout the country. I would be happy for it just to be the Wrekin.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Lovely, thank you very much indeed, and thank you for your time and thank you for coming to say you support. It is really important to us that we hear that, so that we do not let the waters be muddied too much if we get only objections, and it is difficult to know how much support there might still be. So really important you came, thank you. Our next speaker is Joan Gorse, please. So your name and address.

CLLR GORSE: (Arleston Ward) Yes, thank you, my name is Joan Gorse, and I live at 24 Emerald Rise, Wellington. I have lived in Wellington for 47 years and I am a Wellington town councillor for the Arleston ward.

The name of Bridgnorth, Wellington and the Wrekin, it seems quite long and convoluted, I do not see that Wellington has to be included in it. I would be happy with the Wrekin and Bridgnorth, or, as it has previously been suggested, perhaps the Wrekin. This new constituency mainly consists of market towns, and I feel that the Wrekin name should be retained as people identify with the landmark, as it can be seen from all areas, or most areas anyway.

I would like to explain why I think Apley and Wellington have very close links. First of all the schools, the new Charlton School in Wellington opened this year, in April, and it is where children from Apley, Wellington and beyond attend from eleven years of age. It is right on the boundary of Wellington and Apley, so that link is between Wellington and Apley, it is literally right on the border. So I feel it is important, there is no other school

in Apley that can take the children, it is where they go, the Charlton School. It was in another area of Wellington, very close to where I live, and I have seen children coming from Apley, I know the parents, et cetera, and I know that they were very pleased to go that bit closer to home when the new Charlton School was built this year, or opened this year.

Another link is health care. There are two medical practices for Apley residents to use, one in Wellington and one in the Shawbirch ward of Wellington. So that link, that medical link is there, and we feel it is important. Shopping and leisure, that is another point for a lot of people to move areas as well as jobs. Apley has no commercial centre at all, there is no supermarket, shops, library, swimming baths, leisure centre, churches, market, chemist, train station, Post Office, police station, bank or building society. Wellington has all these and more, and residents of Apley have strong ties with Wellington because all those services are within walking distance.

The other side of the Wrekin constituency, residents of Donnington, Hadley and Leegomery identify more with Telford because of historic industrial links. Many families moved to Telford when it was a new town and worked in industrial sites, very large industrial sites at Hadley and Donnington, and I feel that these links will always be remembered by generations of families who came at the beginning of a new era for Telford when it was a new town, and incidentally that is when I moved to Telford, right at the beginning. We moved to Wellington just because of we saw a house we liked, we have been there ever since and I feel that I belong to Wellington. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Again, very useful indeed, do not go away yet. Any points of clarification from the floor? (No response) No. We are fine on that. So Apley is just above Wellington and there certainly has been one suggestion that we have heard that there could be merit in putting it, in taking that into the Telford ward rather than keeping it where it is, so I was particularly interested in what you were saying about Apley, it is Apley Castle ward, is it not?

CLLR GORSE: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The links that you made there, I think they are quite important, so thank you for that, and you feel quite strongly that they go Wellington's way rather than into Telford?

CLLR GORSE: Yes, I do. Apley is a lovely area, it has got a beautiful area, Apley Woods, as it has already been spoken about. The hospital is in Apley ward, the Princess Royal Hospital, and also the Severn Hospice, and apart from those it is a lovely area to live, there are some beautiful houses there, there is open parkland, but there are no shops. There is no commercial centre at all, and I feel that the people I know that live in Apley, I mean it is a beautiful place to live, as I have said, they are

happy there, but for shopping and all the other things it is Wellington that they have links with.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Because it is close, because the transport is good?

CLLR GORSE: Yes, there are regular buses.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

CLLR GORSE: Yes, and, like I say, there is a train station and Wellington is a larger market town.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, and as you pointed out, as far as the name goes, which again there has been quite a bit of discussion about in this room, you feel the Wrekin and Bridgnorth or the Wrekin?

CLLR GORSE: I think, if I have got to say, I think the Wrekin, it sounds better.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Shorter is always more helpful but that does not mean to say it is the right one.

CLLR GORSE: No, I am not from Bridgnorth so maybe the people in Bridgnorth would have feelings about that. I am from Wellington but I do not feel that Wellington has to be included because the proposals include all the market towns surrounding, in the surrounding rural areas, including Bridgnorth.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes. That is lovely, thank you so much for coming along and really useful information for us, thank you. Our next speaker is Christopher Gill, thank you, who I believe is the former MP. Is that correct?

MR GILL: Chairman, that is correct. I am a former Member of Parliament for the Ludlow constituency, where I have lived for the past 44 years. I took the time and trouble five years ago to make oral and written submissions to the Commission when they held a public hearing in Ludlow, and precious little good it did me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You bear to just give us your address as well please, thank you.

MR GILL: My address is Talbot Court, Salop Street, Bridgnorth. I was saying that I made representations to the Commission five years ago, and precious little good it did me because it seems to me that very, very little has changed in terms of their proposals. I think in effect two small parishes have perhaps been added on to the proposals that were made five years ago, and I think I am correct in saying that the other change is

that Highley is being shunted off into the new Ludlow and Leominster constituency. I cannot speak, or I do not speak for the people of Highley, but I would think that they would be regretting that, because of the community of interest that they have with Bridgnorth rather than with Ludlow, and I am here this afternoon, Chairman, principally to exercise again those two concerns which I expressed five years ago, which is that the constituencies really should be based on the community of interest rather than upon trying to achieve quotients of somewhere between 71,000 and 78,000 inhabitants.

The other thing that I feel most strongly about, and again made the same representations five years ago, is that we are creating more constituencies, it appears, where the constituency boundaries will embrace two separate local authority areas, and this is going to be most pronounced, for example, in the case of Ludlow and Leominster, where half of that new constituency will be in Shropshire and the other half will be in Hereford, and of course it is potentially possible that the policies of two separate county councils will be diametrically opposed and that puts the representation by the Member of Parliament in a very parlous situation. What is he to do when half of his constituents perhaps are rooting for one thing and the other half are rooting for a completely different thing. So those are my two points, and let me make it clear I am not blaming the Boundary Commission for what I regard as the inadequacies of their proposals because they are totally hamstrung by this necessity to create constituencies with these magic numbers of inhabitants. So, as I say, I appreciate that you are very hamstrung.

You asked a previous speaker what they thought about Much Wenlock, which direction Much Wenlock should go in. Again, I do not represent anybody other than myself nowadays, but I would have thought that Much Wenlock would be happier remaining attached to Bridgnorth, and whichever constituency Bridgnorth finds itself in, because Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth were of course part of the original Bridgnorth district council, as indeed was Highley, and I stress again that it seems slightly preposterous that Highley is being shunted off into this rather remote Ludlow and Leominster constituency whereas parishes on the opposite side of the river to Highley are coming into the new Bridgnorth, Wellington and Wrekin constituency, and as far as the name is concerned, to anticipate a question which you may ask, I would have thought if we have got to have a new name, obviously we do have to have a new name, then Bridgnorth and the Wrekin would be satisfactory. I am perhaps speaking now in my former role as a Member of Parliament, I was always very glad that when I was called to speak in the House of Commons the speaker could call the member for Ludlow, rather than call the member for a string of names which probably meant nothing to anybody very much. So if we have got to come down on one side or the other, then I would have thought Bridgnorth and the Wrekin. But having said that, I do not think we, in Bridgnorth, and to the west of Bridgnorth, have any community of interest with the people that we are now being lumped together with, but, as I say, I do not blame the Boundary Commission for that, I blame Parliament for having decreed that constituencies have to be based on a numerical number of inhabitants. This is the wrong way to go in terms of our future democracy and I would like that put on record once again, thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, before you go, absolutely that is on record, but, as you say, there is nothing we can do about it, we are absolutely confined by the law to stick to dealing with the boundaries and making sure the numbers fit and that the number of constituencies is reduced, which does not affect your area at all. Thank you very much for those comments, I think they are very important. A little question, the Highley, you feel concerned about Highley, am I right in thinking it is on the boundary, it is on a boundary with a river there?

MR GILL: That is right, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, so that maybe explains what is going on there.

MR GILL: You have Alveley on one side of the river, Highley absolutely opposite on the other side of the river.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: The boundary---

MR GILL: Alveley is coming with us to the north, and under your current proposals Highley going south with Ludlow and Leominster.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Because I do not know this area very well, does the Wrekin mean much to the people of Bridgnorth?

MR GILL: Well, all that I say is that we in Shropshire say we are all friends around the Wrekin, but that is about as far as I can go. No, the Wrekin does not, I think, mean much to us former Ludlow constituency people.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You do not feel, living in Bridgnorth, that you are part of it, you are near it, that sort of thing? It does not do it for you in the way that in Wellington obviously?

MR GILL: No, I do not think it does. No.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is very useful, and I think you have answered everything else and anticipated everything else. Are there any questions anyone wants to put from the floor? (No response) In which case, Mr Gill, thank you very much indeed, really fascinating, thank you for speaking to us today. Is there anyone else in the room who is scheduled to speak, or wants to speak? (No response) In that case we will adjourn, and I am not quite sure what time we are going to adjourn to. Somebody was going to be in touch with a later speaker and see if they wanted to come forward. Did you hear anything from them? That is fine, that is fine. We can deal with that. In which case, what we will do, because at this point in time

while we have had a fairly busy day and a half, it is now going very quiet, and on our actual list we only have one person to speak, that does not mean to say people will not turn up and want to speak, for which they can, but we will adjourn at hourly intervals and then get back together just to check if anybody wants to say anything. So the time now is about 2.30, so I think we will adjourn until 3.20, and reconvene and see if there is any speaker, otherwise we will then be reconvening about an hour or so after that for our final speaker. Thank you so much for your time and for coming today.

Time noted: 2.31 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 3.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So we have not had anyone else walk in, so I am planning now to adjourn again. I am really sorry, and we are expecting somebody last thing, so probably I think reconvene at 4.20, and then as soon as our last speaker arrives we will go with it, but it could be as late as ten to five. So one is expected ten to five, if he comes earlier we will hear him, which is why I am suggesting we get together again about 4.20, does that sound sensible? Sorry about that, but Leamington Spa is busy for two days.

Time noted: 3.31 pm

After a short break

Time noted: 4.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So I am now reconvening, if that is okay, everyone, and this is our last session of the afternoon. A quick reminder that you are being filmed, it is for the public record, and we do need your name and address and the floor is yours.

CLLR DAVIES: (Malinslee and Dawley Bank Ward) My name is Cllr Shaun Davies, I am leader at Telford Wrekin council, my address is 12 Wellington Close, Lawley in Telford, and I like to address my comments in regard to the Telford, the current Telford seat, the current Wrekin seat.

I would like to support the boundary review's initial recommendation in respect of the changes. I think that the arguments made during the last boundary review were clearly listened to, and adopted by the boundary review, and clearly these proposals here today have been taken from that.

I am Telford born and bred, I live and work in the area, and I would like just to address my comments in regards to the general spread of the wards. I think that certainly Donnington, which is currently being proposed by the Boundary Commission to move into the Telford constituency, makes complete sense. Donnington is very much a manufacturing area, has a strong industrial base, as does of course areas of Telford. There is not a huge amount of difference between the industrial areas of Donnington, with, say, for example, Stafford Park, which is in the Hollinswood, the Nedge ward. I think if you speak to people, like I do, their children go to school in Telford schools, they would go to colleges in Telford, in Telford colleges. Myself have got family who live in Donnington too.

In respect of the counter-proposal with regards to Apley, I would suggest, albeit that the parish council boundaries are aligned with Hadley and Leegomery, that in fact Apley is much more assigned to and recognisable to Wellington. The hospital of course, the Princess Royal Hospital is in the Apley area, I think most people that you speak to would say that the hospital actually is in the Wellington area as opposed to Telford, or Hadley and Leegomery.

In terms of the make up of Telford, obviously it is a growing town, and people are moving around from different areas. I for myself have got a number of friends who were from the south of the borough, in areas like Ironbridge and Madeley, who now live in Donnington, and also a number of friends who live in my ward, of Malinslee and Dawley Bank who work in the Donnington area.

In terms of Hadley and Leegomery, I think that certainly does make sense to move that into the Telford constituency. Again it is very urban, very diverse in terms of its population and many of its residents go to Telford schools, and also work for Telford based employers. Therefore the linkages, the community linkages are profound in both those wards.

I think that the Boundary Commission have got it right in terms of the spread across the motorway, and I am glad they have not seen it as a barrier, because it certainly is not, and I think that on balance the community ties are made out in terms of the current proposals, as are the numbers, and therefore I do not support any changes to the current recommendations.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is really, really useful. Just a couple of questions. I assume there is no questions from the floor on this one. (No response) A couple of questions, so Apley Castle, there is this counter idea that Apley should in fact be brought in and Donnington not put in, brought in, and I know you have touched on the reasons, but I just wondered if you could expand a little bit on that and your views on that.

CLLR DAVIES: Sure. Well, in terms of Donnington schools, there has been a merger

of a local set of secondary schools there, so children from the Donnington area will be going to a school where children from the St Georges and Wrockwardine Wood and Oakengates areas of the town, so in effect Donnington's children are going to Telford schools, Telford constituency schools already. As I also said, in terms of Apley Castle, what I think you will find is most people would suggest that is more akin to the Wellington area of the town. I know and I concede that there are parish councils made up in a slightly peculiar way, if that makes sense, but I think most people would take the view that the hospital, which is in the Apley Castle area, and actually has wards named after Apley Castle because of its close links, that the hospital is both certainly in Wellington, and their children will go to Wellington schools, whether that be the Charlton School or whether that be Ercall Wood School, which are both secondary schools within the Wellington area. Again, I would like to point out to the fact that Hadley and Leegomery in terms of the Hortonwood industrial park is very industrial, compared to Apley Castle, which is more residential, more rural in its regard.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, that is great. Just one further question, and again I know you are talking about Telford here, but just whether you had a view, we have had some discussion on the name of the other constituency surrounding it, which at the moment we have suggested, or the Boundary Commission has suggested should be the Wrekin, Wellington and Bridgnorth, or Bridgnorth, Wellington and the Wrekin, and we have had suggestions either that it should be called the Wrekin, or that it should in fact be called Bridgnorth and the Wrekin. We have not had anybody ask to keep the Wellington in, in fact most people think it gets a bit unwieldy with all three in, I just wondered if you had a view on that?

CLLR DAVIES: I would take that view, that it probably does get unwieldy and I think that most people would take the view that the Wrekin certainly is heavily associated with Wellington, and therefore if you were to take one of the names out, then Wellington would be the name I would suggest.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What about keeping or not keeping Bridgnorth in?

CLLR DAVIES: I am neutral in regards to that, but in terms of, I suppose the Wrekin and Bridgnorth seat has a ring to it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Lovely. Thank you very much indeed, really important to us in making sure we get the balance right between people who object and people who support, so that we do not go off on a tangent down the line of objectors only if there is substantial support. Really important that you came to speak to us, and we appreciate your time. Thank you so much. At which point I think we will close this session, because I do not think we have any other speakers come through, and thank you so much for your time, and we look forward to catching you in Leamington on Thursday at ten o'clock. Thank you again.

The hearing concluded

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