

**BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND**

**PROCEEDINGS**

AT THE

**2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN ENGLAND**

HELD AT

**COUNTY BUILDINGS, MARTIN STREET, STAFFORD, ST16 2LH**

ON

**MONDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2016**

**DAY ONE**

Before:

**Ms Margaret Gilmore, The Lead Assistant Commissioner**

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Time noted: 10.00 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is great to be here in Stafford and welcome to this public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the West Midlands. My name is Margaret Gilmore, I am an Assistant Commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England and I was appointed by the Commission to assist them in their task of making recommendations for new constituencies in the West Midlands. I am responsible for chairing the hearing today and tomorrow and I am also responsible, with my fellow Assistant Commissioner David Latham, who is here, for analysing all of the representations received about the initial proposals and then presenting recommendations to the Commission as to whether or not those initial proposals should be revised.

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

The hearing today is scheduled to run from 10.00 am until 8.00 pm and tomorrow it is scheduled to run from 9.00 am until 5.00 pm and I can vary that timetable and I will take into account the attendance and the demand for opportunities to speak. I should point out that under the legislation that governs the Commission's review each public hearing must be held over two days and cannot be extended to a third, possibly not a problem over the next two days.

The purpose of this public hearing is to allow people to make oral representations about the initial proposals for the West Midlands region. A number of people have already registered to speak and have been given a timeslot and I will invite them to speak at the appropriate time and then if there is any time free during the day or at the end of the day I will invite anybody who has not registered but who would like to speak to do so. I would stress that the purpose of this public hearing is for people to make oral representations about the initial proposals. The purpose is not to engage in a debate with the Commission about the proposals, nor is this hearing an opportunity for people to cross-examine other speakers during their presentation. People may seek to put questions for clarification to the speakers but they should do so through me as the Chair. I will now hand over to Glenn, who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals.

MR REED: Thank you very much Margaret and good morning everybody. As Margaret has mentioned, my name is Glenn Reed and I am a member of the Commission's staff. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their role to recommend new parliamentary constituency boundaries, and at this hearing I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly. As Margaret has already stated, she will chair the hearing itself and it is her responsibility to run the hearing at her discretion and to take decisions about

speakers, questioners and timings. My team and I are here today to support Margaret in carrying out her role, and please speak to any one of us outside the hearing if you need any help or assistance.

I would like to talk now about the Commission's initial proposals for the new constituency boundaries which were published on 13 September. We use the European electoral regions as a template for the allocation of the 499 constituencies to which England is entitled, not including the two constituencies to be allocated to the Isle of Wight. This approach is permitted by the legislation and has been supported by previous public consultation. This approach does not prevent anyone from putting forward counter-proposals that include one or more constituencies being split between the regions but it is likely that compelling reasons would need to be given to persuade us to depart from the regional-based approach we adopted in formulating our initial proposals.

In considering the composition of each electoral region we noted that it might not be possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties. Therefore we have grouped some local authority areas into sub-regions. The number of constituencies allocated to each sub-region is determined by the electorate of the combined local authorities. Consequently it has been necessary to propose some constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries. The Commission's proposals for the West Midlands are for 53 constituencies, a reduction of six. Our proposals leave seven of the existing constituencies unchanged. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Staffordshire and the south of Stoke-on-Trent, three of the existing constituencies in Staffordshire are unchanged. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Shropshire and the unitary authority of Telford and Wrekin and combines the towns of Bridgnorth and Wellington, and one constituency in Shropshire is unchanged. We have proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Shropshire and Herefordshire, which combines the towns of Ludlow and Leominster. Another proposed constituency contains electors from Worcester and Herefordshire, which contains the towns of Great Malvern and Ledbury. Additionally, we propose that electors from the south east of the county of Worcestershire are combined with electors from the south west of Warwickshire in one constituency. We also propose that the electors from Solihull are combined with some electors from Warwickshire. Three constituencies in the county of West Midlands are unchanged.

The statutory rules allow us to take into account local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015. These include both the external boundaries of local councils and their internal boundaries, known as "wards" or "electoral divisions". We seek to avoid dividing wards between constituencies wherever possible. Wards are well-defined and well-understood units which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. We consider that any division of these units between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for electoral registration and returning officers who are responsible for running elections. It is our view that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances will splitting a ward between constituencies be justified

and our initial proposals do not do so. If an alternative scheme proposes to split wards, strong evidence and justification will need to be provided and the extent of such ward splitting should be kept to a minimum.

The scale of change in this review is significant and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation period. We are consulting on our proposals until Monday 5 December, so there is still time after the hearing for people to contribute in writing. There are also reference copies of the proposals present at this hearing and they are also available on our website and in a number of places around the region. You can make written representations to us through our consultation website at [www.bce2018.org.uk](http://www.bce2018.org.uk), and I would urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December.

Finally, I would like to remind all participants that this hearing is part of a public consultation and you will be asked to provide us with your name and address if you wish to make an oral representation. The Commission is legally obliged to take into account the public hearings and as you can see we are taking a video recording from which we will create a verbatim transcript. The Commission is required to publish the record of public hearings along with all written representations for a four-week period during which members of the public have an opportunity to comment on those representations. We expect this period to occur during spring of next year. The publication of the hearing records and written representations will include certain personal data of those who have made representations. I therefore invite all those contributing to read the Commission's data protection and privacy policy, a copy of which we have with us, which is also available on our website.

Now, before I hand you back to Margaret, I just want to say that we understand there are no planned fire drills today, so if we do hear the alarm we need to evacuate by the nearest exit which is just behind us (indicating) and we assemble downstairs in a muster area where everybody else is assembling in the market square. Also the facilities, gents and ladies, if you come out of the room here (indicating), go down on the right hand side you have got the ladies' cloakroom and at the far end the gentlemen's cloakroom. Right, at this stage I will now hand you back to Margaret to begin the public hearing. Thank you for your attendance today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thanks Glenn, I hope that is all clear. I think we should just go straight into it and our first speaker is Geoffrey Hanson. Is that you sir? We would love to hear from you. We need you to come and speak at the podium, if you are happy, which is just here (indicating). Okay, we will need your name and your address, sir, and then fire away.

MR HANSON: Okay, my name is Geoffrey Hanson, Spinney End, The Green, Whittington, Lichfield, WS14 9LU. Good morning, I have come to beseech you to review the decision to move Whittington from the Lichfield constituency to the Tamworth constituency for the following reasons:

Whittington has no current relationship with Tamworth. The postal address is Lichfield not Tamworth; the school catchment area is Lichfield not Tamworth; the weekly newspaper is the Lichfield Mercury not the Tamworth Herald; Whittington adjoins Lichfield City Council local government constituency, it does not adjoin a Tamworth local government constituency. Our local government councillors represent us on the Lichfield District Council. When asked 'Where do you live?' people reply 'Whittington, Lichfield'. We have significant pleasure from belonging to key Lichfield organisations such as the Johnson Society, Darwin House, the Lichfield Science and Engineering Society, we are totally unaware of anything in Tamworth. The Langton GP practice in Whittington is a branch of the main practice in Eastern Avenue, Lichfield. We go to the Garrick Theatre in Lichfield, not in Tamworth. And if you are buying or selling a house it would be grouped in with the Lichfield area properties not the Tamworth area. Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for that. Before you go are there any points of clarification that anybody wants to ask from the audience? Mr Hanson it is very important --- oh, I am so sorry, we will get a microphone to you, we need to do that for the record.

CLLR SMITH: (Staffordshire County Council) Yes, David Smith. I would only just clarify one thing, I would only just clarify that the whole of Whittington is surrounded by what is basically the Tamworth constituency and I suspect that the 30-odd per cent of people who are within the Lichfield District Council area are actually looking towards Lichfield, it is a situation that (inaudible).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, so as a point of clarification is that something you would agree with?

MR HANSON: I do not agree with that statement at all. Have you got facts and figures?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, we cannot get into a debate here, but if you tell me exactly what it is that you disagree with about what he said I would be interested to know.

MR HANSON: Well, I disagree that we are totally surrounded by Tamworth constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I suppose if we have a look at the map up here (indicating), are we able to put the old and the new constituencies up? I think the point he is making, and, again, because it comes down into Tamworth ---

MR HANSON: Yes, I accept we abut outlying places of Tamworth, we are a very long way from the centre of Tamworth and we are much closer to Lichfield and the north area of that map is all Lichfield and not Tamworth.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you live in this ward Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: I live in Lichfield, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You live there, okay. That is very, very useful. Thank you very much indeed. Anyone else? Yes, we have another question here. Officially it is points of clarification so if you can ask a question, but we will just get the mic to you, and again, we just need your name.

MR THOMAS: Ma'am, Neil Thomas, I am from Stafford. I have looked at this and it seems to me it is six of one and half a dozen of another that obviously the Tamworth constituency does border the city of Lichfield presently and if these boundaries are approved really there is not much in it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You will have a chance to speak later anyway, I believe you are on the list. Again, would you like to comment on what he just said, which was 'six of one, half a dozen of the other'?

MR HANSON: Well, I understand what he is saying and maybe the junctions are six of one and half a dozen of the other but it is 100 per cent that Whittington feels part of Lichfield. We do not feel part of Tamworth.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: This is what we have to get to the nub of. So, you as a local resident, would you think that most people who live where you do, your neighbours and what have you, believe that is the case?

MR HANSON: Yes, for the reasons I have given. The postal address is Lichfield, the school catchment area is Lichfield, the weekly newspaper is Lichfield, the doctor's is Lichfield, I mean, nothing is Tamworth.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed Mr Hanson, rest assured that what you have to say we absolutely will put in and has equal weight with what anyone else says.

MR HANSON: Thank you very much indeed.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We really appreciate you coming to tell us that. Without your information we cannot make the right judgements.

MR HANSON: And here is the treasured document! (Same handed).

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Which I will of course treasure! Thank you very much. Our next speaker is David Smith please, and again we will need a name and an address Mr Smith.

CLLR SMITH: Thank you I am Cllr David Smith, I am a member for Lichfield Rural South on Staffordshire County Council. I am a past leader of Lichfield District

Council and my address is Ormside House, Church Road, Stonnall, which has a Walsall postcode, just to add to the confusion.

Madam Chairman, I heard in detail what was said about what was being considered in the way that an application would be looked at. We all look at things, as far as change is concerned, with regret, because we all end up with our links and our ties with various matters. It is interesting that Whittington, which seems to be the main bone of contention, actually has never sat – until the last boundary review – within an exclusive Lichfield constituency. If one goes back in history, it has sat within the constituency of Sir David Lightbown as Staffordshire South East, which seemed to be something everyone was perfectly content with. As part of the 1983 boundary changes it was abolished and we ended up with the Staffordshire Rural East and various changes that were made at that sort of time. So, Whittington has passed around a fair amount.

We have, at the last consideration of the boundary review, considered the possibility of the alternative, that Hammerwich would become part of the Tamworth constituency. If one looks at the map, it is impossible to understand how Hammerwich would actually have any relative relationship, it is effectively adjoining Burntwood, which is a town the same size as Lichfield, so it does not really --- when one starts looking at change, which is essential and we all support change, it is has got to be one way or the other. And it seems very much to me that the options which the Boundary Commission are proposing and far and away preferential to what the alternatives may well be.

Madam Chairman our proposal is that we support the Boundary Commission's recommendations on the basis that Whittington sits equidistant, three miles from Tamworth, three miles from Lichfield. It does have very significant links back into Tamworth, people do shop very extensively within Tamworth and it does have very considerable relationships, particularly when we start looking at what is now DMS Whittington, the medical centre. That has very close relationships back, again, with Tamworth, so it is difficult to split how its relationships would turn either way. It is absolutely true that it does sit within Lichfield District Council's area but so does the major part of the rural area of the current Tamworth constituency. My own village of Stonnall sits within Lichfield District Council's area but is not part of Tamworth and I think it is confusing by the title of Tamworth that we sometimes think of it as being Tamworth Borough Council with some additions, that is not the way that the whole thing is perceived.

My feeling is that if what we do is to accept the fact that Whittington, inevitably, is the only way that we are going to balance the constituency, the one thing that I would make a recommendation on that I would ask the Commission to consider is that we have the village and parish of Wall, which sits currently as Hammerwich with Wall ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are you able to get the pointer that you have --- There is a pointer sitting on the desk there and there is a round button at the top and you can point these places out to us, we have the time to do this.

CLLR SMITH: We are looking here that the village of Wall, I think, sits there. What we are suggesting, Madam Chairman, is that Wall, which has an electorate of some 360-odd people and Streethay, which has much the same sort of population, I think there is actually, yes, a difference; 359 electorate in Wall and 495 in Streethay. Streethay sits on the little lump which is proposed here that would go into the Tamworth constituency. I can see very significant difficulties with the closeness that Streethay effectively is linked to Lichfield, it is the other side of the road where you have got two conurbations, a village and the main conurbation of Lichfield. We see a very strong argument, for why? Because of the relationship between Streethay and Lichfield that Streethay and Wall should be interchangeable. I do understand that the Commission is largely trying to look at keeping local authority divisions or wards together but in practice as far as the county divisions are concerned, whichever way we go we will end up with the divisions being split and so my recommendation to the Boundary Commission is to consider the possibility that Streethay could remain with Lichfield and that Wall would stay with the Tamworth constituency.

I would also ask the Commission to consider the possibility, as far as the name of the constituency is concerned, because Tamworth is clearly confusing as we have heard from the previous speaker. Some 30 per cent of the constituency sits entirely outside Tamworth and is a rural wedge that sits between Lichfield and Tamworth and therefore I would propose to the Commission that we consider the possibility of renaming it Tamworth and South East Staffordshire or possibly even going back to the old title of South East Staffordshire and dropping Tamworth, although I can understand that there is a wish to keep some sort of identity with a major community. We do have a problem, as far as Tamworth and Lichfield are concerned, that we have this great wedge of rural area which is effectively, one could say, no man's land. I mean Whittington is a community in its own right in the same way that all of the individual villages are. Whittington sits very close to Wigginton, to Elford and to all the other rural areas and has a great link as far as they are concerned, particularly because of the rural community and probably does not look to either Tamworth or Lichfield for its rural communities in many, many of those areas.

So, Madam Chairman, I would, to summarise, support the recommendations that Whittington would go, as far as balancing the population is concerned, that we do not see an alternative to Whittington becoming part of a renamed Tamworth constituency, but we would ask you to consider the possibility of transferring Wall and Streethay on the basis of community cohesion and the relationships that we have with our various areas. So, madam Chairman, I would submit that you consider those possibilities and I am happy if you had any questions or clarification. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do we have any questions? We do. Yes, if you could put it as a question, a point of clarification, that is the official way we are meant to do it because we are not meant to – at this early stage in the process, there will be further consultation – get into that. We need your name again, sir.



MR HANSON: My name is Geoffrey Hanson. In the numbers that you quoted for Streethay you have not taken account of the fact that they are building a new estate of 500 houses. So that will be at least 700 or 800 more constituents.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Would you like to make a comment on that, although I would point out we are limited in the data we can use, but you are welcome to say something.

CLLR SMITH: My understanding, madam Chairman, is that you look at the electorate as it currently stands, not as projected numbers. If you look at projected numbers then you end up with 10,000 houses being proposed for Lichfield District Council's area. Some of those are on the boundaries of Tamworth, so it would put the whole of the proposals into the melting pot and I think that would just give you an impossible problem of how you try to resolve that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further ---?

MR HANSON: Well, these are not being proposed, they are being built.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. We hear what you say, we have heard the answer. Thank you. And another question over here?

MR THOMAS: Neil Thomas. Am I right in thinking that the Streethay parish includes the Lichfield Trent Valley railway station?

CLLR SMITH: The Streethay parish does include the railway station and also, of course, the parish council is a merged parish council, so together with Fradley, which of course is well into the heart of the Lichfield constituency, which I think supports the argument for Streethay staying the Lichfield.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You need to take me through that a little bit in more detail, the relevance of the station. It is called Streethay station is it?

CLLR SMITH: No, no, no.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is the Lichfield station?

CLLR SMITH: It is Lichfield Trent Valley.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right.

CLLR SMITH: It is effectively an out-of-town station.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, that is what I need to know.

CLLR SMITH: On the West Coast main line, it is a very important railway line.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thank you. Is there --- yes, we have another question here.

MR RILEY: Thank you. Ian Riley. Whilst it is clearly true that Streethay is very close to Lichfield, is it not equally true that Hopwas is very close to Tamworth and that Whittington itself sits in the middle with people facing in both directions.

CLLR SMITH: Well, I think I would clarify that Whittington sits three miles from Tamworth and three miles from Lichfield. If you take some of the areas like Shenstone, Shenstone, for your information, sits at the far end of what is the existing constituency over here, Shenstone, Little Aston, Stonnall and indeed Wall, which we were mentioning earlier on, are all some significant distance from Tamworth when you compare them with Whittington. Whittington has got very, very good bus services that take them in both directions so it is difficult to argue a case for why the relationship between Whittington and Lichfield is stronger in either direction. But on the basis that we have to change the numbers, that the numbers have to be correct, I do not see an alternative to the proposal for Whittington that gives us a reasonable alternative. And Whittington, of course, has sat in this constituency for longer than it sat in the Lichfield constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I have a question which is you are talking about Wall, which constituency does Wall currently sit in?

CLLR SMITH: It currently sits in the Tamworth constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And you are asking for it ---

CLLR SMITH: For it to remain.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: For it to remain in the Tamworth constituency.

CLLR SMITH: Just as far as the county divisions are concerned, my county division stretches right the way across from Canwell, which you probably can see, which is somewhere here, right the way across into Hammerwich, which is over here. So it crosses the boundaries of both constituencies, as of course does the existing Whittington with Streethay division, as far as the county boundaries are concerned. So it makes a problem whichever way one looks.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And what would you call the exceptional circumstances that we have to invoke if we were to split wards, which we have not done anywhere else in our initial proposals for this region.

CLLR SMITH: I would argue that the exceptional circumstance is that Streethay, when one looks at the A38 which is the boundary line here the bit that sticks out here clearly sits more comfortably with Lichfield. Streethay, literally is within walking

distance of Lichfield, it makes a very, very sensible part of --- one has to be very careful to say 'a part of Lichfield' because the people of Streethay would get very upset with that, but its relationship to Lichfield is so close that I think that it would be very, very difficult to include it in a new South East Staffordshire constituency, where[as] Wall currently sits in South East Staffordshire or in the Tamworth constituency and effectively makes no difference.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have one further point of clarification, and another one.

MR THOMAS: Neil Thomas again from Stafford. Would you agree with me that it would be very helpful if the Commission could explain what count as exceptional circumstances because plainly they do not want to divide wards and I accept that and I am not, in anything I say later, going to ask for them to divide wards. But I think a lot of people would find it very interesting to know what counts as exceptional circumstances.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I am going to pass that one to Glenn. I think you anticipated that coming did you not?

MR REED: It is something that we have not actually determined, what exceptional circumstances are. I think the issue is it depends where the request to split wards is, what the implications are in that particular area and I think each case would be looked on on an individual specific basis. So we would not want to have a carte blanche definition of that situation would be.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: In other words it is very open and it is for others to provide the case and the evidence, but it must prove that it is exceptional. We have another point of clarification here.

MR HANSON: Geoff Hanson. David said we have very good bus services from Whittington to Tamworth; we have one every hour.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is one bus service to Tamworth every hour good? And how does that compare to the bus services to Lichfield.

CLLR SMITH: I think if you look at rural bus services, rural bus services are very poor across the whole of the county and are getting worse. I think it is something that from a county council point of view we need to address and I am not sure how relevant that is when we start looking at changing constituency boundaries. What I think is very important is that the relationship which the current Tamworth constituency has with schools remains the same and if we were to look at any of the options it would open up a whole stack of different schools that we would need to talk to, it really makes life very, very difficult if we look at any of the alternatives to the ones that the Boundary Commission has proposed apart from the one that I am suggesting to you madam Chairman.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will go back and have one more point of clarification here but I think it would be useful also, and I will use my privilege as the Chair here, to ask you how many bus services [there are] to Lichfield every hour which would be useful.

MR HANSON: Geoffrey Hanson. There is one an hour. I am not on David's wavelength about the schools. If he could explain why he has brought the subject up. I made a point that in my proposal that the Whittington school catchment area is Lichfield, so I do not know what it has got to do with Tamworth schools.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, we will put that as a point of clarification. Could we have some clarification on the educational situation?

CLLR SMITH: Madam Chairman we are confusing Tamworth with the Tamworth constituency. Tamworth only represents 70 per cent of the overall constituency. It would be absolutely true to say if you look at the boundaries of the present Tamworth constituency that most of that constituency from an educational point of view looks to Lichfield to go to its schools and they are all bussed in. If one was to look at what had been considered by the Boundary Commission as an alternative, that Hammerwich would have been the alternative to be able to be worth looking at, that introduces a whole stack of different Burntwood schools, which would make life very, very difficult indeed. And I think that the recommendation is sound on that basis and I think, again, when you look at the existing Tamworth constituency and what would be a new constituency, Whittington is entirely surrounded by the present Tamworth constituency. That is where it is.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, yes I think you have made that point already. Do we have any further questions? You are not happy, well I think we need to --- Mr Hanson I have to say to you that your view absolutely holds equal weight to everyone else's and we will definitely look at it and we have the written submission and we really appreciate you coming. Not to worry; I just have to keep some order in here. We appreciate your views, thank you very much and let me just check the situation on who our next speaker may be, thank you.

CLLR SMITH: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, our next speaker is not due for about 20 minutes, half an hour, so is there anybody in the room, since we are on this issue who maybe would like to speak now instead of in their allocated slots later? That would be great, because it is sometimes quite good to keep the subjects together, so just watch the step there, lovely.

MR THOMAS: Thank you very much, Neil Thomas, 72, Greensome Lane, Doxey, Stafford, ST16 1EU. Thank you for allowing me to speak now because I have got other things to do later on and I do not know when they are going to take place. I am a political journalist, I have looked at these things in the past. I live, obviously, in the Stafford constituency and that is the one that concerns me most, but I do take an

interest in the whole of Staffordshire. I want to commend the Commission on its overall approach, I think the regional approach is sensible, I know boundaries between regions can be debated but I do not think they are debatable in the West Midlands. We are used to being a region. I also accept the sense of leaving constituencies unchanged where that is possible. Obviously in most constituencies it is not possible. South Staffordshire, Cannock Chase and Burton will, under your proposals, be left as they are and I approve of that. There is a change between the boundaries of Lichfield and Tamworth, you have heard about that. I understand the problems connected with that but I am not going to argue about them. The one part that I know is contestable is the part of Stafford borough that you are proposing to include in the Lichfield constituency, Haywood and Hixon, I know that people in that part of the world do not like that. I would love to be able to tell you that I have got some terribly clever alternative to it but I have not, ma'am, so I accept why that is being proposed.

The Staffordshire Moorlands constituency will become a constituency on its own district council boundaries and that makes sense, I know that you like that and I am not going to argue with that. Then there is this new constituency of West Staffordshire which I will recommend, ma'am, should be renamed North West Staffordshire, which includes the town of Stone, which I know, and the parish of Eccleshall, which I know, and the south west corner of Stoke-on-Trent. Well, under the rules part of Stoke-on-Trent is going to have to be mixed with another part of Staffordshire. Stoke-on-Trent has had three parliamentary constituencies since 1950 and probably before then. It has never had the number of electors to justify that and I think this is a sensible arrangement under the rules and I commend it to you. I do not think that that is a bad area at all but I daresay there are people in Stoke-on-Trent who think they ought to have three seats, well, they have had three and they have not been entitled, is the way I look at it. So I commend this. I also make the point, and under the previous initial proposals it was proposed to divide the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, well, I did not like that and if somebody wanted to draw a line through Stafford and say 'you are going to be in two different parliamentary constituencies', I would not be very pleased. So I understand why people did not like that and I think the present arrangements are far more sensible.

So I want to commend the Commission's proposals, I think they make sense. I would love somebody to come up with a better arrangement. I think they are good, given the rules, which are strict, but given the rules I think they make sense and I commend them to the Commission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much it is very important to us that we do hear support as well as objections so that we can get things balanced and do not take decisions that are based on minorities, so very, very useful. Do we have any points of clarification that anyone wants to raise? (None). In which case thank you very much indeed for your time.

MR THOMAS: I know you have had problems in the past when people who have been happy with your proposals have not said anything and then you change them and they say 'oh no we liked them'!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Exactly, we had a big problem last time when we got a lot of objections and got something wrong, so we are really grateful and of course all things can change and I want everyone here to rest assured that everyone who speaks influences, so thank you. Thank you for your time. Our next speaker has arrived, we are going to give her time to get into the chamber so we will keep the session open but we can talk amongst ourselves for a few minutes. (After a pause). Mrs Fletcher, you are our next speaker because we do have a little bit of a gap. We have just had a few speakers, but I notice that you and – I am guessing – somebody standing next to you are probably the only two at this point talking about Coventry, but we are ready to take you if you would like to or you can take five minutes it is entirely up to you. We would love you at the podium here first of all, yes absolutely, everyone else has done it, and if you just sit down there (indicating) until it is your turn then that is great. And we will, for legal reasons, we need your name and address, obviously House of Commons is fine if you prefer and we will get Coventry here up on the map and there is a pointer there, the round button is the thing you press so if you choose to you can show us what you are talking about.

MRS FLETCHER: (MP for Coventry North East) This is all new to me.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh I know, it is amazing. So, your name and address and then ---

MRS FLETCHER: Okay, my name is Colleen Fletcher and I live at 39, Edyth Road, Coventry. Okay, thank you. Thank you first of all for allowing me to speak this morning. A key point that I wish to highlight today is in relation to the Boundary Commission proposals for Coventry and Warwickshire. It is important for the Boundary Commission to note that economic, social and demographic links in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region tend to go from north to south not from east to west. As such, the proposals to include Meriden and Knowle in the Boundary Commission's original proposals do not respect the local linkages between communities in the sub-region. Equally, the Meriden Gap is not only a stretch of green belt that aims to protect the city of Coventry from encroachment of the Birmingham conurbation but is also an area that defines itself independently of either Birmingham or Coventry. Consequently this gap should be protected and the Commission, I believe, should resist efforts to place any part of this gap in Birmingham or Coventry.

I support the Labour Party proposals, principally because they respect the local communities in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region. A Coventry West and Atherstone constituency respects the north south links within the sub-region and connects communities in the north of Coventry to communities in Warwickshire which already have close ties. For example, a key hub of this area is the large shopping centre, the Prologis Park, this is a business park and is well used, it is quite

large and it is well used by all the communities in north Warwickshire and in the north west of Coventry. The proposal is also a strong one as it respects transport connections with good bus connections between Coventry and the communities in north Warwickshire already in existence. The fact that Bablake and Woodlands ward are both semi-rural wards that lead directly into Warwickshire, [that] they are within Coventry would also mean that there are communal links and similarities between the communities in these wards and the wards that would be included in north Warwickshire. Some of these links are really historical and in the past there have been in that area two collieries, for instance, there was the Keresley Pit, which is in Bablake ward and then there was Daw Mill, which has just recently closed down, in Arley. So there are strong links there between that side of the city from Bablake going there into Warwickshire.

I support the Boundary Commission proposals for the new Coventry South for similar reasons. The obvious centre of the constituency would be Coventry city centre in St Michael's ward, which has close links to Radford, Sherbourne, Whoberley, Earlsdon, Cheylesmore and Binley and Willenhall. Importantly, there are good links between each of the peripheral wards, so for example, Radford shares out-of-town shopping streets with Sherbourne along the Barker Butts Road and Moseley Avenue, linking the two communities. Sherbourne and Whoberley share schools, they share St Christopher's Primary School on the Allesley Old Road, acting as both a community hub for the Camden and Allesley Park communities and also, of course, it is a shared polling station, emphasising the fact that it is well used by both communities. Whoberley and Earlsdon also share communities with Earlsdon North, forming part of the Whoberley ward. In this area, the two schools of Hearsall Primary and Earlsdon Primary are also shared between the communities, likewise Binley and Willenhall, Cheylesmore and Earlsdon share close communal links and are already part of the same constituency, sharing shops, schools and other community facilities between them.

As I mentioned previously, the communal links in Coventry and Warwickshire go north south not east west, as such Labour Party proposals for Westwood ward and Wainbody ward respect the links that they have between each other and Kenilworth and Southam. Therefore, as others have noted, there are links between the south of Coventry and Kenilworth in the south. These links, however, do not extend far into the city of Coventry, but it would be reasonable to place Wainbody and Westwood into Kenilworth as these respect the communal links that do exist between the neighbouring wards in Coventry and Kenilworth. It is important to note that communities in Wainbody supported the creation of a Stoneleigh Parish Council which has strong links to Stoneleigh itself and the centre of the constituency would be the University of Warwick, of course, noting that lots of students and academics live in Westwood and Kenilworth wards, which surround it.

Finally, I would like to say I am the Member of Parliament for Coventry North East, I have been for the last 18 months. Before that I was Councillor in Coventry North East in two separate wards, in Wyken and in Upper Stoke, for a total of about 14 years. Coventry North East is unchanged in the Boundary Commission's proposals

and the Labour Party proposals make some minor proposal to change the boundary. It is important to emphasise that Coventry North East is already a well-defined community and major change should be resisted and I think that is reflected in the Boundary Commission's proposals and the Labour Party proposals as well. Further to me being a Member of Parliament and a Councillor in the area I have lived in Coventry North East for all of my life and that is for over 60 years, and my family lived there, and the fifth generation of my family is now being brought up, educated and work in Coventry North East.

The centre of Coventry North East is Foleshill ward, it is the heart of the community and links Foleshill to communities on the east of the city. Foleshill has close communal and demographic links to Longford, Stoke and Lower Stoke, with large minority populations living in each of these wards, with shopping areas, places of worship, community centres largely being located in Foleshill. These links are strong and well-recognised in Coventry. It is important for the Boundary Commission to note that the links between Foleshill do not extend to the west of the city. This is because the neighbouring ward of Radford on the west has a number of small factories and businesses on its boundary with Foleshill and the Jubilee Crescent shopping district tends to draw residents from the eastern side of Radford into the centre of Radford rather than into Foleshill. As such even though the wards neighbour each other there is a natural economic boundary between Radford and Foleshill that really should continue to be respected.

I have to say that looking at the boundary of Coventry North East, starting right from the top at Rowleys Green next to the new Ricoh Arena – I think I can just about see that map – going right from there, and I actually checked this over the weekend, the boundary is so strong because it actually follows some really important lines and they are train lines and there is the Coventry Canal, which weaves itself around Coventry, mainly in the Foleshill and Longford areas. There is a disused railway line that it follows right down to Stoke at the bottom, all the way down here you will see the railway line, it goes all the way down following --- This is the main road, Phoenix Way, the A444, and it actually follows a bit of that round and then follows the railway line directly down to the bottom into the city centre. Then it follows main roads up and it follows a disused railway line coming down here and then it meets up with the main railway line there which is the East Coast line, the main line to London and then comes round on to --- This is the main Allard Way which is a really busy main road coming up to Binley Road, it then turns round and this is the main eastern bypass of course, so again, a very, very main road coming up and follows, again, the M6 there and then comes round and it meets [the] canal again because you are back up to Longford. I have to say that the canal goes all the way round here as well and follows --- It sort of winds itself round I do not think it is quite clear there. It was interesting while talking to my predecessor in Coventry North East as well over the weekend, his thoughts, and he said that because of the strong boundaries around Coventry North East that has been reflected by the Boundary Commission and the Labour Party, there are very few places in that boundary that you can actually walk across. Very few places. There are a couple of bridges and obviously there are roads but to actually cross it, walking, is very, very difficult; really well-defined and



strong boundaries, strong links, and that is why, I think, very strong links from Foleshill, which is the hub down into Lower Stoke and into Upper Stoke where mosques and temples are shared.

The Labour Party proposal, of course, takes in Exhall, and I think there are strong links between Coventry North East and Exhall, [I was] just having a conversation with my husband coming her in the car today, he worked right on the boundary in a factory up there in Ibstock Road for many years and I said 'Did many people work there who came from Exhall?', because there is a main road going through to Exhall and he said 'They all came from Exhall!', so, again, very strong links and working links from Exhall into Coventry and I think that Exhall would be a welcome ward into Coventry North East and of course going back to the Labour Party proposals it is important, I think, to bring Nuneaton and Bedworth back together, they share some really special links as well and obviously it is too big to have the whole of it in one constituency and so with the breaking-off of Exhall into Coventry North East that would be natural and very, very welcome. But clearly there are lots of links between Bedworth and Nuneaton, deeply integrated, an example of this: there are Nuneaton people who are councillors in Bedworth and Bedworth people who are councillors in Nuneaton, the George Eliot Hospital sits almost equally between Nuneaton and Bedworth and serves both towns, a very much-loved institution by both Nuneaton and Bedworth residents. Both communities have mobilised when the hospital has been under threat, they have united on this and so many things. Nuneaton College is in Nuneaton but serves both towns with many students travelling daily from Bedworth. The Warwickshire Justice Centre in Nuneaton is the court covering Bedworth as well, there is a volunteer centre which covers Nuneaton and Bedworth, there are lots and lots of links and they sort of go together, Nuneaton and Bedworth, as do the welcome proposals – by most people I think – to link Warwick and Leamington back together.

So, without taking up any more time, because I know other people want to speak, I think that is --- thank you very much for allowing me to just say my piece this morning, and the review has been difficult because of the thresholds that need to be applied and I think we all get that. We all get that, and we all want minimum disruption and if we can keep communities together then that is always the ideal thing to do. However, the Labour Party proposal is the proposal I think that best respects the community ties in Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region without creating disjointed and disconnected constituencies with few links to each other. And there are always going to be some orphan wards, you know, but hopefully that is not going to be in the main, hopefully, you know, we can keep those to a minimum. Thank you very much for hearing me today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, thank you. Do we have any points of clarification from the floor?

LORD HAYWARD: (Conservative Party) Lord Hayward of the Conservative Party and a former Whoberley ward Councillor. You referred to Exhall ward, could you identify on that map the actual shape of Exhall ward and confirm that actually both

the area below the motorway and that strip running up from the motorway are all part of Exhall ward please?

MRS FLETCHER: I cannot identify on there, no.

LORD HAYWARD: But there is Exhall ward identified? That is Exhall ward is it not?

MRS FLETCHER: Right.

LORD HAYWARD: Thank you. Can I ask my second question, which is in relation to your observation about Westwood ward, which is in the south west of Coventry? And I will identify here that I used to live in Allesley Park, to which you referred, which overlooks --- sorry, I meant Woodlands ward rather than Westwood ward, which is the next one up. My apologies, thank you. I lived opposite Woodlands, the other side of the A45 in Allesley Park. I think you described Woodlands as semi-rural; other than a few fields by the main roundabout is it not the case that actually with Eastern Green, Tile Hill, Canley and all those places, it is actually intricately linked with Westwood ward and is not semi-rural?

MRS FLETCHER: I am sorry, I am just looking for where I said it was semi-rural. Oh, yes, sorry I said that Bablake and Woodlands ward are semi-rural wards, meaning that they had probably more green space than anywhere else. And of course Bablake is semi-rural because it follows on right into Warwickshire at the top end there.

LORD HAYWARD: So are you sticking by your observation that Woodlands ward itself is semi-rural?

MRS FLETCHER: Well, yes, yes, I am, yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any further questions? I just have one question and forgive me if it is very naïve, but we have had a lot of representations around this area ---

MRS FLETCHER: Oh, have you?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You said two things – one was that you supported the counter-proposals from the official Labour Party and the second thing you said was that you want to go north south and you also put Kenilworth and linked that up to Coventry. But the official proposals that you say that we have seen actually have Kenilworth going towards Southam with a couple of Coventry wards in it. There are counter-proposals on the table from several quarters which put Kenilworth and Coventry South and they make that a constituency rather than going to Southam as we have in proposals at the moment, and obviously at some point we need to find consensus on all these things. Are we seeing a change there in the attitude towards Kenilworth?

MR RILEY: I wonder Chair, if I could explain?

MRS FLETCHER: Yes please.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: As a point of clarification that would be useful.

MRS FLETCHER: Yes, thank you.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley. In the official submission from the Labour Party the counter-proposal for Kenilworth and Southam includes the two Coventry wards of Wainbody and Westwood.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR RILEY: Then some are Rugby, some Stratford-upon-Avon and some of Warwick.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, understood. That is fine for me. Any further questions? (None). Thank you so much for your time.

MRS FLETCHER: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Really very useful and let us move on now to our next speaker who is Damian Gannon.

CLLR GANNON: (Sherbourne Ward) Thank you, my name is – as you said – Cllr Damian Gannon, I am Councillor for Sherbourne ward in Coventry and I live at 61, Frilsham Way, Allesley Park, Coventry, CV5 9LJ. Thank you for allowing me to speak this morning, I just wanted to say a few words about some of the current proposals and I wanted to speak in favour of the Labour Party's counter-proposal.

I think we will start with the Boundary Commission's proposals for a Coventry West and Meriden seat and why I am not convinced that it is a particularly good idea. I think, first of all, I wanted to draw the Boundary Commission's proposal to some recent work that has been conducted by local authorities in the research that they have done to build up a case for a West Midlands combined authority that is part of that. They had to conduct a governance review to look at the links between each of the different communities within the West Midlands, that review found that looking at travel-to-work areas that the travel-to-work areas in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region actually go from north to south rather than from east to west. Lots of people think that everyone travels from Coventry into Birmingham but this review found that that is not the case and actually they used, it is called a 'self-containment ratio', to highlight the number of people that live in an area and work in an area and the self-containment ratio for Coventry and Warwickshire is 77 per cent and for Birmingham and Solihull it is 77 per cent. The report noted, I think on page 18 of this governance review, that the links between Coventry and the Solihull areas are not

that particularly strong at all so I think it is important to take that into account, that there is some very strong evidence there that demonstrates the fact that the links between Coventry and Solihull, which includes the wards of Meriden and Knowle, are not particularly that strong at all.

I think also the proposal on the Boundary Commission to include Wainbody and Holbrooks ward in Coventry, people would find that a little bit odd, I do not think they have ever been attached in their constituency in any of the previous iterations of the Coventry constituencies, I think the Boundary Commission in some of its guidelines says that ideally you should not be --- people in one side of a constituency should not be travelling through another constituency to get to another part of that same constituency and with the proposals for a Coventry West and Meriden you would actually need to travel through what you are creating as the new Coventry South constituency, which would be problematic. The only other way would be to go, sort of, all of this way, and there are not actually north south links on the west of the city, they run through the centre of the city, like so. And they are very, very different wards; Wainbody ward being very affluent with close links to the university looking south towards Kenilworth, and Holbrooks looking northwards towards Nuneaton, Bedworth, Corley etcetera.

Moving on to the Boundary Commission's proposals for Coventry South, I am Councillor for Sherbourne ward and I would say I think it makes sense to continue to include Binley, Cheylesmore, Earlsdon, St Michael's in the same wedge there, they have, sort of, got strong links between them, have historically been together and fit together very nicely. And actually Radford, Sherbourne, Whoberley also fit together very nicely. There is areas in the south of Whoberley ward here which is Earlsdon South, which has close links to Earlsdon, and again going into the city centre in the south of my ward, in Sherbourne ward, you have got the Spon End community which has very close links with communities on the other side, there is a school there, Spon Gate Primary School, of which I am a governor, and a lot of the children that go to the Spon Gate Primary School actually also live just over the border in the St Michael's ward. And the same goes for Radford ward that has a small boundary, but a boundary nonetheless, going into the St Michael's ward, so that actually is quite a very nice constituency.

I would associate my comments with Colleen's comments regarding the boundary between Radford and Foleshill. That is a very natural boundary between the two constituencies, there you have got – as Colleen said – the railway line acting as the boundary and factories on that side that make it even more difficult to cross that boundary. It is also important to note that, I think Colleen mentioned Jubilee Crescent shopping district and that little area there, that little hub in the centre of Radford and that attracts people living in, I think it is Middlemarch [and] Grangemouth Road into the centre there rather than hopping across to any of the shopping districts within the Foleshill ward itself.

In terms of Coventry North East, Foleshill ward is the most important central ward of that constituency. It has got a high ethnic minority population and that population is

increasingly moving out to wards like Longford, Stoke and Lower Stoke, so you have got strong communal ties going to the east of the city not so much to the west of the city. And I think --- I know this probably is not the place to comment on other people's counter-proposals but I am aware that some of the counter-proposals do put Foleshill into Coventry West or into other constituencies and I think that would actually rip an integral part of Coventry North East out of that constituency, splitting a very well-established community, and again, going back in time, I do not think Foleshill ward has ever been in any other constituency other than a Coventry East, Coventry North East constituency.

I think that is probably all --- oh, sorry, I did not speak about Westwood and Wainbody wards, going into the south of Coventry. Those wards – again, as Colleen said – the councillors in Wainbody ward supported the proposal for the creation of a Stoneleigh Parish Council, which is just over the boundary, so highlighting the close links over the boundary into, I think it is Warwick District Council. There is the Warwick University, which I think their land straddles both Coventry City Council and Warwick District Council and that would, essentially I think, create a nice centre of a new constituency created under the Labour Party's counter-proposals. There was a question previously about Woodlands ward as well, about its semi-rural nature and I would say it is a semi-rural seat, I think you have got --- the Woodlands ward cuts across I think it is the A45 going across there, and that is Tile Hill North there, so it does include a bit which has historically been part of the Westwood ward, but Upper Eastern Green all back[s] on to a significant green expanse and if you live in Allesley Green or Upper Eastern Green it does not really matter the fact that the boundary for local government purposes is there because your houses back on to green fields there and you class yourselves as living in, almost, the country side, given the fact that just over the boundary you have got the small villages of the Meriden area.

So I think that is pretty much all I wanted to say, so thank you for allowing me to speak this morning.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any points of clarification?

LORD HAYWARD: Cllr Gannon, Lord Haywood, Conservative Party. Just to clarify, in relation to the constituency you are proposing involving Wainbody and Westwood ward, I will not carry on the discussion about Woodlands, how many local authorities does that actually involve?

CLLR GANNON: Off the top of my head I am not too sure.

LORD HAYWARD: Is it Coventry, which is a unitary authority, Warwick, Rugby and Stratford-upon-Avon?

CLLR GANNON: Oh, yes, I think that is right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further comments? (None). Thank you very much, none from me either, very clear.

CLLR GANNON: Thank you very much.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Thank you very much, a very, very interesting morning. We are now going to take our coffee break and we will reconvene at 11.50 am. So, adjournment until 11.50 am, thank you.

After a short break

Time noted: 11.50 am

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen we are ending our adjournment and ready to continue with our hearing and our first speaker is Lord Haywood.

LORD HAYWARD: Lord Hayward, 11 Grosvenor Park, London, SE5 0NQ. Can I just pick up on something that arose before the break please Ms Gilmore? And that relates to Woodlands ward. All I would make as an observation in relation to it is it is a fascinating concept of describing something as 'semi-rural' because you can see fields from your back garden. Estate Agents would probably be proud of that as a description but I will make no further comment, other than to pick up on one other specific. I did check for Lord Rooker – and I told him I was going to tell you this – Lord Rooker recalled that Perry Bar had been linked with Lichfield at some point in his lifetime. I checked, and he confirmed, and it was up to 1945. I do not want to disclose his date of birth or anything but I did tell him that I said that I would check. I also would say that I actually enjoyed the honesty of two of the Birmingham presenters, I think their names were Messrs Regan and Gove-Humphries in terms of their arguments in relation to what fitted together as a community in one form or another. I thought they were very striking.

Can I now move to two specific issues, one of which relates to primarily Birmingham and I return now to the rules for redistribution under Schedule 2 of the Act, i.e. Rule 5 and Rule 1. And I will just quote for the moment three of the rules, and it says:

(a) the Boundary Commission shall take into account if, and to such extent as they think fit, special geographical considerations including the size, shape and accessibility of the constituency, I am going to leap over (b) because it is not particularly relevant, (c) is boundaries of existing constituencies, and (d) any local ties that would be broken.

And I draw your attention to those specifically because in previous boundary hearings over the years, and the law has not changed, the Boundary Commission has specifically ruled out creating homogeneous constituencies and therefore they have also ruled out composing heterogeneous constituencies just by forcing the elements, because those rules that I have just referred to have remained the same

throughout the different periodic reviews of the Boundary Commission's operation. And therefore, I have asked as one can see there, the Birmingham seats --- and there was a lot of reference to the different shapes and they were justified in one form or another, all I would describe them [as] is 'out of the ordinary' and I do not think one could reasonably argue that those seats – whichever one one looks at with the possible exception of Hodge Hill – actually fit the rules that I just identified. In fact what I would say is that Birmingham Ladywood, there, that one, is the oddest shape of all in Birmingham and I think you would be hard pushed to identify that local ties are not broken when you have a constituency that is however many miles long and hardly a mile wide. And it must be reasonable to argue that in areas all along that northern boundary and even – if it were relevant – to the southern boundary, that there were distinct ties.

Can I move on to Evesham and South Warwickshire please? And again, drawing your attention to Evesham and South Warwickshire, nobody can reasonably argue that that is not an odd constituency. Evesham is part of Worcestershire, nobody has argued that Worcestershire is linked in any clear way with Warwickshire, in fact the arguments have gone the other way. And it is significant that Worcestershire is linked, for example, in West Mercia Police with Herefordshire and Shropshire and there are a whole host of other links between Worcestershire and what I would describe as the March Counties. The areas of South Warwickshire which are linked, we heard from on Friday, and to suggest that they are anything other than linked with Stratford-upon-Avon is absolutely clear. One could argue, if anything, their links, as we heard on Thursday and Friday, are actually out of the region if they are not with Stratford-upon-Avon rather than towards Worcestershire. What I would say about both Birmingham Ladywood and Evesham and South Warwickshire is that they do not meet the rules as set out in the legislation, and they essentially are as a result of the Boundary Commission's unwillingness to split wards in and around Birmingham.

The Boundary Commission guidance quite reasonably identifies that wards are an indication of communities. But if wards are an indication of communities then boroughs and counties are an even stronger indication of often long-standing loyalties and communities, and I just referred to specifically Warwickshire and Worcestershire looking in very different directions. What I found interesting on the first day of the West Midlands hearings was the contribution from Adrian Bailey, who was a completely independent person, and in his submission, and I have got it here just as a reminder, Mr Bailey referred to the Boundary Commission proposal as an 'amorphous blob-ism', and actually I share that view. With the exception of Staffordshire, we have a position where Shropshire is linked with Herefordshire, Herefordshire is linked with Worcestershire, Worcestershire is linked with Warwickshire, Warwickshire is linked with Coventry, Coventry is linked with Solihull, Solihull is linked with Birmingham, Birmingham is linked with Sandwell and Birmingham is linked with Walsall, and just for completeness, Sandwell is linked with Wolverhampton, and, sorry, I forgot, Birmingham is also linked with Dudley. So we have this amazing position, and as I say, Mr Bailey as an independent commentator, analyst, made reference to describe the proposals of the Boundary Commission as 'amorphous blob-ism' and I agree with it. They are not the oddest constituencies

that the Boundary Commission has proposed anywhere in the country, I would regard that as Colne and Clitheroe in the north west and the associated North Lancashire seats, but for me these are the second-oddest collection of seats and I refer specifically to Birmingham.

Birmingham, the proposals include 11 constituencies within the city of Birmingham, six of which cross one borough boundary or another. And it seems really odd to be in a position whereby so many constituencies have to cross the boundary of one major city, the second city of the country, to create what I describe as 'weird', Mr Bailey described as 'amorphous blob-ism' collection of constituencies. It would be much more sensible if the wards in Birmingham were split in some form. We heard from the leader of Solihull council last week, who was complaining last week that his constituency went off into three different constituencies in different directions. If I were Solihull I would actually feel rather like Poland of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, you know, a convenient 'bit in the middle' of other people's empires which you chopped up at convenience, and that is actually what the leader of Solihull council said. And interestingly enough, when Jess Phillips the Labour MP was speaking she acknowledged that she had started her survey and she acknowledged that people in Sheldon, when responding, were actually responding indicating not that they had any links with Solihull, but actually they wanted to be named as part of Solihull so that their house prices would go up in value; probably not a rule that the Boundary Commission ever had in mind, or the legislators ever had in mind, when devising constituencies.

But let us look at the wards that one is talking about here. Can I look specifically at Whoberley ward, please, in Coventry, to which I referred before the break, which I represented? And it is fair to say that Whoberley, with just under 10,000 voters, is a series of communities, and that is at 10,000 voters. Rob Marris, the Labour MP for Wolverhampton, was honest enough to say that wards – and they are roughly the same size as they are in Coventry – you could link them in any particular way with certain specific exceptions. In general I think the Boundary Commission's comments about wards being an indication of community clearly relate to most of the country where you have 4,000 to 6,000 voters. If I look at my own Whoberley ward, there was reference to the Earlsdon end, down there, which is correct, there is an area in the middle which was a second part, and then there was Allesley Park, to which people referred. So even within an area of one ward in a major city there were three very distinct parts, if one was being picky. There are actually two parts of Allesley Park, one right there, which does vote on the borderline, the rest of Allesley Park, which I lived in, votes at a different location. So even at 9,000 you have different communities within one ward. So therefore to argue that in Birmingham you have to keep wards of some 18,000 voters together really does not meet any sensible consideration and it was actually Lord Rooker who said the other day that Birmingham wards were a collection of communities, that is an honest and fair assessment of the position. And therefore if they are a collection of communities there must be a better way than what the Boundary Commission has proposed in relation to Birmingham.



Now, the better way, we have proposed splitting three wards, what is significant is that the Greens when they made their initial submission indicated that they were willing to see split wards, although they have not as yet put in a full proposal. The Liberals have also indicated their support for split wards, and I understand we may be seeing a proposal from them at some stage, but they have clearly indicated their willingness and support for split wards in Birmingham. We have had Adrian Bailey do so, and we as a party have also indicated that you finish up with a much more sensible basis for Birmingham and also for the areas around if you are going to split wards.

Now, the Boundary Commission says 'Do not split wards because they are well defined, they are recognised by the parties and it is convenient for administration.' Unfortunately – or fortunately in this particular case – that is not the case in Birmingham. And I have got here the map of the wards that will almost certainly operate in 2018, i.e. before any 2020 general election. Now, for those to whom I have not given a map, and I apologise, under what is referred to locally as 'Kerslake', which is the proposals from Lord Kerslake to the Local Government Boundary Commission, Birmingham is proposed to be divided not into 40 wards but 69 wards, and that will happen before the next general election. And what is equally significant is that the three wards that we propose to split are themselves all split in what is currently the Local Government Boundary Commission proposals, so it does not bear consideration in these circumstances that you should not split wards because they are recognised as being convenient for operation for the political parties and local government because neither of those will apply, probably, well not probably, certainly, in May 2018 which is before the Parliamentary Boundary Commission's final proposals. It therefore is clearly sensible that the Boundary Commission, when drawing up parliamentary constituencies acknowledges the position that there should be split wards in Birmingham. Can it really be right that six parliamentary constituencies from Birmingham, as proposed by the Boundary Commission, should stretch into other boroughs? Can it be right that Solihull does not have any constituency within it which is wholly within the constituency, it is linked in one direction or another? Stratford-upon-Avon, a small district council authority has four constituencies, none of which are wholly within Stratford-upon-Avon. Wychavon has five constituencies, none of which are wholly within Wychavon borough. And we have heard from the leaders of all those three councils, saying 'This is a mess.'

The mess arises from the unwillingness of the Boundary Commission to split wards in Birmingham. If they split a limited number of wards – and we indicated that we would put forward three plus one in Dudley – you finish up with a more coherent plan for Warwickshire, a more coherent plan for Solihull and Coventry, a more coherent plan for Birmingham, a more coherent plan for Worcestershire and a whole series of local authorities. We indicated our willingness to consider other proposals and I really would ask that the Boundary Commission give serious consideration to moving away from what is an illogical collection of constituencies, both within Birmingham and without, to produce seats that are actually coherent, logical and with regards to natural communities which are not bodies of 18,000 people or more, 18,000 voters or more. I think, really, they need to give serious consideration to going in the

direction of that supported by a number of the political parties and independent analysts who put forward their comments in one form or another. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do we have any questions or points of clarification?

MR RILEY: Thank you Lord Haywood, sorry, Ian Riley. The Boundary Commission are working on the basis of rules set by parliament, of which you are a member, and those rules are being applied by the Boundary Commission for England in all of the 500-and-something constituencies in England. The Commission have set out the rules on this quite clearly and particularly the basis on which they would consider split wards. Could I start by asking whether your proposals for split wards in one region, the West Midlands region, is being applied to other regions in England?

LORD HAYWARD: I am commenting here about the West Midlands and I have drawn my comments specifically in relation to the area that we are addressing here and I have been present when other people have been ruled out of order for referring to other regions.

MR RILEY: I take it that means that you are not doing it elsewhere. Could I go on then and ask what is the basis for arguing that splitting the three wards that the Conservative proposal proposes, Springfield and Brandwood in Birmingham and Brierley Hill in Dudley, what is the basis on which you argue that those three wards should be treated exceptionally and that there is a compelling reason for those wards, specifically out of the hundreds of other wards in the West Midlands, that they should be split? What is the justification?

LORD HAYWARD: There are two specific reasons. One is that we are talking here about only splitting wards in the metropolitan West Midlands. You were present when the arguments were made very clearly by Mike Wood MP and others in relation to the logic of splitting the Dudley wards. In relation to Birmingham you will look on the map that I have given you in relation to Kerslake, and those wards which we have split are split by Kerslake in each case. The logic is we have tried to keep the splits to a minimum, we indicated that we would look at alternative proposals, but the logic is that by splitting what we think is the minimum, but it may not be, we obviously do not want to split too many communities across current ward boundaries, although, as I say, we are moving to 69 in the near future, but by doing that you produce seats within Worcestershire, within Wychavon, within Solihull, within Warwickshire, within Stratford-upon-Avon, with Birmingham you have more, and a more sensible structure in relation to Coventry as well.

MR RILEY: Thank you. Ian Riley again. We are all aware that ward boundaries will change in Birmingham in 2018 but ward boundaries will change almost everywhere over a matter of time and the Commission, I think I am correct in saying, have to operate on the basis of the ward boundaries as they existed in May 2015 so I fail to see why a special case can be made for adopting different ward arrangements for Birmingham.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ian, you need to put it as a point of clarification, sorry.

MR RILEY: Can I ask two questions? One, can I press the point, what is the exceptional and compelling reason for changing these three specific wards, because that is what your proposal does.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I think that is fair enough for specifics ---

MR RILEY: And secondly ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You do not have to answer it!

LORD HAYWARD: I am going to!

MR RILEY: And secondly, you know, you are arguing that we should take account of the 2018 wards for Birmingham, but again only in relation to these two wards in Birmingham, and indeed I do not think the two wards are exactly the same as what you are proposing the split should be.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Obviously we know what data we are allowed to use and I think you probably do as well,

LORD HAYWARD: All I would say is that you used the word 'have to', the answer is they do not have to. We have to provide, i.e. the Conservative Party, the LibDems, the Greens, independent people who have made submissions, the obligation is on us to show that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances. I believe that what I have commented on this morning indicates that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances which result in a much more coherent set of communities across the whole of the West Midlands.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. I just have one question and I know we are running slightly over time, for which apologies everybody. There was a steady stream of people that came – in fact the majority probably in Birmingham including some MPs who were going to lose their seats – who were in support of the initial proposals. Obviously, would you agree with us that we have to give them equal weight too?

LORD HAYWARD: Oh yes, there is no question. The obligation, the burden, is on – as I just indicated – myself on behalf of the Conservative Party and other parties and other individuals to show that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances. I happen --- and clearly those other political parties do as well, but you have got to give, and I would not choose to do your job, you have to give weight to all those different representations and decide upon them.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Our next speaker is Michael Fabricant.

MR FABRICANT: (MP for Lichfield) Good afternoon.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon, if we could have your name and address.

MR FABRICANT: Right. Michael Fabricant, do you want my home address for security reasons? Or shall I say --- I will say I live in Lichfield but I will say House of Commons if that is okay. Well, first of all, thank you very much for your time in allowing me to speak today. I very much support, generally, the recommendations being made – the initial proposals being made – by the Commission. I recognise that Tamworth is too small and needs an additional ward and that it should come from the Lichfield constituency and I also recognise that would result in Lichfield being too small and that I would need a ward from the Stafford constituency. The point I want to raise today is actually in support of my letter to the Commission of 30 September, a copy of which you have. And the reason why I wanted to come today was (a) to re-emphasise my strong feelings regarding this, but (b) also to give you the opportunity to question me on the points that I make.

Can I first of all say that I am well aware that the Commission does not take into account any political consideration on this and that whatever wards are changed makes no difference, politically, to Lichfield or Tamworth, so that is not my motivation. It is all because of the sense of community. So my proposal – and those of other people – is that rather than the ward of Streethay and Whittington being transferred into Tamworth that Hammerwich with Wall be transferred into Tamworth. And as I have stated in my letter the numbers are fine as far as far as the Commission is concerned and as far as the Act of Parliament is concerned.

Now, why do I feel so strongly? Well, my colleague and friend Johnny Hall will be speaking after me, he is the Association Chairman, and he will concentrate a little bit more about the Streethay end. Oh, and by the way, may I say that being a lot more rural than Birmingham, while I take completely the point made by Lord Haywood about split wards, I am not arguing for split wards in Staffordshire. The wards are small enough and there is a great sense of community within the wards. In fact I am positively arguing against splitting any wards in my neck of the woods. But why am I saying that it should be changed as I am saying? Well, Streethay – and my colleague will be talking about this in more detail – is very much a part of Lichfield. In fact it looks like the battle of --- so, (indicating), this is Lichfield and this is Streethay. I mean it does actually look like 'Dad's Army', sort of like an incursion into Lichfield. It is a completely artificial cut-off. It would mean that Lichfield Trent Valley station, from which I came this morning, would end up in Tamworth. And my friend – as I said, Johnny Hall – will explain in more detail, a lot more detail about how Streethay is an integral part of the city of Lichfield. And, you know, people in Streethay would find it absolutely extraordinary that a part of Lichfield has suddenly gone into the constituency of Tamworth.

But may I also speak about Whittington, which is very close by, only I cannot really see it. Can you zoom in or is that not possible? Yes, all this, Huddlesford, which is part of the Lichfield Cruising Club, which is a canal club, I hasten to add, just in case anyone has any doubts about Lichfield or its MP! Whittington, which is here, historically it has always been linked with Lichfield, someone pointed out to me all of the ancient lanes lead into Lichfield, they go nowhere near Tamworth. The Staffordshire Regiment – which was founded in a marvellous pub, The King’s Head, just a few yards from where I live in Lichfield – has its regimental museum in Whittington, because the Whittington Barracks, which are now the headquarters of Defence Medical Services, you know, have a long historical link with Lichfield. It would be utterly inconceivable that either Whittington or Streethay have any connection whatsoever with the Tamworth constituency. And in my letter of 30 September I explain all that in more detail and I certainly welcome any questions you may have about it.

I mean, I do not want to lose any ward, I have got many friends and I know it is not relevant but I will say it in order to demonstrate my political neutrality as far as this is concerned, I mean we have got a very active Conservative branch in Hammerwich, but the truth of the matter is the ward is Hammerwich with Wall, Wall is already in the Tamworth constituency, Hammerwich looks more towards Walsall, Cannock and to Burntwood, it also looks towards Lichfield too, it would be foolish not to, but it does not have quite the strong links, I would argue. So I do not want to lose that ward either, but I do recognise that to keep the numbers coherent in the area I am going to have to lose a ward, and in a way Hammerwich, you know, has sort of got used to the fact that it may have to leave because in the last Boundary Commission review, Hammerwich was going to go into the Tamworth constituency. So with regret, that is the swap I am proposing. Otherwise we would take the ward of Hixon and Haywood from the Stafford constituency; I know I look far too young, but I have been the Member of Parliament since 1992 and in those days it was called Mid Staffordshire, and that ward was in my constituency and I still have friends there and, you know, I suppose that is not quite so relevant, but the point is that I totally accept that ward joining the Lichfield constituency.

So, I do not want to repeat myself; all-in-all I just think it would be bonkers for a part of Lichfield city to be sliced off – which is Streethay – and be moved in to Tamworth and it would be equally wrong for Whittington, which has all the historic connections – and all the kids, by the way, go to schools in Lichfield or Barton-under-Needwood which are in the Lichfield constituency, very few if any go into the Tamworth constituency, they get the Lichfield Mercury newspaper – I mean, you know, you just have to see the place to know it is a part of Lichfield and there are very strong connections with Whittington and Lichfield. And Streethay, as I said, is part of the actual city of Lichfield. So that is why I am suggesting that swap.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, that was very useful. Do we have any points of clarification?

MR FABRICANT: Oh, could I make one more point?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Sure.

MR FABRICANT: Sorry, I forgot to say. One other point I was going to say is that Chris Pincher, my colleague in Tamworth, is completely neutral on this. He has said that to me in writing, he has said that to me verbally. He is content either way, whether he takes Hammerwich with Wall, and as I say Wall is already in the constituency of Tamworth, or whether he takes --- no, he is neutral.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. We have one question from over there, so we will take that. It should be a point of clarification rather than getting involved in a debate.

MR LEWIS: My name is Martin Lewis. Can I ask you to clarify what you feel are the community ties from Hixon and Haywood towards Lichfield?

MR FABRICANT: Ah, no, a fair question. I am not arguing for that, I am simply accepting that that is what the Boundary Commission has suggested. So I totally accept that strong links with Stafford --- I would not argue with that but I know that the numbers game means we have got to take a ward from somewhere. The only tie I was suggesting was that I had previously been the Member of Parliament for that area, because in the old Mid Staffordshire constituency it went all the way up the A51 and included that.

MR LEWIS: So you are clarifying it to me by saying it is just about the numbers?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you have a view to put you are --- are you down to speak later? No. Please feel very welcome to, we can easily slot you in. But --- point made, thank you. Thank you very much. We have had some discussion on this earlier before you arrived this morning, which has given quite a bit of clarification on some of the things you have spoken about so thank you very much indeed.

MR FABRICANT: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Our next speaker is Jonathan Hall.

MR HALL: (Conservative Party) Jonathan Hall, 55 Trent Valley Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 6EZ. I am speaking as an elector in the Lichfield constituency but also Chairman of Lichfield constituency Conservatives. I would just like to start by saying that I completely support my colleague Michael Fabricant's view that while we understand why Lichfield has to lose a ward on either the southern or eastern side we really have no better alternative than to take Haywood and Hixon as a replacement ward. However, I completely support him in the view that it would be more sensible to retain Streethay and Whittington within the constituency and reluctantly to lose Hammerwich with Wall. I think if you look at the position of both

constituencies you will see, to a great extent, both extend very close to the boundaries of Lichfield, but I would particularly like to talk about Streethay because I feel while Streethay is a small part – in area terms – of the Whittington and Streethay constituency, it has the strongest community ties to Lichfield and also is the most anomalous part of the border. And – I am not going to read this, but – broadly I think we can look at it and say that the main road from Lichfield town centre northbound to the A38, the 5127, travels through Streethay, Streethay itself has only gone into Whittington at the last Local Government Boundary Commission change and was largely there as makeweight to turn Whittington and Streethay into a three-member district ward. It actually shares a parish council with Fradley, which as Alrewas and Fradley ward will remain part of the Lichfield county constituency and while I accept that you cannot take new electorate into account I wanted to point out that it is going to increase significantly and it is going to increase significantly, as we will see, because it is considered by housing developers as being an integral part of Lichfield city. We are also in the process of starting to build a major distribution and industrial park in the area and that too is being heavily sold as a Lichfield based development.

And I think the other point, which I am going to just touch on briefly, is the HS2 route – which is going to go around Lichfield in a sort of iron collar – is going to leave Streethay very much to the south and west of the proposed development, which will be a very hard boundary indeed.

So this is --- I am going to show you this first (indicating) and then maybe if we could look at the actual thing. This is actually the boundary of the parish council of Fradley and Streethay. The actual Streethay border runs along there and north of it, where you see Fradley Park, is a very large industrial and distribution development, which is served in the main by people that live in Lichfield who travel – or would do if it was not blocked at the moment for development works – up the A5127 here to get to work. This is the centre of Lichfield here, Lichfield city, which is on the Cross-City line, and then here you have Lichfield Trent Valley station, which is on the West Coast main line to London. So if you could just show the Lichfield constituency, so here you will see, that is the line where basically it cuts across the A38, and if we then go back to mine here, again, I am aware that you cannot take future developments into account, I wanted you to see this. This is the major development of 750 new homes which is going in and this is actually an extract from the press release of Miller Homes, which specifically talks about Streethay as being ‘in the heart of Lichfield’. It is located a mile from Lichfield city centre, it is actually a bit more than that, it is between a mile and 1.7 miles, and easy commuting distance. Tamworth comes a poor third to Birmingham and Burton-on-Trent. This is actually the area that is going to be redeveloped, that is the A38 link and that is the A5127 running through. So you will see, it will substantially build up and this map is also useful because you can see down here the Boley Park development of which the current development in Streethay here is a very similar type of housing mix indeed and also feeds into the Lichfield schools. And you will see it will effectively then connect on to Eastern Avenue which is the main arterial road around Lichfield. And you need not dwell on these, these are just some of the plans from Lichfield district

which show the development and the extent to which it will move. It is a little bit difficult to work because they are on slightly different angles.

And then let us talk a little bit about Liberty Park, this is a quite major 32 acre industrial and distribution park which is about to start building. As you can see it is specifically Liberty Park Lichfield. It is fed from an existing industrial estate, Britannia Enterprise Park, which is within the Lichfield constituency and again if you look at the way it is described you can see [here](#) very much the interest is on Lichfield and this map, which hopefully is becoming familiar, [that](#) is the main route, the 5127 to the A38 and [that](#) is the area that the park will fill.

The final piece of observation which I would like to make, [this](#) is the proposed route for HS2 phase one, and again, [that](#) is Streethay [there](#), Huddlesford is going to be bisected, as is Whittington Heath and then it will move round and end up at Handsacre. Again, the majority of the electorate in Streethay are going to be well to the west of the HS2 development, which is going to be another hard boundary as well as the A38.

So, in conclusion I think I would like to make the same point as Michael Fabricant, while in an ideal world we would neither wish to lose Hammerwich with Wall nor Whittington and Streethay, if we were forced by Morton's Fork to choose, we would certainly choose Whittington and Streethay to remain within the constituency. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Any points of clarification?

MR RILEY: Hello. Ian Riley. Mr Hall, we heard a witness earlier today say that Whittington itself, which is the largest part of the Whittington and Streethay ward, looks both to Lichfield and to Tamworth and the witness cited the bus service that goes once an hour in both directions. There was a sense that Whittington itself could be in either a Lichfield or a Tamworth constituency. Your argument seems to be based on the strength of the link between Streethay and Lichfield but is it not true to say that there is an equally strong case to be made for Hopwas and Tamworth? So, you know, it kind of balances itself out does it not, with Whittington being equidistant between the two, and indeed surrounded on all sides by the Tamworth constituency?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So, a bit of clarification on the reasons behind your looking to Lichfield rather than Tamworth.

MR HALL: Having heard arguments earlier regarding the merits of splitting 18,000 electorate wards, it is hard for me to take a 3,500 ward and make a case for splitting that. However, I think it is right to say that obviously it comes close at the eastern boundary to Tamworth but even there I think the majority of the electorate is going to fall closer to Lichfield than to Tamworth.



MR FABRICANT: Could I make an observation?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: If you could couch it as a clarification we would appreciate it.

MR FABRICANT: Michael Farbricant. Member of Parliament for Lichfield. I think you will find, as I said, that one of the reasons to answer the question asked by Ian there is that first of all Whittington does not get Tamworth newspapers, secondly, the children go to schools in Lichfield and Whittington, as I said, looks towards Lichfield and all the historic ties are with Lichfield.

MR HALL: If you are asking me to clarify whether I agree with you, Michael, I probably do agree with you, yes!

MR FABRICANT: He would make a good MP!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any further points?

CLLR McGUINNESS: (Staffordshire Moorlands) Trudie McGuinness. I know from working the southern Staffordshire area for quite a long time that actually there are a lot of people who from Whittington go to experience education in Tamworth. I until very recently worked for South Staffordshire College so actually there are strong links with Tamworth from Whittington, so while some of the school-aged children might go to Lichfield it is important to clarify that there are others who will identify at a different age elsewhere.

MR HALL: Yes, and I think an important point which we should recognise is that Lichfield District Council itself covers a lot of area which is already within Tamworth constituency and one of the reasons why I think we are comfortable that Hammerwich with Wall would be easily received into it is that currently part of it is already there and certainly children within Shenstone who are within the Tamworth constituency go into Lichfield so I think the Commission will find that it is an evenly balanced and in some ways invidious choice which the Commission has to make, but given that you are tasked by parliament to make it, you have had my submission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, thank you. Our next speaker is Trudie McGuinness. We need to begin by having your name and address please.

CLLR McGUINNESS: Certainly, so Trudie McGuinness, and my address is 5, Fountain Court, Teddesley Park, Penkridge, Stafford, ST19 5RQ. My interests extend across southern Staffordshire, as I alluded to there, through the work that I have done. So I am an active member of the Labour Party, so my interest predominantly comes from that particular perspective, but I have lived and worked across southern Staffordshire for quite some time. I am currently a candidate also in Cannock Chase, so as a point of interest I will be fighting for a divisional seat in Cannock Chase in the county elections next May. My work for South Staffordshire College until very recently was

in the Staffordshire constituency, Tamworth constituency, Lichfield constituency and South Staffs, so I have been used to dealing with students and their needs and indeed with working with district councils and so on in those areas for quite a long time.

Primarily I just wanted to speak in support of the Boundary Commission proposals at this point in time. I think as we will all be aware of it is a very difficult task to make sure that these quotas are met in the way that you need them to be by government decree, but I think having looked at the plans which are being proposed across southern Staffordshire in terms of keeping Burton and Uttoxeter within the same as existing boundaries, Cannock Chase the same as existing boundaries and southern Staffordshire, that seems to make sense. And I wish to support the proposals for Tamworth to include the whole of the divided Lichfield district of Whittington and Streethay for Lichfield, including Hammerwich and Wall and indeed the wards from Stafford of Haywood and Hixon, and to speak in support of the proposals for Stafford as well, adding in the currently divided area of Milwich, Seaford and Church Eaton and bringing in the wards of Gnosall and Woodseaves from Stone.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, it is important to us when we weigh up everything we have to hear where there is support as well as where there are objections, so that is very useful for us. Do we have any points of clarification? (None). Nor do I, I think you have been very, very clear but it is really important that you came along so thank you.

CLLR McGUINNESS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you for your time. Our next person is not due quite yet so if anybody wants to make any particular points and take to the podium they are very welcome. Thank you very much, we will need your name and address and it will take us a minute or two just to get it down because I do not think you have registered to speak.

MR LEWIS: My name is Martin Lewis and my address is 3, The Saplings, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 4HW, and my interest in this is that I was candidate in the last election for the Liberal Democrats in the Stone constituency. I am prompted to come and speak here for the same reason I think the lady who preceded me did. In general terms the Liberal Democrats support – particularly in Staffordshire – your proposals. I nit-picked with the gentleman from Lichfield because that is, in the generality of things, the most painful little tweak that is being proposed and I would ask that you try hard to avoid moving Hixon and Haywood out of Staffordshire, out of the Stafford constituency into Lichfield. It does not belong there, as the Member of Parliament said. That is the most painful little tweak that the proposals bring forward. The effect of the proposals on the former Stone constituency, which you are thinking of renaming West Staffordshire, makes it, I suppose, the least homogeneous of the constituencies in Staffordshire. As your booklet says, it ends up with six wards from Stafford, five wards from Newcastle and four wards from Stoke.

Given the job you have to do I do not, I cannot, propose a better solution for doing it. What the old Stone constituency, the new West Staffordshire constituency will then have, its distinctive feature is that it is rural and that it contains small settlements of people who move and work here, there and everywhere; not much homogeneousness but as a product at the end of your process it is acceptable. That is the generality of what I want to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed. Every voice is heard so we are very grateful to hear that and it is useful to us. Are there any points of clarification from the floor? (None). I am really grateful that you came and spoke to us, thank you very much for your time. Dr Davis we have no other people listed, it is a little bit earlier, are you happy to speak to us now? Thank you very much. I should say no others listed in this session.

DR DAVIS: Okay, my name is Nicky Davis, it is 35, Constance Avenue, Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 8TE.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you, you might want to just tweak the mic a bit, that is it, lovely.

DR DAVIS: Okay, I have got a couple of slides to show you. First of all, I have only looked at Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, I have not looked at the rest of the region, but for the most part I really like the initial proposals for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent but I am only here to propose just a little bit of an improvement in my view. So, if we have the next slide. So in summary I want to propose moving five wards, they are all in Stoke-on-Trent local authority, so I would want to move Dresden and Florence from West Staffordshire to Stoke-on-Trent South, Hanley Park and Shelton from Stoke-on-Trent South to Stoke-on-Trent North, Joiners Square from Stoke-on-Trent South to Stoke-on-Trent North, Abbey Hulton and Townsend from Stoke-on-Trent North to Stoke-on-Trent South and Springfields and Trent Vale from Stoke-on-Trent South to West Staffordshire. So this affects just three constituencies and five wards, so I would like to show you why by looking at the map.

Now, Stoke-on-Trent, you probably know is composed of six towns, and five of these towns have got quite large major parks associated with them. Stoke does not have a park, Tunstall and Burslem and Fenton, those parks in these current proposals, their parks are with the centre of the town in the same constituency so I am happy with those. The issues I have is with Longton and Hanley, so I would like to focus first on Dresden and Florence ward. If you could zoom in on Dresden and Florence ward (indicating) just down by Longton near the south of the city. Right, yeah, I can see it now. So this is Dresden and Florence ward here. Now, the centre of Longton is up here, so you can see that the boundary line, the red boundary line goes across between the two. So, that being the centre of Longton, is one of the six towns. This is Dresden and Florence ward and if you were to zoom into that area, that is its park, that is called Queen's Park, Longton, okay? So although it is in Dresden it is

considered to be Longton's park. So what I would really like is for that park to be in the same constituency as the centre of Longton, which is up there. So I would propose moving this ward into Stoke-on-Trent South. Okay, a similar argument I have got is with Hanley and Hanley Park. So if we can go up to Hanley --- Stoke-on-Trent North, yes, yes here we are. So here is Hanley, so that is the centre of Hanley here and if you go down there a bit, Hanley Park --- go down a bit more, that area there, if you zoom in on that, that is Hanley Park. And again, this is on the south side of the dividing line at the moment. So if we zoom out again you can maybe see it a bit better. So what I am wanting is to move Hanley Park and Shelton ward, which is this ward here from Stoke-on-Trent South into Stoke-on-Trent North so that it becomes in the same constituency as the centre of Hanley, so it has got its park with it. Now, if you do that, if you then look at Joiners Square ward, if you are moving this one, this one looks much more out on a limb. And this Joiners Square ward anyway is quite close to the centre of Hanley, so my proposal would be to move that one as well. So move Joiners Square from Stoke-on-Trent South into Stoke-on-Trent North. Okay, so that is three of the wards I want to move.

The next one is Abbey Hulton and Townsend. Okay, so Abbey Hulton and Townsend ward is this ward here and at the moment it is has been placed in Stoke-on-Trent North. Now, what I wanted to do is draw the links between that ward up here and this ward to the south of it and this ward here. Historically these three areas have more links, more community links, than Abbey Hulton and Townsend does with these wards to the north and to the west of it. There is a dividing line here, the River Trent divides it, and up at the north there, there is a cemetery dividing it from the communities further north. So it felt to me when I looked at this initial proposal that really this ward would be better placed if it was in Stoke-on-Trent South because it would be closer to the other wards. Before the Local Government Review the Townsend part of this ward was in with Bentilee, so it does have quite recent links, so my proposal would be to move Abbey Hulton and Townsend into Stoke-on-Trent South.

Okay, I have got one more ward I want to move, which is Springfields and Trent Vale, which is down here. The main reason I want to move this, being perfectly honest, is because you have to make the numbers work, do you not? So the other four movements I have proposed, I have got strong reasons to do them, but if I want to do those I have got to take a ward from Stoke-on-Trent South and move it into West Staffordshire. So I had a look to see, well, what is the best one to do it with? Now, this one here, you see where it is fitting at the moment, it is quite reasonable, it is in with Stoke, the town of Stoke, but actually it is quite a long way from the centre. So although it is quite reasonable for this to be grouped where it is, it is not unreasonable to take it out. If you look here, you have got the main A34 road, [which] goes down from Springfields and Trent Vale down into Hanford and Trentham, which is being placed in West Staffordshire. I live in Trentham, I am quite happy with that. So there is a link here that you can draw between this ward and this ward here that makes it, I think, ideal to really be in either constituency. And because you need the numbers to work I am saying that I would prefer to move Springfields and Trent Vale ward from Stoke-on-Trent South into West Staffordshire,

and it can be linked with Hanford and Trentham quite easily via that road. So those are my five ward movements that I want to do between three constituencies and I am happy with everything else.

So if you just put my last slide up, that is just to check that the numbers work. So, the initial proposal, these are the numbers in the three constituencies that are affected. In my proposal these are the numbers. We know that they have got to be - -- do you want me to read them out for the transcript? Yes, I am aware that you do a transcript later, but the minimum is 71,031, the maximum is 78,507. The mid-range of that is 74,769. So both --- the BC initial proposal obviously works, my new proposal works as well, so Stoke-on-Trent North, I would be taking the number down from 77,445 to 76,342 and then Stoke-on-Trent South, it comes up a little bit from 76,296 to 76,504, and West Staffordshire would go up from 71,078 to 71,973. Now the important thing is that these numbers are well within range and actually two of them have improved in the sense of --- the Stoke-on-Trent North and West Staffordshire have improved in the sense of going nearer to the middle, that one is slightly going the other way, the Stoke-on-Trent South. But they all work, which is the key thing, so that is what I would like to propose and I am happy to take any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed, that was fascinating. Do we have any points of clarification from the floor? Just a reminder, we need your name again.

CLLR McGUINNESS: Trudie McGuinness. I am just interested in the premise of your argument, particularly around the parks. If the parks were intended to be in different local authority areas for maintenance, control of budgeting and so on, I might have some understanding of why that was central to the argument of what should be moved where under the proposals. But I am just interested that that is the premise for the argument.

DR DAVIS: Well, I suppose it is about community and in terms of any boundaries any ward boundaries, any constituency boundaries, what you are looking for is community areas that belong together because they are part of the same community. So to me, historically, the Stoke-on-Trent and its six towns is very important in Stoke-on-Trent and the parks are old and have been there for a long time and really are associated with those six towns. So because of the association I did not really want there to be a constituency boundary between them. Yes, it is in the same local authority, so I can understand from the practical point of view what you are saying is 'Does it really matter?' And it does not hugely matter, I mean I quite like the initial proposals, I am just thinking from a community point of view, it looks a bit better to make sure the parks are with the town centres if it is possible to do so and when I had a look at it I decided it was possible to do so.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have another point of clarification from the back.

MR LEWIS: Martin Lewis. Is there a more modest version of your proposal which might see changes between Stoke North and South but would not need Trent Vale to be moved into West Staffordshire? A smaller shrink of changes between North and South?

DR DAVIS: When I looked at it I could not find --- I think even if I left Abbey Hulton and Townsend where it was --- if I wanted to do the thing with the parks, and I did actually want to do the thing with Abbey Hulton and Townsend, there was not a numbers way that I could see that did not involve taking some ward out into West Staffordshire. It is because I have wanted to take Dresden and Florence back in to South Staffordshire, it makes West Staffordshire too small, so I need to take something out, so looking at the map, that seemed to be the most appropriate. I could not think of a more appropriate ward to take out so I think it had to come as that package. I mean there are lots of different arrangements that I could find for the entire city, and I looked at those before the Boundary Commission's proposals came out, and when they came out I preferred the Boundary Commission's proposals to the ones I had come up with in terms of the way things were split and arranged and what went together and what did not. I think this one is better, but I just wanted to try and make the six towns that bit better than they are. I mean they are pretty good at the moment, I just wanted to improve them.

And Springfields and Trent Vale? I mean it would be interesting if there were any strong opposition but I come and make my point and then other people can make their point, I mean they may say 'Yes, we really like being where we are, associated with Stoke' or whatever, but I am just making my point. And my point is about the parks in Hanley and Longton, and it would have to, obviously, be weighed up with everybody else's ideas.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Do any of these proposals involve changes, then, in local authorities, the moves that you suggest? For example, the West Staffs one?

DR DAVIS: Well, they are all Stoke-on-Trent local authority wards.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So they would absolutely stay. It would not change --- yes, I see what you are saying.

DR DAVIS: Yes, they are all from one local authority.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, okay.

DR DAVIS: And it is affecting three of the proposed constituencies.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I see exactly what you are saying. Now, there was one of them, which one was it? Maybe it is the last one, I think, Springfields and Trent Vale – if we could have a quick look at that and go in on that? – which would leave it quite a strange shape, would it not?

DR DAVIS: Yes it does, I totally admit that. The shape, and if we were to look at Abbey Hulton and Townsend, it does make it look a slightly more odd shape.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: I wonder what the links were like, then, between Springfields and, is it --- I cannot read it there --- Boothen and Oak Hill ward?

DR DAVIS: Yeah, I do not think it is too much of a problem to redraw that boundary there, from my point of view. I mean I think Springfields and Trent Vale you could argue that it has got a stronger link with Newcastle-under-Lyme, actually, because it is going up the A34 again all the way to Newcastle. But you do not want to mess with the border, I do not think, between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent because nobody would be very happy with that that I can think of. So in terms of the Oak Hill area I am not sure that that is unreasonable to draw it there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: But just having a look at the boundaries, it is quite an odd boundary anyway, is it not? It goes right across a street with houses one side and another. Obviously these are things we need to look at. We have another point of clarification.

MR FARRELLY: (MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme) Paul Farrelly, I am the Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme, which has just been ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could you just say your name again?

MR FARRELLY: Paul Farrelly, it is Irish. I am the MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme and Dr Davis I think I remember you from five years ago.

DR DAVIS: Yes, yes, yes.

MR FARRELLY: Just with the Springfields and Trent Vale ward, which adjoins Newcastle, can you confirm that actually by taking that out and putting it out of a Stoke-on-Trent constituency you are taking out a ward that stretches right into the urban core of Stoke where the hospital is as well, and that will then be represented by a West Staffordshire MP?

DR DAVIS: Yes, but it does not go into the centre of Stoke, as such, does it? What I have said is it is quite on the --- I mean the centre of Stoke is up here, is it not? The centre of Stoke is there, so yes it is quite a distance from the centre of Stoke.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Could I ask what the hospital is called?

DR DAVIS: Nowadays it is called The Royal Stoke, I believe, unless it has changed. Is it still called ---

MR FARRELLY: It is called The Royal Stoke University Hospital, and I think it is about the twelfth biggest in the country.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Any further ---? That was really fascinating, thank you very much indeed and we will have a really good look at those. It is going to take a little while to get our heads round them.

DR DAVIS: Okay, thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What an interesting morning, and a huge variety of things. We now have no speakers until 2.30 pm. So I think we will have an adjournment now and we will reconvene at 2.30 pm. Oh, a quick change, sorry, we are going to reconvene actually at 2.20 pm, sorry about that.

MR REED: 1.20 pm, we are going to adjourn until 1.20 pm.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: (After conferring with the Secretary). We are going to stick with 2.30 pm. Sorry!

After the luncheon adjournment

Time noted: 2.40 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, we are just waiting to see if our first speaker has turned up. We have plenty of others so if they have not we will just plough on anyway. I will keep you posted. (After a pause). Is Miss Helen Cawdor here? No. In that case please could we call Mr Murray to speak first please?

MR MURRAY: (Liberal Democrats) Right, I am David Murray of 72, Raby Street, Wolverhampton, WV2 1AL, and this is my presentation which is mainly about Birmingham and the Black Country area.

In paragraph 20 of the initial proposals, the BC said 'We were mindful of seeking to respect, where we could, the external boundaries of local authorities.' Yet in Birmingham the BC has failed to do this. In its determination to achieve a solution without splitting wards it has arrived at some bizarre combinations of wards and has effectively stolen a constituency from the Black Country in order to create 10 constituencies in Birmingham within quota, to which it is not entitled. For the purposes of this review Birmingham has 686,804 electors. This number will only sustain nine constituencies with an average electorate of 76,312, well within quota. By contrast, the Black Country has 812,061 electors, which divided by 11 provides a slightly lower average of 73,824, indicating no need to breach these two boundaries.

The House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, in its eighth report of session, entitled 'What Next on The Redrawing of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries', considered the BCE's 'Review Closure and Lessons



Learnt' management report from the 2013 review, which was considered, as a whole, not satisfactory. In paragraph 6, they welcome the statement from the BCE that it would be 'more open to the possibility of splitting wards in the future. This should serve to minimise any unnecessary disruption resulting from the boundary review process and allow for greater account to be taken of substantive community boundaries.' Going back on this is a retrograde step and must be challenged. Without this possibility the 2018 review could become equally unsatisfactory.

I was actually involved in the Local Government Boundary Commission review of the Birmingham wards for the 2018 local elections, and submitted contributions at each stage of the process. In doing so, and considering the final recommendations I noted that the LGBCE had changed the boundaries of 75 polling districts to arrive at their conclusions. We also became familiar with the communities in Birmingham affected by this review. It is strange that the BCE themselves have gone back on their intentions to consider split wards in Birmingham. It is clear that constituencies cannot be created in quota within the city without the necessary and judicious splitting of some existing wards, taking into account the boundaries of the new, smaller wards created by the LGBCE. It is also necessary, under Rule 5, to respect the boundaries of existing constituencies and any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.

There is a proposal for the Birmingham constituencies, with nine of them, the Sutton Coldfield one remains the same, and I will come on to talk to them individually. Erdington is as shown, and Perry Barr, Hodge Hill, we have created an Edgbaston and Ladywood because in fact it consists of five complete wards, three from Edgbaston and the Soho and Ladywood ward. And the Hall Green one remains virtually as it is with a small addition to help Yardley, and Selly Oak remains almost the same and also Northfield. As in the BCE initial proposals, the retention of Sutton Coldfield constituency, with or without its 'Royal' prefix is agreed, with an electorate of 73,172. The other eight constituencies would be marginally different due to the original 10 reduced to nine.

My counter-proposal for Birmingham Erdington would retain its four wards of Erdington, Kingstanding, Stockland Green and Tyburn instead of the Walsall ward of Pheasey Park Farm, but needs the addition of Oscott, as in the BCE proposal, part of which the LGBCE had added to the Kingstanding ward following evidence from the north Birmingham communities. The electorate would then be 80,035, so a compelling reason to bring it within quota is to transfer the CVE polling district to Perry Barr, bringing the Erdington constituency down to 78,031. Birmingham Perry Barr would retain 3.15 of its existing wards, Handsworth Wood, Lozells and East Handsworth, Perry Barr and the CVE polling district from Oscott. It is important for Perry Barr in that the Perry Beeches schools and the Priestley Smith School are in this polling district, serving the Perry Beeches area between the M6 and the A34 Walsall Road. Also, the first Perry Beeches Free School is based on Beeches Road, linking these two areas under the M6, and there are now four others in different parts of the city, a compelling reason for keeping CVE with Perry Barr. It is agreed that the Aston ward should be added the Perry Barr constituency as in the BCE proposal,

but in addition, instead of the Newton ward from Sandwell, it is proposed to add the five northern polling districts, CTA to E, of Nechells ward, the new Local Government Boundary Commission one-member ward has exactly the same boundary, with 8,004 electors, to bring the electorate of Perry Barr to 77,665.

Birmingham Hodge Hill would not stay exactly the same as in the BCE proposal but would keep 3.48 of its existing wards, Wordsley Green, Hodge Hill, Shard End north of the River Cole and Washwood Heath. Added to it would be the remaining polling districts of Nechells ward, CTF to K, which for the LGBCE's new Bordesley and Highgate one-member ward, which is CTF, G and H, with CTI, J and K forming part of the new Bordesley Green one-member ward, adjacent to the existing Bordesley Green ward. This, then, seems a very logical combination, keeping the Bordesley parts together in one constituency and fitting in well with the LGBCE's final recommendations. It also keeps the River Cole as a natural boundary to the south of Shard End itself and to the east of the existing Hodge Hill constituency. These are compelling reasons for a better solution to keep its local communities together with a 73,756 electorate.

Birmingham Yardley would keep 3.8 of its existing wards; Sheldon, South Yardley, Stechford and Yardley North and most of Acocks Green. With all four wards it would still be below the minimum and the BCE solution is to eject Sheldon from Yardley and add in Hall Green ward, breaking up an existing constituency that was already in range with 73,938 electors, just because Hall Green has 2,953 electors more than Sheldon. Instead it is proposed that the Shard End ward south of the River Cole, CZC – H, is added to Yardley. These are all part of the LGBCE's two-member Glebe Farm and Tile Cross ward, which also includes part of Stechford and Yardley North ward north of the railway, and uses the River Cole as its northern boundary. This would give Yardley 79,055 electors, 548 above the maximum. This is solved by adding the CAA and C polling districts, which total 3,588 electors, to Hall Green, as can be seen in the next slide.

There is a map of Acocks Green ward (indicating), the green line represents the boundary of the existing polling districts, CAA and CAC, and the red line is the revised Local Government Boundary Commission line which follows the A4040 up here. It would have followed it all the way, but the people in here, the Ninfield Road and Gardens, objected so strongly to being shut out of Acocks Green, because they were still in the B27 postcode that the Local Government Boundary Commission actually moved the boundary to include them in Acocks Green, which is why it does not follow the A4040 up in that bit. Birmingham Hall Green would keep all its four wards, Hall Green, Moseley and Kings Heath, Sparkbrook and Springfield, which gives it an electorate of 73,938. Like the BCE, changes have been made as a result of changes to adjacent constituencies, but different ones. Transferring CAA and C from Acocks Green to Hall Green is a logical choice as these are the two polling districts that the Local Government Boundary Commission added to its new Tyesley and Hay Mills ward to keep the electorate of a new two-member Acocks Green ward in range. This leaves Yardley with 75,497 electors and Hall Green with 77,496.

Birmingham Edgbaston retains three of its existing wards, Edgbaston, Quinton and Harborne and adds in the remaining two wards from the Ladywood constituency, Ladywood and Soho. Recognising this, the new constituency name could become Birmingham Edgbaston and Ladywood, the Bournbrook as its southern boundary, another natural boundary.

Birmingham Selly Oak would retain all four of its existing wards, Billesley, Bournville, Brandwood and Selly Oak, but this would leave it with only 68,460 electors. This counter-proposal adds in the eastern polling districts of Kings Norton, CND to CNH, a total of 9,905 electors, to bring the total up to 78,365. This is a very logical addition in view of its community links to the north east and brings Selly Oak within quota.

Birmingham Northfield would retain 3.38 of its existing wards, Northfield, Weoley, Longbridge and the western polling districts of Kings Norton CNA, B, C and I, which total 7,192 electors. The constituency would also include Bartley Green from the present Edgbaston constituency, bringing the electorate to 76,240. This would have the Bournbrook as its natural northern boundary and be a logical combination.

All these counter-proposals more closely match existing constituencies than the BCE's. There is the in Kings Norton ward, the bit to the west goes into Northfield the bit to the east goes into Selly Oak and the little bit there was a sort of thought that this CFD polling district from Bournville would even up the electorates between Northfield and Selly Oak because it is actually much closer to Northfield railway station just here than it is to either Bournville or Cotteridge further over the other way, but it would mean splitting one ward too far so we are not proposing to consider that this time. Here is the list of counter-proposals for Birmingham. There is the list of actual wards, the actual electorates, the Birmingham total, 686,804, and as you can see the split wards, when added up, add to the 40 wards of Birmingham as it is now.

So, for the Black Country, with 812,061 electors it is entitled to 11 constituencies. However, the BCE has taken three Dudley wards, three Sandwell wards and one Walsall ward, a total of 63,796 electors, and combined them with five Birmingham constituencies. It has done this to avoid splitting wards in Birmingham itself, manipulating communities in the process and breaking local ties that have been in existence for a considerable time. This counter-proposal looks back to the 2013 review's final recommendations for Wolverhampton, and the boundary was Walsall. There seems no good reason to depart from the previous decision of a Wolverhampton West and Wolverhampton East, each with nine wards. This keeps the two Bushbury wards together in East – [they are] split in the BCE proposal – and provides an almost vertical division of the city with the two remaining wards in a Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency, but not the BCE one. There is the map of Wolverhampton wards and you can see that by actually changing over the Bushbury North here and St Peter's, which should never have been in a constituency without the Wolverhampton name, you have got a very good boundary here down the centre from a Wolverhampton West here and a Wolverhampton East, and it returns cosily east here back to Dudley. And the two left over ones are the two Wednesfield ones

which would go into the Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency, which I had previously called Walsall West after the last review.

So, Wolverhampton West would exchange Bushbury North for St Peter's and this would reduce the electorate from 77,373 to 74,882 and be more logical. I actually stood for election in St Peter's ward in 1995/96, 20 years ago, so I know the area quite well. Wolverhampton East would contain nine Wolverhampton wards and the Coseley East ward, currently in Wolverhampton South East, would be returned to Dudley. The electorate would be 78,223 and would keep the Bilston wards together in one constituency. Well, I know that area because I actually stood for parliament in the 2005 general election for Wolverhampton South East. The alternative Wednesfield and Willenhall constituency would join the five Walsall wards to the west of the M6, Willenhall North, Short Heath, Willenhall South, Bentley and Darlaston North and Darlaston South, leaving just the Wednesbury North ward from Sandwell to bring it in quota with 72,637. The M6 provides a logical boundary to the east of this constituency, unlike the BCE's Walsall Central.

There is a map of the Walsall wards, there is the M6 coming down here and the Wednesfield and Willenhall one we are suggesting is logical to be completely west of the M6, that is a good break, and then we have got Walsall North here and Walsall South. There is a funny little lump here at the top, which I will just mention briefly, that could be part of Walsall North, but that would mean splitting another ward, but I will just show you the difference. This counter-proposal retains the existing constituency names of Walsall North and South but with a different configuration. Walsall North consists of the eight wards north east of the M6, which have more links across this area than those between Bloxwich and Streatley in the BCE's extended constituency of Aldridge Brownhills and Bloxwich which are right at the opposite ends of Walsall. This new Walsall North would have 72,676 electors with the four northern wards of Aldridge Brownhills. Walsall South consists of the seven remaining wards east and north of the M6 and Great Barr with Yew Tree ward from Sandwell, giving it an electorate of 77,151. To create a logical boundary and even up these two electorates part of Aldridge central in the south wards, to the north of Leighswood Avenue, could be added to Walsall North. And there you can see the logic of it, there is the little hump, it goes right up here and then comes back down here and then up there. And Leighswood Avenue is this bit in the middle here and if the boundary took that as that, because Aldridge here is to the south of it, it would make a more logical boundary rather than having that hump and it would even up the electorates at the same time.

So there are the Black Country constituencies. They are almost the same as I have put up before except instead of Walsall West, which is number three there at the top, I have changed that down here to Wednesfield and Willenhall. This counter-proposal keeps a Dudley North, Dudley South and a Stourbridge constituency with minor changes to each, but does not accept attaching the three northern wards to Wolverhampton South and Coseley BC nor the three south eastern wards to Selly Oak and Halesowen BC because it deprives Dudley MBC of six of its wards. The BCE's Dudley West BC is a very strange constituency, like an S-bend, giving

Brierley Hill to Stourbridge and taking back Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood. The extra 268 electors from this exchange bring Dudley West just 23 electors above the minimum. This suggests, once again, that using whole wards is very much a BCE arithmetical exercise, ignoring the effect on existing communities. It is better to accept that in some cases split wards can prevent the disruption to adjacent areas forecast by the Select Committee in 2015 when it welcomed the change of heart to giving more consideration to split wards.

Dudley North would reclaim Coseley East from the current Wolverhampton South East and would keep the two Gornal wards together, a community recognised by the BCE in the 2013 review. With Sedgeley, Castle and Priory, St James's and St Thomas's, the electorate would be 70,661, just 370 below the minimum. Adding polling district MO7, 1,850 electors from Netherton Woodside and St Andrew's would bring it to 72,511. This is a logical addition, as MO7 is just south of St Thomas's wards and is on this map that I have given to the Assistant Commissioner.

Dudley South would keep the remaining 8,502 electors from Netherton Woodside and St Andrew's and polling districts XO1 to XO3, which is another 3,336 electors from the north of Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood. Again, these relate to areas in the adjacent wards. These would provide an electorate of 72,215, with the wards of Amblecote, Brierley Hill, Brockmoor and Pensnett, the two Kingswinford wards, that is Kingswinford North and Wall Heath and Kingswinford South and Wordsley.

The Stourbridge constituency would share six of the wards in the BCE proposal, Cradley and Wollescote, Hayley Green and Cradley South, Lye and Stourbridge North, Norton, Pedmore and Stourbridge East, Wollaston and Stourbridge Town. To counter the loss of Amblecote and Brierley Hill to Dudley South BC, the remaining polling districts, XO4 – XO7 with 6,777 electors from Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood and the adjacent Cradley Heath and Old Hill ward from Sandwell, would be added to keep the Cradley community in one constituency with an electorate of 74,789.

A new Halesowen and Morley constituency would be created with four wards from the existing Halesowen and Rowley Regis constituency and four wards from the existing Morley constituency to provide a balance in the new constituency. This would have an electorate of 73,635 and keep all the wards in the Black Country. There is the new Halesowen and Morley constituency. These three Morley wards, because there are seven wards in the Black Country, mainly, and they have had to come up to eight, those three wards would go to West Bromwich East, this one, Rowley, would go to West Bromwich West, these two wards, Cradley Heath, to keep all the Cradley bits together, would go to Stourbridge along with this one at the bottom. And the remaining parts, the remaining eight would form the new Halesowen and Morley.

Instead of a single West Bromwich ward as proposed by the BCE, retaining all the Black Country wards in Black Country constituencies allows the continuation of the West Bromwich East and the West Bromwich West, each with eight wards instead of seven. West Bromwich East would retain five of its existing wards and add the three

remaining wards from the Morley constituency of St Paul's, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria. This would give it 71,260 electors, equally north and south of West Bromwich town. West Bromwich West would retain six of its existing wards and gain Greets Green and Lyng from the current West Bromwich East and Rowley ward from the current Halesowen and Rowley Regis. West Bromwich West would have 72,082 electors, maintaining its boundary on the west with Dudley and have a more rational eastern boundary.

There is the summary, there are 10 constituencies in the BCE numbered version and 11 constituencies in the alternative version which I am proposing. And if you add up all those figures on the right hand side you will find it comes to 812,061, which is the total to which the Black Country is entitled for 11 constituencies, and the red ones are ones that follow existing names and compared to the Boundary Commission one there is only about two and compared to these there is seven.

Solihull constituency could remain as it is with 75,121 electors and it would not be necessary to split it up as the BCE has done to create a Chelmsley Wood and Solihull North and a Shirley and Solihull South. The latter adds the Tamworth-in-Arden orphan ward from Stratford-upon-Avon unnecessarily and splits Knowle ward from its links with Dorridge by including it in the new Coventry West and Meriden CC. This carves up the existing Meriden constituency and a better solution can be found by exchanging two wards between Solihull and Meriden. If Elmdon ward is included with Meriden and Blythe ward to the south of Shirley is added to Solihull then the two constituencies can remain within the boundary of the Solihull MBC. The Solihull electorate would increase to 75,626, about 500 more, and Meriden in quota would come within range down to 78, 247.

In terms of proposals for Warwickshire, a number of different counter-proposals have been put forward for Warwickshire. In order to effect change there will have to be some sort of consensus in this area. Having considered the alternatives, I support counter-proposals that would retain Warwick and Leamington as one constituency with 77,569 electors, and Stratford-upon-Avon, with 78,370, by reclaiming orphan Tamworth-in-Arden ward. The 18,700 electors from South Warwickshire would return to the Stratford constituency. Rugby and Southam CC would lose Kineton at the southern end of the constituency and gain Radford Semele to keep Warwick and Leamington CC within range. It would then have 76,575 electors. Nuneaton would stay as the BCE version with 76,385. North Warwickshire and Bedworth, if we add the Bedworth bit because it is the whole of Bedworth – five wards – that go into North Warwickshire, would stay as the BCE with 74,124.

At the time of the last review the three Coventry constituencies were all within range of the UK average, but not this time. Between the general elections of 2010 and 2015, Coventry South lost 8,525 electors, the highest in the West Midlands. Coventry North West lost 3,464 and Coventry North East 2,735, which is 14,724 electors lost to Coventry. That is almost a ward and a half. I support the counter-proposal that combines Coventry South with Kenilworth as Warwick University straddles both areas. Whoberley from Coventry South would be transferred to

Coventry North West to leave Coventry South and Kenilworth with 77,275. A new Coventry East would have five wards from BCE's Coventry North East, exchanging Foleshill for Binley and Willenhall, giving an increased total of 73,304 from 72,135. Coventry North West would add Foleshill, and other ward changes would give it 77,745.

So for Worcestershire, the biggest change in this area is the Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency, resulting from the justification for separate Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick and Leamington constituencies, which would not cross into Worcestershire. With the Dodderhill and Droitwich wards going into Bromsgrove and Evesham CC constituency should keep its northern boundary with Bowbrook and Inkberrow. Of the three remaining Wychavon wards in the north, Hartlebury would join the Wye Forest constituency, which is what the BCE proposes, with which it has links, and Lovett and North Claines and Ombersley would go to boost the Worcester electorate instead of the two south eastern wards of Norton and Whittington and Drakes Broughton. Evesham would then need the five south eastern wards from Malvern Hills to bring the constituency back in range with 74,847 electors. This is preferable to a counter-proposal to include Kempsey and Ripple with Worcester.

As a result of losing Ombersley and five of its south eastern wards, the Malvern and Ledbury constituency would need additional wards from the east of Herefordshire. The logical additions are the three wards of Bromyard Bringsty, Bromyard West and Hampton. It is noted that the first two of these are in another counter-proposal but Hampton, 2,666, is needed here to bring the electorate up to 72,441. And this is appropriate for a constituency covering a large geographical area like this one. Losing these three wards from the Ludlow and Leominster constituency would reduce that electorate to 70,097 and it would need to reclaim the Chirbury and Worthen orphan ward back from the BCE's Shrewsbury constituency to raise it to 72,399. Again, an appropriate figure for the largest constituency in the West Midlands.

The Hereford and South Herefordshire constituency would remain as the BCE's version, at 77,370. I support the BCE's proposals for North Shropshire, Telford, Bridgnorth and the Wrekin, dropping the Wellington name from the title of course, but do not agree with the suggestion that Much Wenlock should be added to the already large Ludlow and Leominster CC. It would actually put the road between Bridgnorth and Broseley in a different constituency. If the BCE did decide it was appropriate to move Much Wenlock then Chirbury and Worthen should remain in the Shrewsbury constituency. This would increase the Ludlow and Leominster to 73,503 and reduce the Bridgnorth and the Wrekin to 73,850, very similar. With the BCE creating Staffordshire as a sub-region of 11 constituencies I decided that the BCE would probably not accept including the four north eastern Warwickshire wards with Tamworth, as I had originally proposed, hence the changes to Warwickshire.

So in conclusion, although the print is a bit smaller there, overall I believe that major changes to the BCE's initial proposals are necessary in the Black Country, Birmingham and Warwickshire to retain more of the existing constituencies under

Rule 5 and minimise the disruption forecast by the Select Committee which reported in March 2015 on the last review. It welcomed the decision by the BCE to be more tolerant in the acceptance of split wards, particularly in the case of Birmingham, by splitting just five out of 40 very large wards which will not even exist for future local elections. Solutions are provided that better comply with Rule 5. By not splitting any wards in the West Midlands the BCE's initial proposals have created some very strange and inappropriate ward combinations, resulting in numbers of disparate communities ending up combined into one constituency. I am disappointed that the BCE has gone back on this approach and in 2018 is again demanding exceptional and compelling reasons to split any ward however sensible it may prove to be. I hope this unsatisfactory decision will be challenged by others, although I refer back to the invitation in paragraph 27 of the review that the BCE would 'welcome evidence on whether an alternative configuration of constituencies could be formulated that was not based on whole wards. I hope this will be so. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Do we have any questions or points of order? Yes we have got one here.

MR RILEY: Thank you. Ian Riley. Mr Murray, can you tell me how many wards you are now proposing to split in the West Midlands?

MR MURRAY: Seven.

MR RILEY: Seven wards altogether, which means that you are not treating them as exceptional, it is almost ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You need to do that through me, but ---

MR MURRAY: There are five in Birmingham and two in Dudley, two adjacent ones in Dudley.

MR RILEY: Can you tell me then, can you define within the rules what is exceptional about those wards and what is compelling that forces us to consider splitting them?

MR MURRAY: I tried to deal with that in my actual presentation, that it keeps communities together, it retains the existing constituencies and it also makes sure that the constituencies can come within range. All the Black Country constituencies were well below the actual thing so it was a bit of an arithmetical exercise to try and juggle them to get them to come together. And, as I say, the Dudley West ward which the BC proposed put Gornal into Wolverhampton South West, or whatever, or Wolverhampton South, and the other part of Gornal in this Dudley West, so it split that community, which the BCE recognised in the last review. So there are various compelling reasons. In Birmingham it is a case of actually the splits that have been suggested tie in with the boundaries of the new local government boundary wards and it minimises the disruption the next time round when the new wards will be used for the next review in 2023.



THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further points of clarification? (None). We are evidence gathering here so we need to be very clear about what we have got. This was the piece of paper that was given to us about two weeks ago.

MR MURRAY: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Does what you have put there supersede this?

MR MURRAY: It may do because we have made quite clear in that presentation that there would be a written one which may have revisions in it.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, that this was initial.

MR MURRAY: That is my own personal view.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And this covers everything but it is more up to date. Is that correct?

MR MURRAY: Yes, that is more up to date.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Than this?

MR MURRAY: As of about 12 o'clock today.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Because, yes, there are certain differences, and we need to know which is formally the official ---

MR MURRAY: Because I have got some more actual sheets with the numbers on to give to you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Fine, which would be quite useful, that would be very useful indeed. We have another point of clarification before you go David. And if you can do it through me as the Chair so I can check we are sticking to points of clarification here.

MR LEWIS: Martin Lewis. Can you clarify what you think is exceptional about wards in Birmingham?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do you mean split wards?

MR MURRAY: No, the wards in Birmingham are the largest wards in the whole country, I think more than any other place. I think Leeds comes second in terms of large electorates, but Birmingham, if the figures that are actually being used for the Local Government Boundary Review, is about 125,000 greater than the ones that have been used by the Boundary Commission for the Parliamentary Review.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And of course we absolutely --- we are restricted by the law in the data we use and we cannot do anything about it, it is not within our gift.

MR MURRAY: So the wards have been up to 20,000 or 21,000.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh yes that is true, that is true.

MR MURRAY: And so it is very difficult and you had a very difficult job to try and put them together without splitting wards.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It becomes more difficult for sure. They are very, very large wards compared ---

MR MURRAY: And I think a better solution comes from the plan that I put up at the beginning.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further points of clarification? Can we hold on one second?

MR REED: Mr Murray, can I just clarify precisely, the presentation you have just given now, is it a personal presentation as opposed to a formal agreed presentation?

MR MURRAY: It is a personal one that may form a large part of the official Liberal Democrat presentation submitted before 5 December.

MR REED: So just to get that perfectly clear, so the original one was the Liberal Democrats' one, the one you have just given now is a variation of that with personal elements, is that correct?

MR MURRAY: Yes I have just given the present one as the Policy Chair of the West Midlands Liberal Democrats because I have been involved with this for quite a number of years.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: But what you have actually said also, and this is important to clarify, is this original one is going to be replaced by one taking in this, which will be submitted in written form by 5 December.

MR MURRAY: Yes, that is right.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And that will become the official ---

MR MURRAY: And that will have all the appendices with all the figures, and all ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: And will make this redundant?

MR MURRAY: Possibly, yes, but do not destroy it yet!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, we will not destroy it yet! We have got so much paperwork! Thank you very much indeed, thank you. Our next speaker is Mr Ian Jenkinson please.

MR JENKINSON: Thank you very much. My name is Ian Jenkinson, I live at 4, Halesworth Crescent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 4LJ. Effectively I am coming along to support the proposals for North Staffordshire and Newcastle. As I said, I am a resident of Newcastle, I lodged an objection against to constituency proposals during the 2012 Boundary Review, arguing that the proposals for North Staffordshire did not reflect any natural community with common affiliations, in particular they did not reflect community travel patterns to work, shop, school, college and entertainment. Also they broke up existing communities and did not reflect local government boundaries. I made that objection in light of my time working for Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, firstly as their Head of Assets and Amenities and latterly as their Chief Executive and Returning Officer. I retired from full time employment at the beginning of 2008 but I still have current knowledge about transport and transportation in North Staffordshire through my appointment to the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Enterprise Partnership, commonly known as the LEP, and I am also on the Transport Working Group for the LEP. I am also a member of the municipal engineering expert panel of the Institution of Civil Engineers, where I assist the production of their annual state of the nation reports on local infrastructure and local transport.

As a result, I am pleased to note that the current 2018 proposals overcome many of my objections that I raised last time and that the proposed Constituency 27, Newcastle-under-Lyme, largely follows the boundaries of the borough and importantly it embraces the whole of Kidsgrove Town Council which is an important component of Newcastle, exactly where the cursor is on the plan at the moment. It also reflects community travel patterns for work, shopping, school and entertainment and in particular it reflects public transport routes and highway links in the area. I have brought all the relevant maps with me and I will go through them at length if you want me to, but I suspect you do not need that piece of information, but I will willingly support it if you require it.

For these reasons I support the proposals for 27, Newcastle-under-Lyme BC. I do, however, note that the maximum head count for Newcastle results in the western part of the borough being assigned to 49, West Staffordshire council, which is the piece just on the left of your map, that is it, you are there, Audley and underneath it Alsager's Bank. I understand the reasons for assigning these parts of Newcastle to the West Staffordshire constituency but I disagree with the constraints that are being placed upon the Boundary Commission by government to achieve a specific size. I understand it, but, however, that is it. It is unfortunate that the result of this assignment of – what we used to call when I worked for the council – the western urban villages from Newcastle to West Staffordshire. This will place two wards in particular, Audley and Bignall End and Halmer End, isolated in terms of transport and highway links, their best public transport link is through Newcastle town centre,

less so for Madeley and Loggerheads and Whitmore because their transport links are a little better to the south, and in fact exactly where the cursor is on that map now. However, that observation aside I do support the proposals for 49, West Staffordshire as it is the least worst option available on the table. So in effect I have come along to support the proposals of the Commission.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. We need to hear from people like you and we need to know where there is support and where there is not support so we can get these things in balance. Just one question – you talked about the transport; a change of MP, how would that necessarily affect a change in the transport?

MR JENKINSON: A change of MP?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, if you cross a border and so your wards go into a different constituency and have a different MP, how will that change the transport infrastructure?

MR JENKINSON: Well, firstly the MPs can look after themselves, that is their prerogative, I am not proposing to get involved in that. My interest is ensuring that the community of Newcastle works as a single community, it reflects the highway network and it reflects the public transport network. I am aware that we have an MP here that I know very well, he will take his luck of the draw on which seat he fights and wins. I do not think that that is a relevant consideration, I am only interested in the work of transport and in the work that the borough council --- in my time, my decade on that council of building a community in North Staffordshire, worked.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, I see what you mean, I was talking about transport, but I am very happy with that. We have a question, a point of clarification here, and if you could address it through me that would be great.

MR FARRELLY: Paul Farrelly, MP for Newcastle. I think Ian, because I listened to his submissions five years ago, is making the point that transport link reflect community ties, which is relevant.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes, I gathered.

MR FARRELLY: And I just wanted to ask whether it would be quite useful, actually, as we go along to see all the maps that Mr Jenkinson has gathered and I just wondered whether it would be helpful to the Commission if he actually made a written submission including them afterwards.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: (a) We would love to see your maps, of course. (b) A reminder to everybody that December 5 is the close off date and as we have been saying throughout the hearings, absolutely, written submissions would be most welcome even if you have given an oral one.

MR JENKINSON: I have given this in as a written statement beforehand, I will of course put in a fuller written statement and I will include the maps that Paul is seeking. I am entirely happy to do that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Perfect, thank you very much indeed. Anything further? (No). Thank you very much and we really appreciate you coming along and the points you have made.

MR JENKINSON: I am the only person who has supported you so far, am I not?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Oh no, we have had quite a few! I promise you we have! Michael Foster is our next speaker. Thank you.

MR FOSTER: Hello, my name is Michael Foster, my address is The Wain House, Sandlin, Leigh Sinton, Malvern, WR13 5DN. I speak as a member of the public but also as my previous experience as Member of Parliament for the City of Worcester for 13 years between 1997 and 2010. I would like to start, if I could, with a couple of general comments about the review as they pertain to the evidence that I intend to give shortly. I do believe that it is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Boundary Commission are restricted to a new margin of error, or margin of variation around the average of now 5 per cent rather than 10 per cent that had previously been used because I think it causes a detrimental impact and major upheaval upon constituencies right across the West Midlands and in particular in the case of the evidence I want to give to Worcester as a whole. I do recognise of course that that is a decision of parliament, not a decision of the Commission or anybody working on these proposals. Similarly the decision to use not the most up-to-date electoral register, again determined by parliament, but it does have a direct relevance to the evidence for the City of Worcester constituency, because the most up-to-date register for Worcester suggests that the electorate stands at 76,290 which makes it above the average size as determined under this particular review, and that average size is 74,769. And it would make it allowable to stand on its own if that register were to be permitted.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well you have put that point on the public record now, but as you say, outside our remit.

MR FOSTER: Absolutely. If I can turn now to comment upon the proposals from the Commission, I have to say from my 13 years' experience as MP representing the City of Worcester I genuinely believe it is highly desirable to have coterminosity with local government units wherever that is possible. It certainly enables for a more efficient use of time for a Member of Parliament and their staff and therefore, in my opinion, offers the best possible value for the tax payer at the end of the day. It is no surprise, therefore, given the opinion I have upon coterminosity, that I believe that this review should minimise the change and any movement away from coterminosity to the bare minimum given the numerical parameters that the Commission is working on. So I would support, in this instance, adding only one ward to the existing Worcester City constituency and not the proposed two. Both Drakes Broughton

ward and Norton Whittington ward on their own would give Worcester the allowable constituency size and, in my opinion, there is no natural community, population or even historic reason why those two wards will require them both to be included in the City of Worcester constituency.

Therefore the decision has to be for the Commission to look at, is which of the two is the more natural fit for the City of Worcester, and I believe that that ward is Norton Whittington ward and for the following reasons. Part of the current boundary for Norton Whittington ward, and I believe it is an old parish council boundary, actually crosses into a large housing estate in Worcester known as St Peter's, so this means part of Deer Avenue, part of Emperor Drive, part of Grasshopper Avenue, as well as all of Camberwell Drive, Admiral Place and Martin Close are part of Norton Whittington ward therefore Wychavon district and currently Mid Worcestershire constituency, when in reality, as part of a natural community link they are part of the city of Worcester because they are all part of one big housing estate known as St Peter's. Norton Whittington is within easy reach of the city of Worcester and the centre there, its inhabitants naturally gravitate towards Worcester for its schools, for leisure, sport, shopping, even the nearest chippy is in Worcester for them to visit. Norton Whittington also has had some new housing built and much more proposed to be built, and these are primarily extensions of housing growth from the city of Worcester and residents in the primary housing concentrations of Norton and Whittington will share the same characteristics as those already living within the city of Worcester boundary. Drakes Broughton ward, however, has little or no affinity with Worcester, it is geographically a large and rural ward which identifies itself with the nearby market town of Pershore for the majority of its services. In terms of the local economy, its housing pattern, even its school system, which is a three-tier school system compared to a two-tier system in Worcester, shows it has a better natural community with the proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency.

But I would urge you not just to take my words for this, if you look at the website Rightmove and you look at what is going on in the housing market, this is what local estate agent Andrew Grant wrote about Drakes Broughton on a property that he recently sold. This was a four bedroom semi-detached family home set in the popular village of Drakes Broughton. Situation: "The popular village of Drakes Broughton lies approximately two miles to the west of Pershore and benefits from a wide range of local services including its renowned first and middle school, local shop, post office, newsagents, fish and chip shop, church, hair salon and two reputable public houses. The riverside market town of Pershore is within a short driving distance and offers a wide range of services including further shops, banks, health and leisure centres, theatre and cinema." So Mr Grant, in a professional capacity, suggests that Drakes Broughton is linked to Pershore and not to Worcester. And of course Mr Grant should know, because he is also President of Worcester Conservative Association as well.

If I can make a couple of other comments with regard to the Commission's proposals, and I understand that there has been a counter-proposal placed made by

the Conservative Party to include the wards of Kempsey and Ripple in addition to Worcester and the two Wychavon wards. I would merely point out that Ripple is some 15 miles from the centre of Worcester itself and has no obvious links to the city. Even its address, if you type it into Bing Maps or Google Maps or your satellite navigation system is followed by the town of Tewksbury and I believe that this is a case of simply trying to gerrymander the boundary for best political advantage regardless of community links. And of course as the Commission already know this proposal would push the constituency limit to 79,319, which is over the legal limit set by parliament, of 78,507.

So, in short, I regret the fact that the Boundary Commission is having to operate under such tight restrictions which means that natural community links and the alignment with local government boundaries are unlikely to be adopted, but if change is necessary at this stage it should be the minimal change possible and that means only one ward added to the existing Worcester City constituency and for it to qualify in terms of the constituency size requirement that ward should be Norton Whittington ward. Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, I think that is very clear. Do we have any points of clarification? (None). No, thank you very much indeed, as I say, very, very clear and thank you for coming along to speak.

MR FOSTER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Is Kirsty Bailey in the room at the moment? Or Helen Cordall? No. Our next speaker is not here so we now have a quiet period. We are going to just hang on for about ten minutes because she is due here within the next five or ten minutes, so we will have a temporary adjournment of ten minutes only. Thank you.

After a short break

Time noted: 3.40 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen we have our next speaker here and we are just going to call her up, it is Miss Kirsty Bailey, so if you come up here, you can leave your bag unless you need it, no, and do not worry we have had a stream of people so you do not have to worry, and we need to know your name and your address, just because we have to.

MISS BAILEY: Who are these people by the way? Are these all, like, electoral people?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Right, my name is Margaret Gilmore and I am the Commissioner and we are the ones who want to hear what you have to say about the Boundary Commission's initial plans, I have not had any part at all in drawing them up and these are other interested parties.

MISS BAILEY: Okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So you can tell me what it is ---

MISS BAILEY: My name is Kirsty Bailey, I live at 9, Elm Place, Blurton, Stoke-on-Trent.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great, and what do you have to say?

MISS BAILEY: Well, I am not really happy with the proposed boundaries, yes, it is on there, they are getting it up. There is the whole West Staffordshire proposed constituency, it is like, I do not know which ward I am in, well, I live in Blurton, yes, they are getting it up on the map, and it is currently in the Stoke South constituency and it is proposed to go in the West Staffordshire one and --- has this gone off? No. And I am not happy about it because, like, I am fine being aligned with Newcastle-under-Lyme and all that, but it is the Stafford constituency as from Stafford I am not happy about because, like, they are more affluent than us, we are primarily, like, social housing and all the paupers and the disabled and people from, like, Barlaston, my aunty lives there, are more, like, affluent and more likely to vote Tory and Tory will --- you know, Stoke-on-Trent is like Labour heartland, not that I completely agree with them, but I feel like the West Staffordshire constituency will become Tory in the next general election because of more affluent people voting and it will just affect the area too much really. I do not really know what else to say.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great, that is fantastic. Perhaps you will tell me a little bit about the area that you live in so we can get a good flavour.

MISS BAILEY: Oh, it is all, like --- well, me, I am a bit of a, you might be able to tell, a bit of a crazy person and my dad is supposed to be my carer but anyway, it is just like, where I live, like, generally, it is not a slum, obviously, but it is, like, social housing and anti-social behaviour and the lot. And, like, Barlaston and all them places what you are proposing to put in the constituency are a lot more affluent and they are more likely to go for Tories because Tories, like, help the people who are more rich, well that is what I think, and then it will just make us, like, less poor [sic] because they are more likely to vote in things like more bedroom tax and everything like that really. I do not really know what I am on about politically.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You do, that is great. Thank you. We needs lots of people like you to come in because you make one big point and that is what we like to hear and this is what this hearing is all about.

MISS BAILEY: Have you got anything to do with the Electoral Commission or not?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We are the Boundary Commission, it is to do with the boundaries and so ---



MISS BAILEY: So, perhaps pass on the message to the Electoral Commission!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: What you say can influence where we put the parliamentary boundaries, that is what we are doing here.

MISS BAILEY: Yes, so nothing to do with the Electoral Commission?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Well, it is a similar thing, we are the Boundary Commission. The point you made is relevant to us here and we are really grateful and it is really important we hear from people like you and we are really pleased you came in and spoke to us today. And you are not the only one, we have had a few other people come in and make points, similar points, so --- unless there is anyone who wants to ask any questions? (None). Thank you very much indeed.

MISS BAILEY: Sorry, I was not prepared.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Do not say sorry, you were great!

MISS BAILEY: I just thought I would be sat at a table talking to someone!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is great!

MISS BAILEY: It is like court. I have never been in court by the way! Just saying! It is like Judge Rinder!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We will carry on talking in a second but I am going to adjourn now and we are going to take our tea break and come back at 4.30 pm if that is okay.

MISS BAILEY: Sorry to keep you waiting, I got lost. I don't live here.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: No, no, you did not!

After a short break

Time noted: 4.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen, just to say we are formally opening it but our next speaker is a Jack Brereton and I do not believe he is in the room. No, so we will give him ten minutes and then we may adjourn again. Just for your information we have three speakers listed between now and 8 pm, although obviously people may come in, they are listed now. Then we have a James Nixon at 5.40 pm and Allison Gardner who we believe is coming, we have been told is coming but not until 7.20 pm, Stoke-on-Trent Yarnfield and Newcastle-under-Lyme, so I am just telling you that so that you --- it is entirely up to you whether you want to hang out or not. So we will give this ten minutes or so and then

formally adjourn again about 4.45 – 4.50 pm for about 50 minutes. So, I am going to keep it open for the moment. (After a pause). Good afternoon again, just a quick reminder to everybody that written submissions must be in by December 5 for those of you who want to put in some written submissions as well as oral ones. And our next speaker is Jack Brereton. Jack if you would take the podium there, just here, and Mr Brereton if you give us your name and your address please.

CLLR BRERETON: (Baddeley Milton and Norton Ward) Yes, I am Jack Brereton, my address is 1799 Leek Road, Milton, ST2 7AD. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, I am here in two capacities today. Firstly on behalf of Karen Bradley, who is Member of Parliament for Staffordshire Moorlands, as her assistant, and secondly I am also speaking as Councillor for the Baddeley Milton and Norton ward and someone who has lived in the Stoke North constituency all my life. We are very pleased with the proposals put forward for the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency and it makes total sense when the population of the district equates well to the specific quota for constituency size that the boundaries should be made coterminous. I think, however, the strongest argument of why this should all be in one constituency relates to the geographic and social linkages between these areas. The new constituency will bring together three market towns and villages that make up Staffordshire Moorlands, Biddulph, Leek and Cheadle all have a very similar make-up and structure, being small towns which serve both their local community and wider hinterland. The wider area taken in by the constituency can be defined as being small villages, hamlets and more isolated farms which interlink to the three towns. The economies of these more rural areas are all based around farming and tourism. This links into the market towns which are centres for the economy in both trade and services serving the wider area.

There is a clear sense of a Moorlands identity which flows throughout the entire constituency with deep historical roots, many areas are very established communities with a high number of retired people across the constituency. These communities are tied together with strong community linkages between the areas of the new Moorlands constituency, bringing the entire district into one constituency would mean a much better representation of the whole of the Staffordshire Moorlands. With this, any attempts to divide the Moorlands and combine it with other neighbouring areas should be resisted very strongly. If the Moorlands were to be divided it would damage community links and break up the shared Moorlands identity. The proposals for the Staffordshire Moorlands represents the most logical and limited change and will result in much less complex relationships between constituency and district levels.

In terms of moving on to Stoke-on-Trent, I am very pleased with the proposals for my ward, for Baddeley Milton and Norton, which recognises the important linkages the area has to Stoke-on-Trent. The area is effectively a suburb of the city and has important community, economic and transport links to the city. With this it is important that it is proposed that the area remains in one of the Stoke-on-Trent constituencies rather than being split across two constituencies as is the case under current boundaries.

My concerns primarily relate to the Kidsgrove area, including the wards of Talke, Ravenscliffe, Kidsgrove, Butt Lane and Newchapel. Whilst these wards make up the Kidsgrove area or are in Newcastle borough area, there are much greater connections to the north of Stoke. Currently four of these wards are in the Stoke North constituency and one is an orphan ward in Staffordshire Moorlands. The proposals put all of these wards in the Newcastle constituency.

In terms of geographical, economic and community links, these wards are much more strongly linked to the areas of Tunstall, Chell, Packmoor and Goldenhill, which are in the Stoke-on-Trent council area. Most importantly, many of the transport links go north south, linking the Kidsgrove area to the Stoke North area, with many people living and working within the catchment, commuting from the Kidsgrove area into the towns within Stoke-on-Trent. Also to prove this, public transport is much more well established between Kidsgrove and Stoke-on-Trent both in terms of bus and rail than is the case to Newcastle. For example, whilst on average there are 12 buses an hour from the Kidsgrove area into Stoke-on-Trent there are only three buses an hour into Newcastle, with some parts of the area having no direct bus connection to Newcastle. Also the A500, the main strategic trunk road, acts as a significant barrier for communities between Newcastle and Kidsgrove. These linkages of Kidsgrove to Stoke-on-Trent, particularly community links, have only become further established by Kidsgrove being in the Stoke North constituency.

Certainly identity is very important within the Kidsgrove area, however whilst different from both Newcastle and Stoke-on-Trent there is much greater commonality between Kidsgrove and north Stoke. It is also concerning that this would be the third time that Kidsgrove area will have been moved in three reviews. This undermines community linkages and causes unnecessary disruption. It is also notable that the proposed move of Kidsgrove into a constituency it has never been in before – previously it was in the Moorlands constituency. If Kidsgrove were retained in the Stoke North constituency it would result in much less change, strengthening an established community and economic ties. To facilitate this would require some changes to the proposals put forward to other constituencies in North Staffordshire. To take in Kidsgrove wards and stay within the quota in Stoke North the wards of Etruria and Hanley, Birches Head and Central Forest Park and Abbey Hulton and Townsend would need to transfer to the proposed Stoke South constituency. This would be a very logical transition as these areas tend to be more focused around the city centre but under the current proposals would be split from similar areas such as Hanley Park and Shelton, Joiners Square, Eaton Park and Bentilee and Ubbertley. Bringing these areas back together would mean that economic and community ties between these areas are not divided.

To make up for the wards lost from the proposed Newcastle constituency the remaining wards from the Newcastle Borough Council area can then go into the proposed Newcastle constituency. This would mean a change to the proposal with Audley and Bignall End, Halmer End, Madeley and Loggerheads and Whitmore going into the new Newcastle constituency which would return Newcastle to its pre-

1997 boundaries, meaning less change and impact for North Staffordshire overall. This would reunite all of the rural Newcastle with its market town, emphasising the current established economic and community linkages. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Are there any points of clarification from the floor? Yes, we have one here.

MR FARRELLY: The MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme. Just regarding the transport links which show community ties and connections, including shopping and travel-to-work, Councillor, could you tell me where the 4A bus route runs from and to and the 94A bus route north and south?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So that is a point of clarification you are asking for, it is up to you whether or not you answer it, take your time.

CLLR BRERETON: One second, let me find that.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You do not have to answer it if you do not want to, but if you want to and can that is fine too. So we will take that as a point of clarification.

CLLR BRERETON: So in terms of the 4A, that runs to Newcastle but there are only three buses an hour on that. The 3 bus has six per hour, as comparison, into the Tunstall area from Kidsgrove. And in comparison also the 7 bus, which runs from the Newchapel and Mow Cop area has six buses an hour into the Chell and Packmoor area then going, in both of those cases, into the wider area of Stoke-on-Trent. So that shows that there is clearly a much higher amount of bus services from the wider Kidsgrove area into Stoke-on-Trent in comparison to the amount of bus services into Newcastle. In terms of the further point I made about the lack of services also from the Newchapel area and Mow Cop, there are no direct services from that area whatsoever to Newcastle.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR FARRELLY: My question was not fully answered. The 4A does go from Kidsgrove to Newcastle, it was the 94A, that was not addressed but I will just read into the record that goes from Kidsgrove through Tunstall and Stanton to Newcastle. Could I ask one further point for clarification?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR FARRELLY: Thank you. Councillor, you said that these links with Stoke for the Kidsgrove area have only been developed by virtue of them being part of the Stoke North constituency, and you have made the point that it has swapped around, can you tell me when the rail link was built between Stoke and Crewe that actually goes through Kidsgrove station?

CLLR BRERETON: Oh, well I cannot obviously give you an exact date, that would be beyond my knowledge, but I think, you know, there has been established links since Victorian times between those areas with three trains an hour from Kidsgrove going to Stoke station with one train an hour stopping at Longport as well, which is in the north of Stoke, so there are very established rail links with absolutely no rail links whatsoever from --- well there is no rail service at all to Newcastle, so ---

MR FARRELLY: It would be difficult because we do not have a railway station, but thank you, you have answered the question, it dates from Victorian times.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Any further questions? Right, we have got one more question for us. And just a reminder, we will need your name again.

DR DAVIS: Nicky Davis. I just wanted to clarify with the movement of, I think what you have said, is four wards from Newcastle-under-Lyme into Stoke-on-Trent North and three wards from Stoke-on-Trent North into Stoke-on-Trent South, and you have taken some other wards to the west of Newcastle-under-Lyme into Newcastle-under-Lyme, what is the knock-on effect of the borderline between Stoke-on-Trent North and Stoke-on-Trent South and the border between --- well, you have said that one, it is more the knock-on effect between West Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent South. And do the numbers comply?

CLLR BRERETON: Yes, I do have all that detail which I will give to you, but in terms of the knock-on impact, the border for the Stoke North seat basically just moves down slightly so, as I said, previously the wards that would transfer over are basically the Etruria and Hanley ward, Abbey Hulton and Townsend, the --- let me get the proper list and I can tell you exactly, I did say it in the speech, but ---

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is difficult, sometimes it is quite fast! So as long as we do get hold of the papers that would be useful.

CLLR BRERETON: Well you can have all the documentation. So it is basically the areas which are to the south of Burslem, so the wards that will transfer over are Etruria and Hanley, Birches Head and Central Forest Park and the Abbey Hulton and Townsend ward would transfer to the Stoke South constituency from the Stoke North constituency, that allows you to bring the border down --- the northern border down slightly and then in terms of the impact on West Staffordshire that basically would transfer some wards out of West Staffordshire into the Newcastle seat, so all of the Newcastle borough wards which are currently in the West Staffordshire seat would transfer over into the new Newcastle seat, so reuniting the rural hinterlands with Newcastle town. And then for West Staffordshire that would have to be facilitated by taking in some more of the Stoke South wards out of Stoke South into the West Staffordshire seat.

DR DAVIS: That is, I think, the root of my question – which ones? And do the numbers add up when you do it?

CLLR BRERETON: Do you want me to go through the ones that would be in West Staffordshire?

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That was the clarification so I am happy to hear that, yes.

CLLR BRERETON: Okay. So, it is proposed that the West Staffordshire seat would now be made up of Hanford and Trentham, Hollybush and Longton West, Blurton West and Newstead, Blurton East, Dresden and Florence, Lightwood North and Normacot, Meir South, Meir Park, Meir North, Weston Coyney; and then from Stafford borough, Fulford, Barlaston, Swynnerton and Oulton, St Michael's and Stonefield, Walton and Eccleshall. So that would give the overall quota for the West Staffordshire seat as 74,914. The number for the Newcastle seat would be 71,622. The number for the Stoke North seat would be 75,725 and the Stoke South seat would be 75,732.

DR DAVIS: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: We have a point of clarification over here again. We do need your name again, sorry.

MR FARRELLY: Paul Farrelly, Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme, I am sadly --- this time around I think we will only get the submissions in January, after the deadline closes so I just wondered whether – a little bit more slowly because it is quite important – whether you could read out again the major changes that you are proposing to Stoke South and West Staffordshire.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That is fine.

CLLR BRERETON: So, I will go slowly, so the West Staffordshire seat would now be made up of Hanford and Trentham, Hollybush and Longton West, Blurton West and Newstead, Blurton East, Dresden and Florence, Lightwood North and Normacot, Meir South, Meir Park, Meir North, Weston Coyney, Fulford, Barlaston, Swynnerton and Oulton, St Michael's and Stonefield, Walton and Eccleshall. Which of the seats, sorry, did you want to hear, the Newcastle or the Stoke South? Newcastle, okay.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. And we have a question or a point of clarification here.

MR RILEY: Ian Riley. Mr Brereton, you started by saying that you were speaking for Karen Bradley MP, can you clarify whether the proposals that you have just put forward in respect to Staffordshire West and so on are her proposals or yours?

CLLR BRERETON: No, they are not her proposals, I was speaking on her behalf in the first half of my presentation. The other proposals are being put forward by myself and a number of other colleagues.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: So can you just clarify for us again which are hers?

CLLR BRERETON: The first half that I spoke about in relation to Staffordshire Moorlands constituency.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay, thanks. Thank you. Any further points of clarification? In that case we are going to adjourn now, our next speaker is due in in about half an hour, so if we can reconvene at 5.35 pm please. Thank you.

After a short break

Time noted: 5.35 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen our next speaker is James Nixon, who I do not believe is in the room and he is due to speak now, not here, obviously we need to give him some time, so we will give him ten to fifteen minutes and then we will adjourn again. So I am afraid ten to fifteen minutes, we will just sit here and give him the opportunity. Thank you. (After a pause). Ladies and gentlemen our next speaker has not shown so we are going to officially adjourn until 6.30 pm. We are not expecting anyone at 6.30 pm, I am telling you, but we need to give people the opportunity just in case, so we will probably see if there is anyone who wants to speak at 6.30 pm and then we would be re-adjourning until 7.10 – 7.15 pm when our final speaker is due.

After a short break

Time noted: 6.30 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: It is now 6.30 pm and we have nobody who wishes to speak and so for that reason we will reopen the meeting, say that there is no one to speak at the moment and adjourn now until 7.10 pm.

After a short break

Time noted: 7.15 pm

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Ladies and gentlemen thank you so much for your patience and we are now resuming this final session of the afternoon and our last speaker is Dr Allison Gardner, and Dr Gardner if you come to the podium that would be great. And when you get here we will first need your name and your address please. And if you want to refer to any maps they will be up there.

DR GARDNER: (Newcastle-under-Lyme) Right, my name is Dr Allison Gardner and I live at 3, Portland Grove, Westbury Park, Newcastle-under-Lyme, which is Seabridge ward. And I am also a Borough Councillor for Chesterton in Newcastle

and the Chair of Newcastle-under-Lyme Constituency Labour Party, and I also lecture at Keele University so I dot around! For clarity I will say at the outset that I am backing the initial proposals for Newcastle, but with, of course, the caveat that the Labour Party does not support the Boundary Review with its reduction to 600 seats. However, I recognise the Commission's legal duty and the constraints under which it is working. I welcome the decision to treat Staffordshire as a sub-region of the West Midlands with 11 seats, I also welcome the fact that the Commission has built on the foundations of the last interrupted review of 2011/2012 with the current initial proposals largely reflecting the last revised proposals.

I am particularly pleased that now, as then, the Commission has listened to the strong objections made five years ago – cross-party and right across local communities – to the initial proposals made in 2011 that would have divided the historic Newcastle area and seat down the middle, breaking apart many communities. For example the 2011 initial proposals would have divided areas of Newcastle such as Bradwell, Porthill, Wolstanton and May Bank and if you drive around those areas you do not know when you are in one and the other they are so close. It would have placed Chesterton in a Stoke North seat, divided from its own Newcastle town centre which itself would have gone into a Newcastle and Stone seat. Not only did that division ignore the very strong community and historic ties but it did not respect the geography and transport links either, of the area, with the southern areas of Stoke-on-Trent having more of a natural connection with the A34 towards Stone.

The 2012 revised proposals, which were exactly the same for Newcastle as the Commission's current proposals reflected those arguments with a redrawn Newcastle-under-Lyme seat and the new Staffordshire West constituency. Obviously as the Borough Councillor for Chesterton I particularly feel the 2012 revised and now current initial proposals are welcome. Chesterton has a shared mining legacy with the adjoining parts of Newcastle, common social and housing issues and it has crucial continuing industrial connections which strengthen the case for common parliamentary representation and advocacy.

To just give an example of that, and I can give many, but I will just give one example. Chesterton has two brickworks, one of which, Ibstocks, recently has the industry's largest investment, of £20 million. This brickworks is fed by clay from Knutton Quarry in Knutton and Silverdale ward which is just a hop, skip and [a jump] away down the A34 just next door and this recent investment would not have gone ahead without extension of the quarry. But you can imagine a quarry extension does not go well with the residents of Knutton, so some careful liaison there and the last review heard from Newcastle's MP Paul Farrelly, [he] worked very closely for years with Ibstocks and the residents of Knutton to resolve all the concerns and all interests in a positive manner and so this may well have not happened under the old initial proposals had Knutton and Silverdale gone into the Newcastle and Stone seat and we would have had a division of MPs and interest and attention and this may well not have happened, and of course it has been a huge benefit to our area.



Broadening the focus to the wider constituency I agree that Loggerheads and Whitmore and Madeley to the south and west of the M6 and Newcastle borough fit very naturally into the West Staffordshire seat. These wards are largely rural in nature and have long been part of the Stone constituency anyway which forms the core of that new seat so there has been no demands for change and I certainly have not heard any. With regards to the Kidsgrove area, which is the biggest suggested change, I also agree with the initial proposals, which again in turn agree with the 2012 revised proposals and I have had personal reasons, and you know, as a councillor for really supporting this. The five current wards that form the area of Kidsgrove Town Council have been part of the Newcastle-under-Lyme borough since 1974 when the local government reorganisation then abolished the urban district councils, so we have been together for a long time.

From a parliamentary perspective, however, the area's position has always been a bit unsettled. There have been those people that have swapped areas, swapped back and forth between the Stoke North and Staffordshire Moorlands seat, with the last completed review moving four wards, Kidsgrove, Butt Lane, Talke and Ravenscliffe into Stoke North but leaving one, which was Newchapel, which includes the peak of Mow Cop, which is lovely, and is admittedly more rural in nature, into Staffs Moorlands, so there is a split there between the five. By allowing Kidsgrove to finally link with Newcastle the Commission's initial proposals offer (a) the opportunity to correct the historic anomaly of dividing the town council areas, and (b) the prospect for Kidsgrove to have a more settled parliamentary future in a seat which lies entirely in Newcastle borough, so it is a common sense approach and further forges our links together.

I do recognise that with its rail stations Kidsgrove has transport links with Stoke-on-Trent, however the most used routes, the A34 and local bus links, run south to north to Newcastle-under-Lyme hence these initial proposals do correlate strongly with local transport, and I will come back to that in a few minutes. Plus, and importantly, Kidsgrove has a shared coal mining history with Newcastle and this is reflected in local social housing, which is owned by Aspire Housing, the registered social landlord which serves the whole of Newcastle area and Kidsgrove. Democratic links have been reinforced at the last county boundary review, which created a new Talke and Red Street division, which takes in the Kidsgrove Town Council area of Talke just north of the A500 and then Red Street, Waterhayes and the Crackley area of Chesterton, which is my ward.

And to really illustrate how close we are, recent issues with some building works with the A34 and A500 roadworks, have really illustrated the strong links between Talke and Red Street and Crackley Bank and Waterhayes and we have had joint meetings and councillors working together. In this instance we have been fortunate that the two MPs helped, but we had to liaise and it would have been nice to have been all together on that one, as with the Ibstocks and Knutton Quarry thing.

One further caveat I will add before closing, I would like to comment on Audley and Bignall End and Halmer End areas. These villages have always been part of the

Newcastle constituency with strong ties despite admittedly being largely rural in nature, with the exception of three villages though, of Betley, Wrinehill and Balterley, which form Newcastle rural county division, these villages are also part of the Audley and Chesterton county division which is the lower end of Chesterton. So while the proposals place all of Newcastle rural county division into West Staffordshire seat, which makes sense, and Talke and Red Street are Newcastle, they do split the Audley and Chesterton division. However, I recognise that the initial proposals do place, again, all of Kidsgrove together, Town Council area, into Newcastle and all of Audley Parish in West Staffordshire, therefore avoiding the parish splits, which are not ideal. So the initial proposals are entirely understandable. So, hence, I will close by reiterating that with those small caveats that I mentioned earlier I support the initial proposals and I thank the Commission for its work. That was short and sweet!

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much indeed that is great. Just a reminder that obviously we could take your written submissions, I do not know whether it is worth taking a copy?

DR GARDNER: I have handed it in.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: You have handed it in as well?

DR GARDNER: Yes.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: That would be fantastic. Are there any points of clarification that anyone wants to ask? Hang on a second we will get the mic and we need your name again.

MR FARRELLY: Paul Farrelly for the tape, Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme. I just clarify and Allison will no doubt --- or Dr Gardner will no doubt agree that the three villages that she mentioned of Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill, which form two parishes, are in the Halmerend ward but they are not themselves the whole of the Newcastle rural county division, they go in with Loggerheads and Whitmore and Madeley. That is just a point for clarification.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Thank you. That is useful.

DR GARDNER: Yes, that forms a natural grouping there.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Okay. Anything further? (No). That is really, really helpful, I will have a quick look at it in a minute and it will go in as our formal submissions and a final reminder that people can put written submissions in but they must be in by December 5 if you want to do a written submission and to say thank you very much for your time, thank you so much for coming it is really helpful to us.

DR GARDNER: Thank you.

THE LEAD ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER: Every single voice is heard and counted so we are grateful for that and we appreciate you coming in so late. At which point we will adjourn until tomorrow morning at about 9.00 am, we are going to start on time at 9.00 am. Thank you very much for your time and we will adjourn until then.

Adjourned until 9.00 am on Tuesday 15 October 2016

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