

Submission to the Boundary Commission for England third period of consultation: **North West**

Introduction

The North West of England is a diverse, multicultural region with many different kinds of community ties and links that can be broken. We believe this could still be better reflected in the Boundary Commission for England's proposals for the North West, which we feel currently prioritises administrative boundaries over community links.

In addition, the second draft, we feel, prioritises rural over urban and to place too much reliance on travel to work and private transport links rather than service provision and public transport links. The over-reliance on motorways and car travel routes is particularly egregious in the report of the Assistant Commissioners for the North West with less account being taken of public transport requirements. Almost all of the reasoning starts from the assumption that an individual MP or constituent owns and drives a car. We would question the amount to which the public sector equality duty has been taken into account in drawing up this map.

The split wards issue

As the Gowy ward is already split between Chester and Eddisbury constituency the Commission has chosen to elevate its own policy above a statutory criterion (namely rule 2c relating to current constituency boundaries). We do not feel that the policy of an agency should over-rule statute. We are disappointed that the English Commission has taken this decision, unlike its Scottish and Welsh counterparts, and worry that this might be solely because the other Commissions possess greater technical capabilities. We accept that this argument on statute only applies to splitting the Gowy ward and not to splitting the Stepping Hill ward in Stockport. In addition the Gowy ward certainly passes the exceptional test in that the ward is already split between two constituencies and is further a split ward that no longer exists.

It was also never drawn as a ward boundary having been drawn as a County Division, many of which are split in the Commission's map. By any standards this is an exceptional situation. The Commission uses 'compelling' and 'exceptional' interchangeably but we would argue that these are two separate parts of the test and the Commission can only be arguing that the 'compelling' criterion has not been met in the case of Gowy. It is a serious omission by the Commission to not pay cognizance to this fact in the report. In effect the report takes the approach that the Liberal Democrats are seeking to split a ward when the truth is that the Commission is seeking to unsplit it. We feel this could be considered an obfuscation.

Cheshire and the Wirral

AC69 – Mersey Banks is still bad but we accept it is less bad than the original proposal. Better constituencies could be formed, better reflecting the statutory criteria were it not for the existence of the extra non-statutory prohibition against splitting wards that the Commission has ignored in another Region (South West England). In addition, Mersey Banks is only accessible to people of means by private transport and public transport links are poor.

AC71 – It is not possible to ‘disregard’ a detached part even though it is possible to decide that the presence of the detached part is not significant to outweigh other considerations.

AC72 – The name Mersey Banks and Weaver is inappropriate as it now contains only one bank of the Mersey. The difficulty of naming this constituency illustrates how poor a solution it actually is.

AC77 – It is not the Party that links Hale and Ditton with Merseyside, it is geography. Hale is particularly closely linked to Halewood despite its more rural character.

AC78 is factually incorrect. The overwhelming majority of our Halewood and Huyton constituency is already in Merseyside as both towns have been in Merseyside since local government reorganisation in 1974. This is an area where the Commission has had problems with correctly representing the borders of Merseyside as referred to in our submission in the earlier part of the process.

AC90- AC110 – We note that the Commission has failed to deal with the argument that the ward of Gowy is already, and has always been split. As one of their arguments is the breaking of local ties we do not feel that the Commission has justified their approach in this area. In addition every argument on the accessibility of the proposed constituency is predicated on an assumption that no-one will need to use public transport. The Chester Villages are clearly physically a lot closer to Chester and not everyone owns a car.

AC142- We do not agree that the constituency should be named Tatton. Wilmslow is the major population centre of the current Tatton constituency and retaining the name while removing the town would be inappropriate. We therefore feel that the name should be as in the original proposal, Northwich.

Greater Manchester

AC-187 and AC-189 – It is notable that the Assistant Commissioners agreed that our counter proposal in Greater Manchester better fulfilled the statutory criteria (187) but a significant drawback was that they failed a ‘test’(189). We feel it should be noted that the criteria are statutory while the ‘test’ is not. We remain concerned about the legal ramifications of the Commission elevating an arbitrary policy test above the statutory rules in importance.

The revised proposals in western Greater Manchester are an improvement over the previous proposals.

In eastern Greater Manchester we welcome the decision (A254) to retain the Shaw and Saddleworth parishes in one constituency. The addition of Royton has some logic.

In Stockport we recognise that the option for Bredbury is marginally better in that although the area is split in two, at least the part of Bredbury in Bredbury and Woodley ward remains in a Stockport Borough constituency (AC262) but we regret that both Bredbury and Reddish are split by the Commission insistence on elevating a non-statutory 'test' on ward splitting above a statutory criterion (Rule 2c). If the Commission refuses to exercise its power to split a ward this configuration is amongst the least unacceptable. However it should be noted here that the connection between Bredbury & Woodley ward and neighbouring parts of Stockport is weakened by the presence of the M60 motorway and we would point to this as a specific example of the bias towards car users in the map.

The proposals of the Commission for the City of Manchester seats are better than those previously suggested.

We are pleased that the Assistant Commissioners have accepted that a cross county seat involving Rochdale is not sensible. We view the proposed Bolton North and Darwen as having a similar balance of advantages and disadvantages to our proposed Rossendale and Ramsbottom arrangement.

Lancashire

We do not agree that the removal of rural areas from the Burnley seat is appropriate and we are concerned that the equalities impact of this has not been considered in any way by the Assistant Commissioners. Given that Pendle is a Borough consisting of a series of towns and so is the Ribble Valley seat, why not retain the rural hinterland of Burnley in the Burnley seat, take northern parts of Ribble Valley into the Pendle seat and extend Ribble Valley further into the Hyndburn Borough? We feel that the integrity of Burnley Borough is important and regret the further presumption by the Commission on travelling in Cliviger and Briercliffe by car only.

Given the statement in AC 297 that the Commission did not wish to split the town of Burnley, why has it done so? The Borough of Burnley is small enough to fit entirely within a constituency so the 'optimum' lack of splitting would in fact be no splitting as per our original proposal.

In AC 350 we note the comment of the Assistant Commissioner on the size of our proposed Valleys of Ribble and Lune constituency. We would point out that the Commission has created far larger constituencies within the North West Region and we do not see how this reasoning is applicable to this seat. If Valleys of Ribble and Lune was too geographically large, we do not see how they could create any seats at all in Cumbria. Valleys of Ribble and Lune was very compliant with the rules laid out and despite statements made at the public hearings, the seat contained parts of only three authorities as do many other, apparently acceptable, seats.

Merseyside

In Merseyside we feel that the Commission has respected administrative boundaries rather than actual local ties and physical features such as rivers in the Southport area. Southport is a Lancashire town and would have been better combined with Lancashire villages. However we accept that the argument of the Formby MP, Bill Esterson, accepting the splitting of

Formby does make our task harder in this regard. We welcome the greater emphasis given to public transport in the Merseyside section of the report and regret that this is not repeated in other sub regions.

Cumbria

We welcome the revised proposals for Cumbria and recognise that the argument over the placement of Shap and Crosby Ravensworth is finely balanced.