

PROCEEDINGS
AT THE
2023 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN
ENGLAND

HELD AT
Chester HQ, Chester

ON
FRIDAY 11 March 2022
DAY2

Before:
Andy Brennan, Lead Assistant Commissioner

ANDY BRENNAN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in the North West region.

My name is Andy Brennan and I'm an assistant commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England. I was appointed by the Commission to assist them in their task of making recommendations for new constituencies in the North West. I'm responsible for chairing the hearing today, and I'm also responsible with my fellow assistant commissioner, David Brown for analysing all the representations received about the initial proposals for this region and then presenting the recommendations to the Commission as to whether or not those initial proposals should be revised. I'm assisted here today by members of the Commission staff led by Will Corran, who is sitting beside me. They will shortly provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for new constituencies in the region. Will 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 09:00 am to 5.00pm. 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 into a third.

The purpose of this public hearing is to allow people to make oral representations about the initial proposals for the North West region and the comments we have so far received on them, which have been published in our consultation portal, bcereviews.org.uk. I look forward to hearing your views today. A number of people have already registered to speak and have been given a time slot, and I will invite them to speak at the appropriate time. If there is any free time during the day or at the end of the day, then I will invite anyone who hasn't registered, but who would like to speak, to do so. I would like to stress that the purpose of this public hearing is for people to make oral representations. 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 presentations. People may seek to put questions for clarification to speakers, but they should do that through me as the Chair.

I will now hand over to Will, who will provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the North West. Thank you.

WILL CORRAN: Thank you very much and good morning. As the Chair has mentioned, my name is Will Corran, and I'm a member of the Commission's staff. I'm responsible for supporting the commissioners in their role to recommend new Parliamentary constituency boundaries. At this hearing, I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly. As the Chair has already stated, he will chair the hearing itself and it is his responsibility to run the hearing at his discretion and take decisions about speakers, questions, and timings. My team and I are here today to support him in carrying out his role. Please ask one of us outside of the hearing if you need any help or assistance. I encourage attendees to wear a mask throughout the hearing, but please remove it while you are speaking during your presentation slot. We also encourage you to practise social distancing during the day and have provided hand sanitiser around the venue. If you have any coronavirus-related symptoms or develop them during the day, we advise you to leave the hearing and follow public health advice.

I would like to talk now about the Commission's initial proposals for the North West region, which were published on Tuesday 8th June 2021. The Commission's proposals for this region are for 73 constituencies, a reduction of two. Our proposals leave 10 of the existing

constituencies wholly unchanged and one changed only to realign with local government boundaries that have changed. The 2023 Review of Parliamentary constituencies was formally launched in January 2021, and we held our first public consultation on the initial proposals between Tuesday 8th June 2021 and Monday 2nd August 2021, receiving over 34,400 representations in total. The Commission is required to ensure that the number of electors in each constituency is roughly the same. In doing so, the number of constituencies in England will increase from 533 to 543. We are undertaking an independent review of all constituency boundaries in England and will present our final recommendations to Parliament by July 2023.

We use the English regions as a template for the allocation of the 543 constituencies to which England is entitled, 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. The statutory rules allow us to take into account local government boundaries as they existed on, or were in prospect on, Tuesday 1st December 2020. These include both the external boundaries of local councils and their internal boundaries known as wards or electoral divisions. Wards are well-defined and well-understood units, which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. We have therefore sought to avoid dividing wards between constituencies wherever possible, but in a small number of cases have done so in order to better reflect the statutory factors.

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 4th April 2022, so there is still time after this hearing for people to contribute in writing. There are reference copies of the proposals present at this hearing, and they're also available to view on our easy-to-use consultation website, bcereviews.org.uk. You can provide a written representation to us directly through this website and give feedback on anything from where the proposed new boundaries are, to the names of the constituencies. We attach just as much significance to representations made orally at public hearings, as those made in writing or via letter, email or our website. I do encourage everyone to submit representations to us by the deadline of 4th April 2022 as we will not be able to consider representations received after that date.

Finally, I would like to remind all participants that this hearing is part of a public consultation, and you'll be asked to confirm your name and town if you make an oral representation. The Commission is legally advised to take a record of the public hearings, and, as you can see, we're taking a video recording, which will be made available online on our YouTube channel shortly after the hearing. After the secondary consultation, we will publish a verbatim transcript of the whole public hearing and publish all the responses we have received via our consultation portal, email or letter throughout the consultation period. These may not be published until the commencement of the revised proposal consultation. The publication of the hearing records and written representations include certain personal data of those who have made representations. I therefore invite all those contributing to read the Commission's data protection and privacy policy, a copy of which we have that we have with us, and which is also available on our website. At this stage, I thank you for your attendance today, and will now hand you back to the Chair to begin the public hearing.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thanks very much, Will. Good morning. Is it Pamela? Do you want to come up? Thanks very much. Please give your name and the town you are from.

PAMELA HALL OBE: Hi. My name's Pamela Hall, and I'm from Chester.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you.

PAMELA HALL OBE: As a former councillor for Great Boughton, I'm standing here in front of you all to request that the City of Chester constituency remains broadly in its current form, dating back over a hundred years to 1918. Prior to that, it was still a Parliamentary [crosstalk] constituency dating back to the mid 15 hundreds when it actually had two members. Having lived and been to school in the city for over 40 years, I was initially surprised, disappointed and slightly outraged that the city was being split. Living south of the river in Handbridge Park for over 20 years, it felt like we'd been cut off due to the local links, transport, shopping highways et cetera. However, bearing in mind the constraints of the constituency, the Welsh border being a significant one, alongside the neighbouring borough of Wirral, on reflection, I actually agree that these proposals are sensitive and workable and do support the two new constituencies of Cheshire South and Chester North and Neston. I agree that the river is a natural boundary and does give some strong ties. It means that the wards of Christleton and Huntington, and Handbridge Park sensibly knit strongly together on the south of the city into the new constituency, and I would like to correct my former submission, correcting that Great Boughton was actually included in the recommended boundary changes, which as you'll be aware it isn't, but I do support the boundaries as you have them.

In the last review, Handbridge Park stayed as part of Chester, with the others moving to the Eddisbury constituency, the others being Christleton and Huntington, which would mean travelling in and out of constituencies and boundaries. I actually think this is a really creative solution, binding the different wards together in a coherent and workable structure. The number of new houses currently being built in these current wards also makes sense to align into a new constituency. Huntington, Dogleston, Christleton et cetera are all historic parishes and would align well into a constituency with a more rural mix. As residents, we are still, of course, in the same council borough and part of the Chester mayoralty, which arguably has more relevance for heritage and local government structures than a local MP. Chester isn't moving. We are all still part of the community and the city, no matter the MP's jurisdiction.

It was disappointing to see the current MP's proposal to try and split wards to satisfy new constituency boundaries, which are purely political recommendations and are against the principles of the review. I support the recommendation as it is.

The name of the constituency, South Cheshire, also feels relevant to me and something I can feel part of. I don't think Eddisbury is any longer appropriate, given the county town, the centre of tourism and local government is Chester. But as the constituency covers a large area, I think South Cheshire is something we can all recognise. Whether it's Handbridge, Audlem and Tarporley as well, it will bring everyone together. I'm not sure most people in the Eddisbury constituency now even know where Eddisbury is, and I disagree with the current MP for that area's suggestion on that. Proposals such as this are never popular, but this seems an incredibly straightforward way of keeping similar communities together in a pragmatic way.

Regarding the new constituency of Chester North and Neston, this is also a good and creative realignment, bringing the Neston, Willaston and South West Wirral areas into one constituency along the Welsh boundary with Saughall, which also makes for common areas of interest of

types of similar communities together along the Dee, as well as the historic city and suburbs of Chester. I'm also delighted that there is still a Chester constituency named Chester North and Neston and will align as well with the works of the Cheshire West and Chester Council.

I'm sad not to be part of the City of Chester constituency, which, just one mile away, will always be home. But I'd like to thank the Boundary Commission for your proposals and particularly thoughtful use of natural geographic boundaries and very much support this proposal for the changes to Chester.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thanks very much, Pamela. Before you leave, can I just check something? Did you say you've made a previous submission?

PAMELA HALL OBE: Yes, I've got an online one.

ANDY BRENNAN: Have you got the reference number? I did a search on your name, and I couldn't see it on the system.

PAMELA HALL OBE: I found it myself the other day. Just put Pamela in, and it comes up.

ANDY BRENNAN: No, that's absolutely fine. It'll be down to my inability to use it. Absolutely fine. Can I just check, please? Are there any other questions of clarification, please? Okay. For the recording, could you state your name and who you're representing, please?

JOHN WALSH: Can I just be clear of the two wards to which you refer as being appropriate to be south of the river? Christleton and Huntington, and Handbridge Park?

PAMELA HALL OBE: Yes, and Lache I think is in there as well.

JOHN WALSH: But those are two that you refer to specifically as being appropriate south the river.

PAMELA HALL OBE: Yes. But there is another one which is Lache, which I'd forgotten to mention. Sorry.

JOHN WALSH: Thank you. We'll write that one as well, please, sir.

ANDY BRENNAN: Is that three then you were saying?

PAMELA HALL OBE: Yes.

JOHN WALSH: it's slightly confusing on the map though. If you look at the map, Lache is the small ward.

PAMELA HALL OBE: It's kind of surrounded by Handbridge Park.

JOHN WALSH: Huntington Park seems to have the name superimposed.

ANDY BRENNAN: Oh, right. I'm with you.

PAMELA HALL OBE: Sorry, John.

ANDY BRENNAN: Okay. That's excellent, Pamela. Thank you very, very much for taking the time to come and explain that to us and also with sharing your experiences of Chester and the surrounding area.

Our next timed speaker is at 9.55, and will adjourn until 9.55.

An adjournment

Good morning, everybody, and welcome back to the public hearing. Could I invite Charles Fifield up, please? Charles as and when you are ready and comfortable if you could start by giving us your name and what town you are from, then please make any representations that you wish to make. Thank you.

CHARLES FIFIELD: Thank you. I'm Councillor Charles Fifield. I've represented Weaver and Cuddington ward on Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council for 11 years, and I've lived within it, in Acton Bridge, all my life. I've come today to support the Boundary Commission's proposals for Cheshire and specifically those for the creation of the Northwich and South Cheshire seats. I wrote last year in support of the proposals, but I've come today to speak specifically about the connections my ward of Weaver and Cuddington has with the Northwich area, as I've been very disappointed to note that both Labour and the Liberal Democrats are trying to remove my ward from its natural place as part of the greater Northwich area.

As a bit of background, Weaver and Cuddington ward comprises five parishes, Acton Bridge, Crowton, Norley, Cuddington and Weaverham. Both Weaverham and Cuddington share a parish boundary with Hartford whilst Weaverham also shares a boundary with Northwich. In the past fortnight, the parish councils of Weaverham, Acton Bridge and Crowton all had their regular monthly meetings, and all of them discussed and strongly supported the Boundary Commission's proposals for the Northwich constituency because they all look towards Northwich. The counter-proposals would put them in a constituency that would stretch across to Chester rather than their natural home as part of the greater Northwich area. The links Weaver and Cuddington ward have with Northwich include health. The Victoria Infirmary in Northwich is our local hospital and connects to local GP surgeries, including the Danebridge Medical Practice, which covers Northwich and Cuddington. Educational links; The local primary schools feed into the Northwich area high schools, which in turn link into Sir John Deane's Sixth Form College in Northwich. Faith-based education; the Catholic primary school in Weaverham connects in with St Nicholas Catholic High School in Hartford. The main independent school in the area is The Grange School in Hartford.

Transport connections include the B5153 Northwich to Frodsham Road, which connects Northwich to Hartford to Weaverham to Acton Bridge to Crowton. We have two railway lines connecting Cuddington with Northwich and Acton Bridge to Hartford. The 82-bus route connects the southern half of the ward with Northwich whilst the numbers 1 and 48 bus routes connect the northern half of the ward with Northwich. The Barons Quay development in Northwich attracts residents from across the greater Northwich area. Northwich is the town where I've shopped all my life. Residents in my ward live and work in and around Northwich. Over the past decade, there have been considerable increases in housing in the area, principally at Winnington urban village, Kingsmead, Hartford, Cuddington and Sandiway, in and around my ward of Weaver and Cuddington. Primarily attracted to Northwich, these residents are attracted to the area due to the provision of local services in Northwich, excellent commuting links provided by the transport corridors, employment opportunities provided by the major employment sites and the educational choice in the area.

The Boundary Commission has a difficult job, which it is doing well, and I strongly feel it has come to the right conclusion with the creation of the Northwich seat. It is well-named, reviving the name that previously existed from 1885 to 1983 and correcting a current disjointment, which has seen Northwich split between three separate constituencies. I would also like to comment here on the name for the South Cheshire seat, which I would recommend retains Eddisbury in some way as there is an affinity to that name. Perhaps Eddisbury and Chester South as this would be a more accurate description of the seat.

Returning to the Northwich seat, I would again state my ward of Weaver and Cuddington and Weaverham especially, which shares boundaries with both Hartford parish and Northwich town councils, see themselves as an important part of the greater Northwich area, and it would be a great disappointment to remove them from this large community of interest.

In conclusion, almost all the residents I have spoken to in my ward regarding the Boundary Commission's proposals are supportive once they hear that we will continue to be part of the same constituency as Northwich, which is our town. Thank you for listening.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you Charles. Just before you leave us, can I just check, please? Are there any questions seeking clarification on what we just heard? We have one. Could I ask you to introduce yourself, please, and also state who you are representing?

JOHN WALSH: Thank you very much. John Walsh the Conservative Party. Can I just be clear about the three parishes that you refer to, all of whom are for the Boundary Commission's proposals? You said Weaverham, Acton Bridge and Crowton. Are those the three parishes?

CHARLES FIFIELD: Those are three of the five parishes in my ward. As I say, they have regular monthly meetings. Those three parish councils all met within the last fortnight. They've all discussed the Boundary Commission's proposals and they all support them.

JOHN WALSH: Thank you very much.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much. Can I just check, please? Are there any other questions seeking clarification of what we just heard? No. Charles, thank you very, very much for coming down to speak to us today.

CHARLES FIFIELD: Thank you for all you're doing.

ANDY BRENNAN: Could I ask, do you need your notes? Could we have a copy for loading up on our representation?

CHARLES FIFIELD: I can email that to you.

ANDY BRENNAN: We appreciate that. Thank you.

If you could start, please. Firstly, identify yourself and what town you're from and who you may be representing. That would be much appreciated.

KIERAN MULLAN: My name is Dr Kieran Mullan. I'm the Member of Parliament for Crewe and Nantwich, and I'm making suggestions in relation to the alteration to the Crewe and Nantwich and what would become the South Cheshire constituency.

ANDY BRENNAN: Excellent. Whenever you're ready, please.

KIERAN MULLAN: Thanks very much. I've come to supplement my written submission and to give evidence in relation to supporting the counter-proposal to retain the Wybunbury ward in full in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency and to instead, to meet the Commissioner's objectives, transfer the Leighton ward in whole to the new South Cheshire constituency.

I must just say at the start, whilst I recognise the commissioners have a set of objectives and are required to make proposals, I think in either regard it does create challenges in terms of continuity and representation to move either ward. But, given representations I've received from elected officials and representatives in Wybunbury ward and other bits of information, I think the preferable solution would be to maintain the Wybunbury ward in the constituency. I wouldn't personally like to lose either.

If I may move on to the points I wish to raise. To move the Wybunbury ward will effectively cut the ward off from its economic, historical, social and civic links to the rest of the constituency. I'm going to touch on physical geography, transport, schools, healthcare and public opinion.

Beginning with physical geography and transport. There are essentially no significant road, rail or bridge connectivities between the Wybunbury ward and the Eddisbury constituency or what would become the South Cheshire constituency.

In terms of schools, Wybunbury ward has two primary schools. Bridgemere Primary, the overwhelming majority of whose pupils are drawn from parishes within the Wybunbury ward, is a feeder school to Brine Leas Academy, which is in Nantwich in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency. There is also Wybunbury Delves Primary School, and I think that their pupils are overwhelmingly drawn from the Wybunbury ward, and it is a feeder school for Shavington Academy, which again is in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency. Sixth-form further education provision for residents of Wybunbury ward would also be located either at Brine Leas in Nantwich or South Cheshire College in Crewe. I hope that outlines how, in terms of school and education ties, they are almost universally related to the rest of the Crewe and Nantwich constituency. In contrast, for example, in relation to the Leighton ward, three out of the four primary schools to which Leighton is a feeder area are located in the Eddisbury constituency.

In terms of healthcare, residents of the Wybunbury ward have their primary healthcare needs served primarily by Rope Lane Medical Centre, which is in the Shavington ward in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency, and Nantwich Health Centre, again located in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency. For secondary healthcare, they are served by Leighton Hospital, which is in the Leighton ward and in Eddisbury constituency. Importantly, their secondary healthcare would not be served by any of the facilities in the new ward were they to be transferred to the South Cheshire constituency. Their other access to healthcare is actually in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire rather than in Crewe and Nantwich. In terms of secondary care, they face the other way.

Public transport links. The route 85, from Staffordshire to Crewe, which runs on Monday to Saturday, flows through that ward and doesn't move on to the Eddisbury constituency. Route 39 from Nantwich to Crewe, which goes via Wybunbury and calls it Shavington and Crewe, doesn't travel through, or provide accessibility to the existing Eddisbury constituency. Route 73, which starts and ends at Nantwich bus station, is a limited service and is probably the only element of transport they would have access to and just calls at the rural villages rather than

any significant conurbation within the Eddisbury constituency. Their local public transport routes are in relation to Crewe and Nantwich rather than some of the big conurbations in what is currently the Eddisbury constituency. In contrast, Leighton ward has direct bus services to one of their major conurbations, which would be Winsford.

In terms of economy and jobs, I've spent time visiting businesses in the Wybunbury ward, and their employment and the supply chains they operate from, I don't have any kind of detailed paper around that. However, my experience has been that people come and work from Crewe. We have a significant rural, food manufacturing industry in that area, and typically their employees will come from Crewe and, to a lesser extent, some of the other parts of the constituency.

I just want to touch on public opinion. I understand you've had representations from the public and also ward and parish councillors from the Wybunbury ward, who made clear their views in terms of the cutting off of the historic ties between them. I think I brought the Commission's attention to a recent parish poll in Leighton ward in relation to proposals to make changes to parish boundaries in which there was overwhelming support for maintaining a separate identity for the Leighton ward rather than merging parts of it into Crewe Town Council. Obviously, that's not the exact same question that the Commission has asked, but I note that there were no significant other views expressed by Leighton ward residents, and that is an example. There were significant numbers of people. I think something like 900 people voted in one of those polls and the overwhelming majority of them wanted to maintain their distinct and separate identity from Crewe.

ANDY BRENNAN: Can I just check something with you?

KIERAN MULLAN: Yes.

ANDY BRENNAN: In relation to the healthcare cover in Wybunbury ward, is that part of a trust? I got slightly confused. Just two medical centres.

KIERAN MULLAN: They're not in Wybunbury ward. There isn't a primary care facility within Wybunbury ward. Both of the primary care centres they would access are located in either Nantwich or Shavington, so their access to primary care is via the Crewe and Nantwich constituency. I regularly receive inquiries from Wybunbury ward residents in relation to primary care within what would be the rest of the constituency from their point of view.

Pharmacies as well. During the pandemic, there were real challenges with access to pharmacies and a lot of Wybunbury ward residents needed assistance in getting their medicines from the pharmacies located in Shavington. I'm not aware that there's any other significant pharmacy in the Wybunbury ward. I could be wrong on that. I've not had any issues raised with me. They've just been in relation to Shavington.

ANDY BRENNAN: I misunderstood what you were saying. I wanted to be absolutely crystal clear because it's important. Can I just check, please, are there any other questions seeking clarification on what we've just heard? Thank you, Kieran. Thanks very much for coming here and making representations. It is really appreciated, and the detail that you've given us. Thank you.

KIERAN MULLAN: Thank you.

After an adjournment.

ANDY BRENNAN: Could you start please by giving us your full name and town that you're from please and who you may be representing?

SIR ROBERT ATKINS: Good morning, Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. My name's Sir Robert Atkins, currently a councillor in the Borough of Wyre in Lancaster, but I was for 18 years the Member of Parliament for both Preston and then South Ribble, during which time I had the good fortune to be amongst other things, the Minister for the planning department. Therefore, I'm pretty familiar with communities and boundary lines in that respect, as you might imagine, and the number of public inquiries and so on planning matters. However, I'm here today in my former context as a member of the European Parliament for the North West region for 15 years. Of course, that covers the whole region that we're looking at in the course of these boundary inquiries. Whilst I was always, and still am, based in Lancashire, I have some knowledge of other parts of the region, which I represented in one form or another.

Specifically, in relation to Cheshire, I'm pleased that the Commission has treated Merseyside and Cheshire as a sub-region and avoided any crossover into Greater Manchester. I think this is an important factor, which of course guides a lot of the consideration of other matters in relation to boundaries. I think also that that applies particularly to the Wirral peninsula, which, depending on where you were when you were born, some people maintain is Cheshire while some people maintain is Liverpool, Merseyside or call it what you will. However, it is a unique part of this area and I think that the Commission again has done a pretty good job of ensuring minimal disruption. The key to all these boundary changes is minimal disruption. If we can maintain constituencies with a good part of what they were before, subject to the numbers, then that's to be appreciated.

I think that the minor changes in Birkenhead and Wallasey and bringing the Heswall community into Wirral West make sense, and I'm content that this is something in which the Commission has achieved a measure of success.

We always used to say in Lancashire that Lancaster is half a seat too big or half a seat too small, and that's certainly true in that part of the world. You have a similar problem in relation to the ancient City of Chester. I know that the splitting of it is causing heartache all round, almost whatever your politics are. Whilst it's very controversial and regrettable on the part of many people, I don't see that there is any way to keep the constituency together, and I don't think that any of the counter-proposals that have been put forward are any much better than what the Boundary Commission has come up with. Reluctantly, I do see the problem and I do see what has been said by the Commission, and, as I said, regrettably one goes along with it in the absence of anything else.

Turning to the proposed new Northwich constituency, I know that some people want to move odd wards about in order to make it fit either politically or in other terms, and I think that's a great mistake. I think our proposal in this respect is very good. The initial proposals that you have made have a limited impact upon electors. Again, that comes back to the point that if you can keep people roughly where they've been for as long as they can, then that makes sense, so I'm happy about that. I just came in a state of flux whilst the Member of Parliament for the constituency was talking about Wybunbury. I was astonished to see that there were people who'd put in petitions at the Greater Manchester hearing about this ward. It is immensely controversial, and I know that a lot of people are concerned about it. There's a general point to be made here, which I think you will consider, both at other enquiries and that

eventually your suggestions and conclusions, that parishes are not to be underestimated. In my experience as a local councillor, the three parishes that form part of my patch are extremely protective and keen to maintain those boundaries because, generally speaking, they've been around for almost literally hundreds of years and community engagement and community connections have grown up. I think that the argument that Wybunbury should be moved to South Cheshire is the wrong one. I think it should stay in Crewe and Nantwich because of those long-standing links that have been there for many, many years. Apart from anything else, it's separated from the rest of South Cheshire by a river, so it makes sense to keep it in Crewe and Nantwich. I don't really understand what the thinking behind that is.

Those are some specific points, Mr Chairman, from my knowledge of this particular area. I think that probably the most controversial thing that you are faced with is the City of Chester, the ancient city that it is. However, I don't see much alternative to what's being proposed. I think I'll stop there if I may.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you, Sir Robert. I have no questions seeking clarification. Can I ask, please, does anybody else have any questions of clarification at this point? Thank you very much, Sir Robert, for coming down and explaining again. That's much appreciated.

SIR ROBERT ATKINS: Thank you.

ANDY BRENNAN: Do we have Chris Matheson available? If you start by giving your name and where you're representing, then when you're comfortable, please make a start.

CHRIS MATHESON: Thank you. My name's Chris Matheson, I'm the Member of Parliament for the City of Chester. and following on from Sir Robert. And, Sir Robert, your daughter's a big friend of mine and a very capable Minister, and always willing to stop and say hello. So could you please give her my best and I will see her on Monday.

Sir Robert touched on my headline in his evidence, which remains, 'Don't split Chester up.' I accept that the River Dee forms an obvious boundary, but I've said to you in my written submission that it's an artificial split as some of the wards south of the river are considered part of central Chester. I'll return to these later. However, as I have previously indicated, the Commission's hands are tied by the various tight restrictions handed to them by the government, which I sought to loosen during the passage of the Boundaries Bill, but I was voted down.

Understanding the parameters that you have to work to, I'm going to focus my comments solely on the proposals as they stand. My aim is to try and keep as much of Chester together as possible. I accept that this will involve splitting wards, but I ask that the Commission consider this on the grounds of maintaining existing links between socially, culturally and geographically connected communities. In the current Chester constituency, there are already split wards. Farndon ward is currently split between the City of Chester and Eddisbury constituencies, and Gowry Rural is split three ways between City of Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston, and Eddisbury, for example.

The first obvious case that I would ask you to look at is the question of Huntington, which the proposal seeks to chop in two, along a brook that runs through the middle of the estate, Caldley Valley Brook. This is the parish boundary between Great Boughton and Huntington parishes, but dividing the housing estate in this way makes no sense. I would ask that the A55, which you can see sweeping through there on the map, becomes the parish boundary in order to

keep that particular estate and community together. It would mean losing from the City of Chester constituency the developments of Saighton Camp, and the villages are beyond such as Aldford, but certainly, the villages would also fit in with the rural character of the proposed South Cheshire constituency. The current proposal strikes me as arbitrary and divisive to use Caldley Valley Brook as a boundary, and a visual inspection, which I would ask you to make - these days you go do it by Google Earth and Google Street view - will confirm that this is one single community. I've sought in my written proposals to amend your initial proposals to retain as much of inner Chester south of the River Dee as possible, notably Handbridge Park ward, and Lache ward.

Going by the overriding criterion of numbers, I would start from the city centre by Old Dee Bridge and work away from that as far as the numbers would allow. That would include the polling districts of Handbridge and Queens Park, which all look entirely to the city centre as the primary source of many amenities for the residents living in the area, with the slight exception of the small shopping district, which has lots of very high-quality local shops in the middle of Handbridge itself. There aren't many bridges across the Dee, but the suspension bridge, which is for pedestrians only, also links these communities with the centre. In my written submission, I've also highlighted the added advantage of keeping the Meadows, the common ground along the river that was gifted to the city over a hundred years ago, in the Chester constituency. I have stated that I believe this is historically and administratively important, given that it is a significant natural asset that belongs to everyone who lives in Chester. Roads such as the A483 Wrexham Road could provide a useful, clear boundary for the Commission to consider if it is looking for ways to split the Handbridge Park ward within population limits. Depending on these numbers, it would be preferable to expand the area into the rest of Handbridge Park and Lache, so the communities of Westminster Park, Curzon Park, Lache and Saltney remain a part of Chester. It does sadden me that I think that it might not be possible, given the constraints the government has put on the Commission and the geography of the Wirral, which is forcing the Commission to build constituencies north and south in Chester rather than starting with Chester and building out from there.

You'll see from my submission that I've proposed changes at the other end of the constituency in order to make the numbers balanced and keep central Chester, or at least as much of central Chester as possible, intact. This involves another split ward, but there are already examples of this under the current arrangements. Until 2019, the council ward of Little Neston and Burton was split between the City of Chester and Ellesmere Port And Neston constituencies.

I propose that Willaston and Thornton ward is split along the main A540 road, which forms a very recognisable physical barrier, with the Willaston section remaining in Ellesmere Port constituency. Willaston has long been a part of Ellesmere Port, both as a constituency and as part of the former Borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston, so would not be out of place. This proposal would have the advantage in the new constituency that the two stranded wards of Eastham and Bromborough would again be connected to Ellesmere Port without having to leave that constituency and then go back in again. Although there is land between these two wards, that's largely industrial land with no real transport connections. It would also have the advantage of ensuring that the village of Little Sutton is not split between two constituencies, as it is in the current proposals.

I'm grateful for your consultation on these proposals and your consideration. Thank you.

ANDY BRENNAN: Can I just check something, Chris? One of the first ones you mentioned, I think it was Huntington, was using the A55 as a more natural barrier than using the estate to split, I think you said.

CHRIS MATHESON: Yes, that's right. The A55 sweeps down, and on the other side of it is the Saughton Camp, which is the new estate. I think it's called Crown Park now. On the other side is the original estate, and it's the original estate that is being split along an old parish boundary, which is a brook, around which the estate has been built. It would split the original estate in a way that I feel is a little bit unnatural.

ANDY BRENNAN: Now, did that alter the overall figures for that?

CHRIS MATHESON: It did, and that's why I've tried to look at the other end of the constituency to balance that out and suggested Willaston goes in, using a major dual carriageway as a boundary.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thanks for clarifying that. Could I just check, please? Are there any other questions of clarification? Okay. For the recording, please identify yourself and who you may be representing, please.

JOHN WALSH: Thank you, sir. John Walsh, representing the Conservative Party. Can I just be clear, for the record, the wards that you are proposing should be split wards within your counter-proposals, which, of course, are not supported by the Labour Party, but which you are putting forward?

CHRIS MATHESON: The Labour Party are aware of my proposals, but my obvious, principal loyalty and desire is to Chester.

JOHN WALSH: Understood. You're proposing to split which wards?

CHRIS MATHESON: Willaston and Thornton at the top. The current Christleton and Huntington, and then Handbridge Park. I would expect that it would only be the Queen's Park and Handbridge sections of Handbridge Park because of the numbers. Exactly where would depend on the specific numbers.

JOHN WALSH: Just to be clear for the record, in the proposed split of the Handbridge Park ward, you talk about the A55 as a boundary. Where exactly would that run? Because looking at the map, and from my experience on the ground, the A55 runs—

CHRIS MATHESON: It was the A483. I suggested that as a possible boundary, but it would have to be in a manner that fitted the numbers because the numbers of the—

JOHN WALSH: You haven't got a definitive boundary of that.

CHRIS MATHESON: No. My desire is to keep as much of the existing Chester together as possible. Unfortunately, the numbers are all that matter. They're not all that matter. They're the main criteria the Commission has to work with, so I would wait to see where the Commission can find a boundary.

ANDY BRENNAN: I think that's answered the question. Do we have any other questions of clarification, please? Chris, thanks very much for taking your time to come and speak to us. Thank you, sir. Could I trouble you for a spare set of notes, sir?

CHRIS MATHESON: I have this one.

ANDY BRENNAN: Is that okay? Thank you.

Do we have David Rutley available, please? David, can you come down to the front, please? For the recording, could you give your full name, please, and who you represent?

DAVID RUTLEY: David Rutley. I'm the Member of Parliament for Macclesfield.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you. And when you're comfortable and ready, you may start, please.

DAVID RUTLEY: Thanks very much. I'm attending today's meeting in response to the initial proposals of the Parliamentary constituency boundaries in the North West region, published by the Commission on Tuesday 8th June 2021, and to the submissions in relation to them from political Parties, stakeholders, and members of the public. I'd like to start by placing on record my thanks to the Commission for its continued work in taking forward this important review. Having been the MP for Macclesfield for nearly 12 years, I've been to a couple of similar meetings to this in the past, and I recognise that it can be unusual to see strong alignment between respondents about the shape of an individual Parliamentary constituency. I'm pleased that this is very largely the case with the submissions relating to the initial proposals made by the Commission with regard to the Macclesfield constituency, with the responses broadly agreeing with the initial proposals, very broadly.

Having fully reviewed the Commission's initial proposals, I'd like to reconfirm my strong support for them today as set out in my original submission dated Thursday 22nd July 2021. The Commission rightly recommends that the Macclesfield constituency should continue to exist as it does today and that all the communities currently included in the constituency will remain within it. This approach fully respects the rules and key factors set out in the Commission's remit in taking forward its review. The proposed electorate of 75,881 meets the permitted electorate range in Rule 2. The initial proposals for the Macclesfield constituency were also consistent with other key factors set out in Rule 5, including the integrity of existing constituencies, acknowledging the local ties between communities in the constituency and minimising any inconveniences to the electorate. Each of these tests is clearly met in the Commission's initial proposals as is the fact that each of the communities in the proposed Macclesfield constituency will continue to be part of wards in the same local authority, in this case, Cheshire East Council.

It is positive to see that the longstanding historic ties between Macclesfield and neighbouring communities would be able to continue with the same Parliamentary constituency under the initial proposals. The aim of broadly maintaining the current boundaries of the Macclesfield Parliamentary constituency is supported or accepted in the submissions of each of the major political Parties relating to the North West region, including the Conservative Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrat Party as well. The Commission's initial proposals relating to the current Macclesfield Parliamentary boundaries were also strongly supported in the submissions from Poynton Town Council, 58460 and 66355, and Disley Parish Council, 71888. This view is also reflected by submissions from members of the public, including Joe Stewart, BCE 64907, 65598, 66870, and 82692; Peter Hazelhurst, Chris O'Leary, Adam

Scofield, Lawrence Clark, and by the Macclesfield Conservative Association and the Secretary of the Poynton branch of the Macclesfield Conservative Association and the Disley and Newton branch of the Conservative Association.

I'm very pleased that the Commission continues to accept the need for the town of Macclesfield to be kept intact within a single constituency. This includes all the Cheshire East Council wards that relate to Macclesfield. A Parliamentary constituency comprising the town of Macclesfield has been in existence for over a hundred years, and Macclesfield also has a clear distinct history and identity of its own, and it's entirely right that the longstanding integrity of the town is respected. I strongly welcome that the Boundary Commission's initial proposals also support the view that Poynton and Disley should continue to be included in the Macclesfield constituency. Both communities have expressed a very clear desire and will to remain in a Cheshire-based Parliamentary constituency. In previous recent reviews of Parliamentary constituency boundaries by the Commission, this is strongly reflected in the submission by Poynton Town Council, which is very clear that Poynton and its residents want to stay within the Macclesfield Parliamentary constituency. The view is also reflected by submissions from members of the public, including John Williams, Joe Stewart, Peter Bolton, Chris O'Leary, Adam Scofield, Lawrence Clark, the Secretary of the Poynton branch of the Macclesfield Conservative Association, and the Macclesfield Conservative Association.

The submissions reflect Poynton's proud Cheshire links, and that the village has been part of the Macclesfield Parliamentary constituency for over 70 years, since 1950, and it's always been part of a Cheshire constituency before that. They underscore the strong ties that Poynton has with Macclesfield and Cheshire, more widely, including well-developed road and rail links, shared health services and local amenities. The submissions also set out that Poynton was part of the Macclesfield Rural District Council until 1974, and from then until 2008, the village has been part of the Macclesfield Borough Council. They highlight that Poynton residents have strongly resisted attempts to make the community part of Greater Manchester from a local government perspective as far back as the 1970s and successfully won the campaign to keep Poynton in the county of Cheshire. At that time, it was a hotly fought campaign.

Disley also has strong links with Macclesfield and Cheshire. Residents have consistently made clear their wish to remain in rural Cheshire rather than Greater Manchester. This is made clear in submissions from Disley Parish Council, Chris O'Leary, Joe Stewart, Disley and Newton branch of Macclesfield Conservative Association and the Macclesfield Conservative Association itself. These submissions underline the strong historic links and ties between Disley and Macclesfield, and Cheshire East more widely. They also set out that as recently as 2008, 65% of voters in Disley elected in a referendum, quite uniquely, to remain in Cheshire, with only 35% wanting to become part of Stockport or Derbyshire.

Given these clear and strong local feelings, it's also positive that the Boundary Commission has recommended that Poynton and the villages of Kettlethulme and Pott Shrigley in the Cheshire ward of Poynton East and Pott Shrigley and Adlington in the Poynton West and Adlington ward should remain in the Macclesfield constituency. I also welcome that the Commission recommends that the Cheshire East council ward of Disley, which includes neighbouring Newton, should continue to be included in the Macclesfield constituency. It's positive to see, as well, that the Boundary Commission's initial recommendations include retaining both Bollington and Prestbury in the Macclesfield constituency, each of which has Cheshire East Council wards representing them. The Bollington ward also includes Higher Hurdsfield and Kerridge, and the Prestbury ward includes communities such as Mottram St Andrew and Over Alderley. Prestbury Parish Council has made strong representations to the

Commission in its submission 87616 in support of its initial proposals for Prestbury to remain in the Macclesfield constituency, given the village's strong historic, social and economic links with Macclesfield. The communities in each of the rural Cheshire East Council wards of Gawsworth and Sutton also have strong historic links with Macclesfield. In the Gawsworth ward, residents in Gawsworth, Bosley, Heaton, Henbury, Lower Withington, Marton, North Rode and Siddington have strong and historic links to the Macclesfield constituency. This is also true in the communities in the Sutton ward, which include Sutton Langley, Macclesfield Forest, Reno [?], Wildboarclough and Wincle. These important links need to continue and to go on being respected as set out in the Commission's initial proposals. These communities look to Macclesfield for local services, including Macclesfield Hospital, other amenities and shopping facilities. They have well-established transport links with Macclesfield and are also part of Macclesfield's secondary schools' catchment areas. It's right that those strong links between the local communities are respected in the Commission's initial proposals.

In conclusion, I'm keen to restate my strong support for the Boundary Commission's initial proposals to retain all the existing wards in the Macclesfield constituency within the same Parliamentary constituency. It's an approach that recognises the clear views of residents of Macclesfield, Bollington, Disley, Poynton and Prestbury and the surrounding communities. As set out previously, the Commission's initial proposals are entirely consistent with the rules and key factors set out for the Commission in establishing new Parliamentary constituency boundaries.

I trust that the Commission will continue to give the most serious consideration to the points I've raised in this submission, as well as those made by other local residents, local organisations and local councils, which support maintaining the integrity of the existing Macclesfield constituency should the Commission make any further recommendations in the North West region and in its final recommendations to the government. Thank you very much.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much. I have no questions seeking clarification. Are there any questions seeking clarification? No. Thank you very much, David, for taking time to come and speak to us today. We really appreciate it, and I know you're really busy as well.

DAVID RUTLEY: Thank you for all the work you're doing as well. I appreciate it too.

ANDY BRENNAN: Could I ask you if we could have a copy of your notes, please? Or if you could send us a copy through, that would be excellent.

DAVID RUTLEY: Yes. I'll give these to you now.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much.

Could I ask if Richard Beacham is available, please? Whenever you're ready, please start off by just giving us your name, what town you're from or who may be representing. Then when you're ready, please start.

RICHARD BEACHAM: Thanks very much. I'm Richard Beacham, I live in Chester. I'm a councillor for the Newton and Hoole ward and I'm a Cabinet Member at Cheshire West and Chester Council. Before I start, I just wanted to say thanks to the Commission for the work you're doing, particularly with the advances in technology, which have allowed for the process of mapping and calculating constituencies to be far more efficient this time. Like the speaker before, the Member of Parliament for Chester, I'd also like to recognise the difficulty of your

task, particularly because of the extremely low variance levels set by the government in this review, which in many circumstances, and perhaps behind your control, has served to split communities rather than build stronger ones.

I'd like to speak particularly on the proposals for Cheshire and Merseyside, focusing on Cheshire West and Chester Council, where I'm an elected councillor and Cabinet Member. I'd like to get across to the commissioners one specific point, which is that in Cheshire West and Chester we can broadly accept your initial proposals, but with some small and simple adjustments. With some tinkering around the edges, if you like, we can negate some of the impact of the low variance level by restoring community links and keeping the final figures within the constituency limits set for the review. Some of the suggestions that I'll be making will require splitting wards, but I will start with the simpler proposals, which involve just changes within full wards.

If we start with the Northwich constituency, Winsford is a small mid-Cheshire town and it's split in the current proposal. Split in half.

ANDY BRENNAN: Richard, sorry, if you could just so down ever so slightly so we can get to the....It's really important that we capture what you are saying and we make sure that we understand the points you are raising and wards you are referencing, and where any future proposed splits may be.

RICHARD BEECHAM: If we look at Winsford Over and Verdin ward, it's the largest ward in the town and it's currently placed in the South Cheshire constituency. I'm going to propose a couple of simple swaps. The first is that the rural ward of Weaver and Cuddington goes into South Cheshire and that Winsford Over and Verdin goes into Northwich. Included in this, Middlewich is the third of the mid-Cheshire towns. They're historically tied by a history of industry and salt mining in particular. My proposal is that a further set of reasonably simple swaps in the rural hinterland around these towns will bring these three towns together in a single constituency. If the Commission would consider moving Marbury ward to Tatton, where it is mostly at the moment, the Dane Valley ward from Tatton to Congleton, and then this would allow for Middlewich to be moved from Congleton into the Northwich seat. I'd propose that it's renamed Mid Cheshire, so it has the same name in the convention of South Cheshire, and it's reflective of the setting and economic relationship of these three market towns of Northwich, Winsford and Middlewich. All of these changes result in the constituencies having the accepted variance level.

The Member of Parliament for Chester identified that the split of the historic seat of the City of Chester is regrettable, and other speakers mentioned this too. I'm a Chester resident, and I find it upsetting in the sense that there has always been a single elected figurehead for the City of Chester, and I think that the city has benefited from that, both culturally and in terms of its history.

Obviously, this will change under the current proposals, and I don't think that's a change for the better. With this mindset, I believe that the Commission could try to do everything within its power to keep as much of the city together as it can, whilst recognising obviously the difficult task that you've got within the tight margins that you've been set.

I do, however, have a proposal to achieve a better result for the city in this respect, and I'll offer you a summary of it today. In the proposal, there is a requirement to split wards, but it means that the city-centre communities like Handbridge, which as Chris Matheson said, are

connected to the city in a physical, spiritual, amenity and traditional sense, and suburban communities like Huntington, as it was mentioned before, the Caldby Valley brook divides the estate, cutting off a small pocket of housing from the constituency, this could be retained as part of a remodelled Chester constituency.

All of these adjustments at this more focused stage of your review would satisfy the Commission's ambition to retain local ties and better retain the boundaries of existing communities. In order to achieve this, splitting Willaston & Thornton ward on the A540 would mean that polling districts RN1, 2 and 3 would move into Ellesmere Port, and this frees up some space in Chester North and Neston. It would allow for the splitting of the Handbridge Park ward, so PG3 and 4, which is the area of Handbridge and Queens Park, the area opposite the Groves area of the city could be added into Chester North and Neston and perhaps simply called Chester City and Neston. Then splitting Christleton and Huntington at the A55, rather than at Caldby Valley Brook would keep all of the housing north of the A55 in the main Chester constituency too, thus creating fewer community splits. You end up with too many people then, but to balance the numbers off, the Commission would then need to consider a split in Goway Rural ward, with QD1, PE1 and RB1 moving from Runcorn and Helsby to South Cheshire, and, similarly, in Sandstone ward QG2, 3, and SJ1 would move from Runcorn and Helsby to South Cheshire. These are all rural villages, connected by strategic roads, where the residents will face similar issues around connectivity, transport, employment and education that would be experienced by similar places in South Cheshire. These minor changes would also focus the Runcorn and Helsby seat more on the three towns of Frodsham, Helsby and Runcorn. To reflect this three-town status and the geography of the area, the Commission may like to consider Runcorn and Sandstone, which, from reading the written submissions, I think has been suggested by other people. I think that would make sense too.

I'll finish on a salient point. Of the Commission's main ambitions, respecting local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies is the biggest challenge for the proposals for Chester. I think it's been recognised by basically all of the submissions, and the current proposals do chop the city in half. It doesn't need to be as brutal as that. More of the city can be kept together with some simple changes in the surrounding area, so the Commission can still keep the constituencies within the accepted levels while satisfying its aim to keep communities together wherever possible. I hope the Commission can consider these ideas.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much, Richard. Before you leave us, can I just check? Are there any questions of clarification, please?

MARK BALFOUR: Could you please confirm the polling districts of each of the wards that you mentioned? I just couldn't write them down quickly enough.

RICHARD BEACHAM: In Willaston & Thornton, it would be RN1, 2 and 3 would move into Ellesmere Port. Then in Handbridge Park ward, PG3 and 4 could be kept with the main Chester constituency, whatever that might be called. Then, Christleton and Huntington using the A55 as the boundary. There's not currently a polling district, so it's the only one that would require a change in the community or governance review of the local authority to make two polling districts for the future. It just seems, as a line on a map, like a logical place to draw a new line. Then in Goway Rural ward QD1, PE1 and RB1 would move from Runcorn and Helsby to South Cheshire. Then in Sandstone ward, QG2, 3, and SJ1 would move from Runcorn and Helsby to South Cheshire.

ANDY BRENNAN: Do you have any other questions or clarification, please?

RICHARD BEACHAM: I should say as well that some of these are required for the Winsford change as well to make the numbers work. The Commission needs to decide whether it wants to create the Northwich seat with the three mid-Cheshire towns. Then, that allows for some of these other changes to take place. The numbers are so tight that you have to make other changes to make the changes work. I understand the difficulty that you've got, but I set out with the principle that I think all of the speakers, regardless of political affiliation or whatever, generally understand this desire to keep as much of the city together in a single constituency as possible. Within that, we have to make compromises, but I think that it could be done less brutally than what's been proposed purely on ward boundaries.

ANDY BRENNAN: That's fine. We understand the points you raise. Could we take a copy of your notes?

RICHARD BEACHAM: I can actually send you the notes if it's better, with all of the numbers.

ANDY BRENNAN: That's fine. Thank you very much, Richard, as we do appreciate it. Thank you.

Could I invite Justin Madders? Please make yourself comfortable, Justin, and when you're ready, if you start off by giving us your name where you're representing, please, and then please make a start.

JUSTIN MADDERS: Okay. Thank you. I'm Justin Madders. I'm MP for Ellesmere Port and Neston. I just wanted to talk to you about one very specific issue, which Richard Beacham has already touched on. I'm just going into a little bit more detail. It's the Willaston & Thornton ward and how I think we can do something with that, which makes a little bit more sense in terms of the communities. Even though there are a lot of constraints on what you can do, the numbers are such that it won't have any impact on the overall picture. Just to start by saying that I think there's a much stronger case for placing that ward, at least part of it, in the Ellesmere Port and Neston constituency, or the Ellesmere Port constituency as it will be known.

There are effectively five distinct communities in the ward as it stands. You've got Burton, which is, as you see on the map there, on the western side of the A540, which are the polling districts that Richard Beacham has suggested could move into the Chester North seat. I think it's commonly accepted that, certainly, that area has got a much stronger link with Neston and Little Neston. You've then got Willaston itself, which is up to the north of the ward. Depending on who you ask in Willaston, some people will say it's got a closer link with Neston and others will say it's got a closer link with Ellesmere Port. It's part of the Ellesmere Port Charter Trustee Area, which is where the mayor for Ellesmere Port comes in, so there is already a strong civic link there. The next community is Hooton, which is just a little bit further to the east, and that's somewhere that's got stronger links with Ellesmere Port and actually probably Eastham as well, which will be part of the new constituency. Then you move a little further south to Childer Thornton, which is geographically, and in terms of all the community links, very much part of Ellesmere Port. Then, you move a little bit further south, where you've got a small part of Little Sutton, which would be in the Chester and Neston seat, but is very, very clearly part of the wider Ellesmere Port conurbation. You can see that it doesn't make sense on any level, if you look at the wider mass of Ellesmere Port, just to have that little bit taken off. You can see that although there's an actual barrier with the railway line there, that barrier has no practical effect because it's all part of the same community. For example, the Little Sutton Methodist Church is based in that area, but the congregation comes from throughout the Little Sutton and

Ellesmere Port area. For people who live in that small part of Little Sutton there's really no basis for them to think that they would be part of Chester or Neston. They would very clearly identify with Ellesmere Port.

Childer Thornton is not physically connected. There is a small break between the Little Sutton area and Childer Thornton, but it's a few hundred yards, and I think that the people there would consider themselves to be part of the wider Ellesmere Port conurbation.

What the current proposals also mean is that you have had the situation where when you're travelling north along the A41, which is basically where that red line is, you have to leave the constituency and then rejoin it again several miles up the road after the M53 motorway. You can see the main route from Ellesmere Port to the Wirral is the A41, which, as you can see, does not sit in the current ward.

I think there is no community or civil society reason for that to be considered part of the Chester area. I think the preferred option that we would like to see is that, as Richard mentioned earlier on, the polling districts on the eastern side of the A540 in Burton would go in with Chester North and the rest of it could go into the Ellesmere Port constituency. I recognise the Commission doesn't like to break up polling districts, but you can see here there is a very strong logic to doing so because we're talking about very distinct communities, and it would enable the Ellesmere Port constituency to have unbroken access all the way through and also ensure that the communities that fit within that channel are also joined up as part of the constituency. Whereas on the eastern side, it's a very distinct village, which can neatly fit into the Chester and Neston seat. So that's me done.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you, Justin. Can I just check, did you say at the beginning that this doesn't have an impact on any of the numbers for either of the constituencies?

JUSTIN MADDERS: Yes. Whatever way you do it, it's well within the tolerances.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you. I thought you said that. Can I just check, please? Are there any other questions seeking clarification? Justin, thank you very much for taking the time to come and speak to us. I know you'll be really busy as well.

JUSTIN MADDERS: Thank you.

ANDY BRENNAN: Could I ask if we have Jack Jackson in the room? Whenever you are ready, could you start off by giving us your name please, and what town you're from?

JACK JACKSON: Jack Jackson and Chester. I'll be talking mainly about the new South Cheshire, old Chester. I currently live in Westminster Park, which is south of the river part of Handbridge Park ward. This is one of those which is part of what would become the old City of Chester constituency and then moved into a part of South Cheshire. It's with regret that we are separating from Chester, but I can see the logic behind it. I see the natural boundary of the River Dee does split us apart, and I guess when you're trying to redraw the lines, basically more fair and within a tolerance, I can see logic and I can accept that. My main quarrel is with the name, South Cheshire, because living in Cheshire West and Chester, we already had Cheshire West, and then opposite us is Cheshire East. I think South Cheshire creates a bit more confusion and a bit of an issue with identity. I was looking for the proposal or submissions from residents, particularly one south of the river where I am, and they feel they're being separated from Chester. I think one way to stem that and cater to the needs of identity will be

to change the name to Chester South and Eddisbury because South Cheshire is predominantly modern-day Eddisbury. Anything along the lines of Eddisbury or Chester South and Eddisbury will help bridge that gap.

Just to go on a point of natural boundaries, the River Dee makes sense as a natural boundary. Looking across the constituency, I can see the River Weaver. Currently, Leighton ward will not be part of South Cheshire, whereas Wybunbury ward will be in South Cheshire. However, there's a natural boundary of the River Weaver, which, applying the same logic to why Chester splits into Chester North and South Cheshire - hopefully Chester South and Eddisbury - that natural barrier makes sense for Wybunbury to then go into the Crewe and Nantwich one and Leighton to then come into South Cheshire. I believe that doesn't really impact in terms of numbers that are within tolerance, and it just makes sense from my perspective that if we're doing that with Chester, to do it on the other side of the constituency. Then it just makes it a bit more even and creates a constituency where there are more roads, and you can naturally travel within it without having to go out of the constituency and back into it.

That's my point there. I appreciate it's a tough job. You're not going to please everyone without splitting wards and creating new divisions. It's a very difficult job to please everyone and maintain a bit of a status quo. I appreciate that change happens, and this is one thing that needs to happen. I just want to reiterate that I support the proposals. It's just the name that I have trouble with. Chester South and Eddisbury would be more than fine with me, and I think it addresses the identity crisis that we're having south of the river on the back of these. So, that's my explanation.

ANDY BRENNAN: I really appreciate your coming Jack to explain that to us. It's really good from our point of view for people who are living in this area and what impacts it has on them, so I'm really grateful that you've done that. Can I just check, please? Are there any other questions? We do have a question. Could you start by giving your name and who you may be representing or what town are you from, please?

KATE VAUGHAN: Thank you. My name's Kate Vaughan. I'm a Chester resident in what will become, if this goes ahead, Chester North and Neston, so the other side of the River to you, Jack. I'm also area Chairman of Chester Rural Conservatives. My point of clarification for you, Jack, is just in terms of the name. You mentioned that you think that South Cheshire isn't a suitable name, and it could potentially create confusion, given that we have Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester, and you'd prefer to see a name that includes Chester South. I just wanted to clarify that what you're saying is that you think that including Chester South is imperative. Then, in terms of Eddisbury, do you have strong feelings about the name Eddisbury, or would you say that you're more relaxed about whether it's Eddisbury or something else but think Chester South is the key there?

JACK JACKSON: I think more Chester South as people have more of a vested interest. But I think it definitely is key. I think it's about, rough numbers, Huntington, Christleton, Lache, Handbridge Park wards, with those coming in, I think it's just under 30% of Chester moves into this new area, so I think they need some form of representation. So, I would stress that there is a need for Chester itself to be included in the name. In terms of Eddisbury, I don't hold too much emotional attachment to the name Eddisbury, but given that it's predominantly modern-day Eddisbury, and from their perspective, nothing really changes too much, then it makes sense to keep it in. I'm not going to lose sleep if Eddisbury drops, but I would lose sleep if Chester South wasn't included.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you, Jack. I think you made that perfectly clear and with passion. That's why I said we do appreciate local residents coming in and speaking with the passion and the knowledge that you've got, so thanks very much for doing that. We really appreciate it.

JACK JACKSON: Thank you.

After an adjournment.

ANDY BRENNAN: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome back. Do we have Razia Daniels in the room? Yes. If you could start by giving your name and the town that you're from. Then when you're ready, if you could make your representations, that would be perfect.

RAZIA DANIELS: Okay. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. My name is Razia Daniels. I'm an elected member representing the Handbridge Park ward, which consists of Handbridge, Curzon Park and Westminster Park, which is located south of the River Dee. In 2017, it was a huge honour and privilege to serve as the Lord Mayor of Chester. I live in the heart of the city within the ancient city walls. My ward is located south of the River, which is only a few minutes' walk from my home and only a few minutes' walk from here. I was first elected in 2006 to represent the Handbridge St. Mary's ward, and since then we've had several boundary changes. Cheshire was split into two unity areas, Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester Council. I remember back then, we fought very hard to keep Chester in the name of our new council, as we feel our historic city is an important county town and should not just disappear. My ward, Handbridge Park St. Mary's, changed into Overleigh ward, which included the Lache ward. A couple of years later, the Overleigh ward boundaries changed again and got divided again, removing the Lache ward to become the Handbridge Park ward, which it is now. This consultation is proposing to split the current City of Chester into two along the River Dee boundary. This will mean that I will live in the heart of the City of Chester, which will be known as Chester North and Neston Parliamentary constituency, and the ward I have represented for the last 16 years is going to be located just a few minutes away, which will not be part of the city centre. It'll be known as the Eddisbury constituency, which means absolutely nothing to us.

This proposal will split our community from the heart of the city centre. The community I've represented for the past 16 years is very much part of Chester and wants to be part of Chester. Most of them live within walking distance of the main amenities of the city centre. Everyone south of the river is connected to the city centre and regards themselves as part of Chester, and they proudly think of themselves as Cestrians. We have a wonderful community spirit. Our civic life, social life, cultural life and every aspect of our life is connected to the city centre. There are very strong community ties based on activities around the cathedral, the church, the university, primary schools, secondary schools, youth clubs, community centres, restaurants, cafes and our new theatre and library, the Storyhouse. We invite our Lord Mayor of Chester and the Sheriff of Chester to attend our local events like switching on the Christmas lights, and we are very much looking forward to inviting our civic leaders to many events planned this year to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

In 2017, I had the huge honour and privilege of being the Lord Mayor of Chester, and I know from speaking to everyone how proud our communities are of our long history. We have mayors dating back to the 1200. The first mayor, William the Clerk, held office in 1238, which is nearly 800 years ago. We are of course, very disappointed in the proposals and the need to split the city into two and separate the community I represented south of the river from the

historic city of Chester. Two hundred and fifty-three representations that have been received opposed to the split. I read with interest about their passion and commitment to being part of the historic City of Chester. But few alternative proposals have been submitted. Over 90% of the representations opposing the split do not include an alternative proposal. Those who have made suggestions, only further divide communities, particularly my ward, Handbridge Park ward. These alternatives are more disruptive and will move more electors overall and do not take into account the local ties and community links forged. They also do not create a more cohesive constituency. I understand that it is due to the required electoral quota that the current City of Chester constituency has been split under these proposals. I, of course, deeply regret the need to split the City of Chester as proposed by the Boundary Commission for England, but do recognise that the proposed split using the River Dee as a boundary is the least destructive change. I wish to express my huge disappointment and regret of the need to split Chester because I do accept that the proposals are the best that can be achieved within the constraints set out.

I've tried very briefly to explain the importance of our community south of the river being part of the city centre. If this split has to go ahead, then, as the past Lord Mayor of Chester and the local ward councillor representing Handbridge Park ward, may I respectfully ask you to consider naming the new constituency as Chester South? In doing so, we, the community of the south of the river, are able to keep our connection to the City of Chester. It is also logical, and it would help retain the historical significance of Chester. We fought very hard to keep the name Chester when Cheshire was split into two and became Cheshire West and Chester Council, so I hope you will consider this again because Chester is the county town and should not disappear. Many thanks for giving me this opportunity to speak.

ANDY BRENNAN: That was really very useful. Certainly, for somebody with your experience as well. We do appreciate you coming. Do we have any questions, please, for clarification? Could you start by introducing your name, please? Then say who you represent.

KATE VAUGHAN: Thank you. Hi Razia. My name's Kate Vaughan. I'm a resident of Chester in what will become Chester North and Neston if the boundary changes go through under these proposals. I'm also the area Chairman of Cheshire Rural Conservatives. Could I just ask for some clarification? You mentioned, and I think it's clear how heartfelt you feel about this, about the name of the constituency if boundary changes do go ahead. You said that you think the new constituency should be called Chester South to reflect the fact that part of Chester, I think 30% of Chester, will go into the new constituency south of the Dee. Would you be open to the idea of a combined name that was Chester South and Eddisbury or Chester South and something else as long as Chester South is in there?

RAZIA DANIELS: Yes. To me the most important thing is Chester being there. I'll welcome any other suggestions like Eddisbury.

KATE VAUGHAN: Thank you.

ANDY BRENNAN: Razia, we have no further questions. I understand you may be talking or presenting on—

RAZIA DANIELS: Councillor Sullivan is supposed to be attending at 4.00 o'clock, but unfortunately his car's broken down and he can't attend, so he asked me to read out a statement on his behalf.

ANDY BRENNAN: Okay. Could you just confirm the details for the recording? I know you just mentioned it. Then we'll go into the reading if that's okay.

RAZIA DANIELS on behalf of **NEIL SULLIVAN:** Councillor Sullivan is my colleague and we work very closely together .

I'm reading a statement from Councillor Sullivan, who was unable to attend. Councillor Sullivan says, 'I fully support the decision to have broadly equal constituencies. The reform of Parliament boundaries is long overdue. The guidelines within which the boundaries are to be set make it almost impossible to come up with a City of Chester constituency. I regret that it now appears inevitable that Chester will be split. I hope when the next review takes place, the increased population of Chester, due to the developments such as the Wrexham Road development will allow for a reunited City of Chester constituency to return. I think the area south of the River Dee, if it is eventually separated from the area north of the Dee, can retain the name Chester. I favour calling the seat Chester South. I hope this will be considered. Councillor Neil Sullivan, Handbridge Park ward, Chester.'

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much for reading that. Very much appreciated. Can you possibly send us an email with both your comments and Neil's, please? Just so we can make sure we have the full record within the system. Thank you for giving us a little bit of a hint of your experience of what it's like living in Chester.

AZIA DANIELS: Thank you.

After an adjournment.

ANDY BRENNAN: Good afternoon again, everybody. Would you like to introduce yourself, please?

LYNN RILEY: I will. My name is Lynn Riley. I live in Frodsham. I have lived there for 40 years, and I'm also the Borough Councillor from Cheshire West and Chester for the Frodsham ward.

ANDY BRENNAN: Excellent. Well, we welcome you Lynn. If you'd like to make your representations, that would be really appreciated.

LYNN RILEY: Okay. I'm speaking today for the Frodsham area as the Borough Councillor for the area as well as a local resident. I am a Co-councillor with a colleague because Frodsham is a town that warrants two local representatives, due to its population and its status as a town. I do think that the Commission has done a good job in trying to manage some constituency arrangements for the proposed new area, given the pressures that have been unfortunately exercised on us by neighbouring constituencies. I think this makes as much sense as it possibly can out of the opportunities available. I do think that bringing together the area of Runcorn into one representative area in one constituency does, in fact, make sense.

I think it makes sense for most of the area around Frodsham and Helsby because our historic arrangements have always annexed us to areas that we have no natural affinity to. The current Weaver Vale arrangements put us with Northwich. There isn't a natural affinity there because the transport links aren't in place, whereas our connections to the wider Runcorn area are a lot closer, and there's a lot of free flow between Runcorn and Frodsham from traffic patterns, so, from an employment perspective, Frodsham tends to be a net exporter of people, but a lot of the people that work in the Frodsham and Helsby area do in fact come in from Runcorn and

we do actually have, strangely for Cheshire West, very good transport links. We have a regular bus service and good train connections. The reinstatement of the Halton Curve has given us great connectivity into Manchester, Liverpool and, obviously, through Runcorn. Therefore, from a connectivity point of view, the new arrangements make an awful lot of sense.

I do have to say for the areas to the east around the Goway Rural ward, I think the arrangements are possibly going to be less comfortable for residents of that area, because whilst some of the neighbouring towns like Ince and Elton will look to areas like Frodsham and Helsby, their natural affinity is to annex themselves to Chester, and I think it's going to be more difficult for them. Having said that, certainly around Ince, Elton, Dunham-on-the-Hill, Manley, Alvanley and Hapsford there is a very natural relationship with Frodsham and Helsby because most people are coming to Frodsham as a key service centre. That's where our GP practice is centred for the 25,500 residents who look to Princeway. Most young people in the area go to Helsby High School, which is the second largest high school, I think, that Cheshire West has. If they're not going to Helsby High School, they're travelling into either Helsby or Frodsham and for the bus connections to other colleges. The A56 corridor is very much the transport route for a lot of the associated tertiary education, further education colleges and things of that nature.

I do think, however, that whilst there is a lot of logical sense in the new arrangements, the name gives me pause, because in every metric that we look at it as local representatives Frodsham's significance is very much at the fore. It's classed as the key service centre for most of the area that is outside of Runcorn. It is the highest-performing key service centre within Cheshire West and Chester. We draw people from a very wide area into Frodsham because of the significance of the service and transport connections that it has. The public-sector focus on health and social care is all predicated on the Frodsham footprint, and to be completely ignored in the naming of the new constituency, I think, is an opportunity missed. I really would like us to think more closely around how we're going to look at naming this constituency, so that, for the first time ever, it actually makes sense to people. I think having Helsby and Runcorn in the title and missing out Frodsham will make no sense to a lot of people and will just drive further disconnects with the political constituency boundaries.

One of the defining features along this particular corridor is our sandstone ridge. In June of last year, it was announced that the sandstone ridge has a unique geology and is about to be added to the areas of national outstanding natural beauty. It's a very significant physical definition for the area because you can literally see that Frodsham has a hill and Helsby has a hill that makes up that sandstone ridge, and it can be seen from Liverpool. It's one of the reasons why people aspire to live in Frodsham, which, at the moment, is the most attractive place to live in the UK. You literally can't buy a house there at the moment because it's such a popular place to live by dint of its great connections. It's 20 minutes to Liverpool airport, half an hour to Manchester airport and is connected to all the major economic areas.

To miss Frodsham out of the naming of the constituency is wrong. But if we could think about something that perhaps allies us, Sandstone Ridge and Runcorn might be our suggestion or North West Cheshire. Something that names either no town or a feature that we can all see and relate to. Certainly, the outer rural areas would all recognise the sandstone ridge of Helsby and Frodsham Hills. It can be seen from Runcorn and can be seen from everywhere. It's one of the things that put us on the map. The unique geology that sits around that sandstone ridge is one of the reasons why the British Geological Survey has put one of its national arrays into the Ince, Elton and Frodsham Marshes area, and we are going to be studying the environmental and geological opportunities for future energy from this new constituency. If

you can imagine the Cheshire geography, we have Jodrell Bank over in the east, looking up at the skies, and you have this new constituency looking down into the ground, in terms of looking at opportunities for new energy generation and new carbon capture. It is going to be a very significant ward for future energy provision in the country, so I would really like us to see that reflected in the name, something that is going to reflect that significance to the wider United Kingdom going forward.

So, please rethink the name. I'm not arguing with any of the boundaries. I think it's as good as it possibly can be. We'll rub along as we have done with Weaver Vale, which didn't really make much sense to most people, but please reflect that you are ignoring the dominant population of this particular area by trying to tag two ends of the constituency in the name and ignoring where most people are coming from. A little bit more creativity and please do better on the name. That's all I've got to say, so thank you very much indeed for listening to me.

ANDY BRENNAN: I understand exactly what you're saying. Is it Sandstone Ridge? I do see it when I go to Wales sometimes. It stands out and—

LYNN RILEY: But next time you go to Liverpool look left. You literally can't miss it because it's the Cheshire plain at the end of the day. It's very, very flat until it's not. And it literally is the high point.

ANDY BRENNAN: And is that formally known as Sandstone Ridge?

LYNN RILEY: Sandstone Ridge is a long-established feature. There is a charitable trust that maintains it, such is its significance. We've had a whole variety of policies, as my colleagues in the room can attest; Vale Royal had a policy, Chesterr West had a policy, recognising the unique landscape and the sensitivities around future development on and around that landscape. It's a big part of our tourist attractions and an area of outstanding natural beauty with unique geology.

ANDY BRENNAN: You're selling this really well.

LYNN RILEY: There we go. I'm a big fan, by the way.

ANDY BRENNAN: I sense that might be the case.. Can I just check one last final thing? You mentioned that Frodsham was the best place in the universe to live.

LYNN RILEY: Oh, officially.

ANDY BRENNAN: Is that officially? Where is that? Is that just your personal observations or is it registered somewhere?

LYNN RILEY: I've long held the view and I'd like to claim some personal credit, but if you Google and go on to Rightmove, the best place in the UK to buy a house right now is Frodsham. Literally, you can't buy a house.

ANDY BRENNAN: I didn't know if it was one of these Times Supplement type things where it gives you best schools, et cetera, et cetera. I just wanted to make sure that we'd captured it if you did say. So, Rightmove is a website we need to look at.

LYNN RILEY: Well, if you just Google it, it's coming up. There's a reason why we've got such a large collection of magnificently professional estate agencies on our High Street, which is the widest in England, by the way.

ANDY BRENNAN: Gosh, Well, we do have a question of clarification. If you could please introduce yourself and say who you represent.

JOHN WALSH: John Walsh representing the Conservative Party. It's not a question. I'm going to crave your indulgence because I can confirm that when I walk my dog to Rivington on a Sunday, I can see the Old Man of Frodsham from as far away as the County Palatine of Lancaster.

LYNN RILEY: Oh, fantastic. Excellent. Well, from the hill, you can see the Pennines, the Welsh mountains and Liverpool. It does stand out as a very dominant feature, and it would be an opportunity, I think, to reflect that in the name and not miss out anybody by dint of omission.

ANDY BRENNAN: Excellent. Okay. Lynn, it's been a pleasure for us to hear from you this afternoon.

LYNN RILEY: Thank you so much.

ANDY BRENNAN: You're clearly very, very passionate about your area, and for us to have local people coming in who know the area inside and out as yourself is a pleasure for us. We do appreciate the time and effort that you've made to come in. Thanks very much.

LYNN RILEY: Well, we have a long tradition in our council chamber, do we not, about how our favourite F word is Frodsham.

ANDY BRENNAN: Do you have an electronic copy of your notes to make sure we capture everything?

LYNN RILEY: No, but I will be putting my comments on the official submission.

adjournment.

ANDY BRENNAN: Good afternoon, everybody. We're opening the public hearing again on day two, the afternoon. Could I invite Mike Amesbury up to the desk, please? Welcome, Mike. When you're ready, you could start by giving your name and the constituency that you represent, and when you are ready, make your representations, please.

MIKE AMESBURY: I will. It's Mike Amesbury, Member of Parliament for Weaver Vale, as in the current constituency. While, obviously, I'm very attached to Weaver Vale, I'll speak to the two proposals. I'll start with the Runcorn and Helsby constituency, as the proposed name suggests from the Boundary Commission. The proposed boundary now unites all of Runcorn into a single constituency. That's both what's known as the old town and the designated new town area, which is the current area I represent. I note that most of the comments seem to support this recommendation. Much of the Runcorn area was historically within the same rural district council area and there's a strong shared interest between Runcorn and Frodsham - Frodsham is a place where I have lived - owing in part to the area being in the Runcorn Rural District area between 1894 and 1974. In a way, it's almost kind of going back in time to those

historical ties. Currently, some local authority wards find themselves split between two constituencies. I know that's something that the Boundary Commission would prefer not to happen, and it can lead to some confusion and governance issues. The proposals put forward address this by only including wards in their entirety. The growth in development in and around the Northwich area of my current constituency warrants it being a separate constituency. It's something, again, that I have a strong emotional attachment to. There are very few clearly defined links between Runcorn and Northwich, probably one of industry in the past in terms of ICI and now its various constituent companies, INEOS and TATA. At times there's genuine confusion, which I know the Commission would be picking up, in terms of the submissions, with some electors not sure what constituency they're in. Runcorn at the moment is obviously divided between Weaver Vale and my neighbouring constituency of Halton. The two current MPs, being me and Derek Twigg for Halton, work very closely together, so we're able to deal with that. The comments actually recognise this difficulty at the moment and the confusion and, on the whole, accept the proposals going forward. It's a welcome name that offers some geographical relevance, unlike Weaver Vale. Weaver Vale, of course, is not named after the place. It's around the river and it's a valley, but it does create some confusion. However, I feel that the proposed name probably doesn't acknowledge, and this is reflected in the comments, that Frodsham is the second biggest conurbation, so I know that's something that you'll have to square going forward.

Sutton Weaver is left out of the proposals. Although a part of Cheshire West and Chester, the village certainly has close links to Runcorn. I've noted the comments, and I think you had quite a number of comments about that. I do understand some of the difficulties you will face, because that will be splitting a ward, and you don't want polling districts appearing in other places. That's my comments on the Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

Onto Northwich. I welcome the proposal, which will have a dedicated constituency. It recognises the town's growth, which has been quite considerable and tackles a longstanding issue of limited links between Northwich and Runcorn, with transport being one of those, and public transport in particular. There's a clear consensus demonstrated in the comments to include Winsford, although I note there is one ward that's not included there which I would argue - and I know some other responders would argue - it needs to include the Winsford wards in its entirety, rather than one out on a limb, which is Winsford Over and Verdin. The ward of Weaver and Cuddington does look to South Cheshire. Though I have a strong attachment, as a constituency MP, to parts of that, I understand some of the recommendations there. The proposals resolve the issue of Tatton being split across two unitary authorities, and the proposed Northwich seat falls entirely under Cheshire West and Chester Council, which will make government and governance more transparent and probably easier. I recognise the comments expressed by the residents in Allostock, who strongly feel connected to Knutsford rather than Northwich. However, I recognise that Allostock is part of Cheshire West and Chester, and I know exactly, obviously what your criteria are, so I understand some of your terms of reference there. These are things which, going forward, you will make informed decisions about. Thank you for your valuable time.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much. Can I just check something with you? Although I clearly know where Runcorn is, I'm not that familiar with the centre, so when you talk about old town and new town, is that something you can explain to us or show on the map? I want to capture and make sure I understand the points.

MIKE AMESBURY: Yes. New town you're looking at, Halton Lea. Around there is a place called Shopping City, which people have an emotional attachment to. It's an old shopping

centre there. That patch there is largely what you call a new town. There was a lot of social housing, certainly in the past. People moved over from Liverpool in that area. The old town itself is next to the Mersey. You see the station? All that area there, this side of the Mersey. You've got the old town High Street. At the moment they're split, and it does create some confusion.

ANDY BRENNAN: That's really useful. I really do appreciate that. Can I just check, please? Do you have any questions of clarification other than what I just asked? No. Mikel, thanks very much. I do appreciate that you'll be really busy at the moment with other matters as well, so we do appreciate you taking the chance to come out and share your experience with us. Thank you.

MIKE AMESBURY: Very welcome and thank you for your time.

ANDY BRENNAN: Whenever you're comfortable and you're ready if you could give your name and who you're representing, then when you're ready, please make a start.

JOHN WALSH: Well, good afternoon and thank you, sir, for inviting me at this point. I'm John Walsh, I'm a councillor in Bolton, but I represent the Conservative Party in this matter.

I'm going to deal with one which had considerable iteration, all of them of the same nature, and that's Crewe and Nantwich. I think the issue of whether Wybunbury ought to be with Crewe and Nantwich. I think we heard on Friday and again today, very clear evidence from the MP today, in reiterating the points made previously, the very clear links of that ward with Crewe and Nantwich. I remind you, sir, of the parishes in the Leighton area who, we were told on Friday, actually wanted to be with the South Cheshire, Eddisbury or whatever constituency title that might have in due course.

In terms of Northwich, it's an interesting one in that there has been almost universal support, and we've heard some very powerful arguments about why a constituency based on Northwich has got considerable merits. This morning, Charles Fifield talked about the three parish councils who had very clearly said that Weaver and Cuddington should be part of that constituency. For parishes to take such keen interest still, I think, is important. He referred to it as 'our town' and the previous splits of Northwich have been regrettable. I think his phrase was that 'Northwich has been split for too long'. The Commission is remedying that, it has to be said.

We heard also, interestingly, from a semi-independent view from Gaynor Sinar yesterday, who has previously led the business improvement team of businesses in the town centre, who argued that to have a single Member of Parliament made it a much stronger case for a smallish town that could have a much more powerful voice. Increasingly government grants from Towns Fund and other such projects are coming forward where there is a united voice and towns are putting together coherent bids. For that reason, I think it's a very important and very powerful case that was put forward by Gaynor yesterday, and from other speakers. The fact that Weaverham, Crowton and Acton Bridge parishes as I said, and Sir Robert Atkins was right this morning when he said that in terms of the structure of government, parishes could be deemed to be the one which is nearest to the people and not always party-political and might therefore be said to have a more powerful voice. For them to have that for unity, I think, is important.

I'll move on to Runcorn and Helsby. As we have just heard, the Member of Parliament there welcomed, as almost seems universal, the unification of Runcorn township. Runcorn's old town is historic. Runcorn New town was a Liverpool overspill in the 1960s and '70s when new towns were in vogue. It was at that time the Runcorn New Town Development Corporation. It has now become integrated with Runcorn in the new authority, but still, the old and new towns are separate and really ought to be brought together, and we heard, very powerfully, the case for that. I think you've accepted, we heard from David Rowlands yesterday, that whilst the Gowry Rural ward is not quite so coherently linked to, nonetheless it is, I think his phrase was 'not ideal', but he could find no alternative, and it might therefore be deemed to be the least worst option in that sense. It's interesting that representation 69766 from Lewis Roberts and others, 61444 and 52073 all make that case for Runcorn town to be united at the heart of the constituency.

What is interesting is that consistently in that, we've heard that Runcorn should be included in the name of the constituency. What you tag on to the end of it is an entirely different matter. I can see the argument for Helsby, being the next town, but equally, Frodsham, a much larger geographic area with a larger electorate, has got a powerful case to be included. If the Commission is generally looking for names that are identifiable geographically, whilst Sandstone Edge or something similar sounds a very attractive name, if I were looking for that constituency, where would I start would be the question I would ask, and given the Commission's normal course of looking for geographical features, they are clearly not identified. There are sandstone ridges elsewhere. This may be the most significant, I don't deny, but it's not that clear geographically. Frodsham might have more of a resonance, but equally we've heard arguments as to why Helsby should be. I'm afraid I leave that conundrum to the Commission to review. I'm not going to express a strong view on the matter one way or the other.

I'm moving onto the Wirral now, moving westwards slightly. There we've had universal support, I think, for the draft proposal from the Commission and an acceptance. I said last week, and I'll repeat, that never have I known Upton to be so universally loved as is the case this time. It's been a case of whether it should be kicked west, east or south in previous inquiries. The fact that everyone seems to accept that the boundary and middle of Upton is a robust and clear one, and therefore a split ward there is the one that seems to cause the fewest problems. Therefore, we support entirely the rural proposals,

Ellesmere Port and Neston. We heard from Lee Evans, yesterday, a suggestion that this would bring together communities. Very strong community links there. Merseyrail was mentioned. The Member of Parliament in his original submission supported the proposition and that has had widespread support. Strong community links. The only issue is whether the name should be Ellesmere Port and Bromborough to recognise and reflect that Wirral as an area linked to. We heard an interesting suggestion this morning that a part of the Willaston and Thornton ward could perhaps be included. I accept that the road does form a boundary, but the links through are only on the edge of that area. They are not through the centre of it and are not through the core of it. Therefore, I do not fully subscribe to that suggestion. I prefer the more robust boundary proposed by the Commission in your draft proposals.

You don't need me to refer to Macclesfield because we've heard no other representations of the Member of Parliament, and he was universal in commenting on others supporting parish councils, town councils, the borough council and the unitary authority.

We come to Chester, and this clearly has been the most interesting conversation during the course of today. Again, I'm going to use the phrase of the least worst option because I think we all accept that for the historic City of Chester to be split into two constituencies is less than desirable, and in the ideal world it would not be. However, there have been, in my view, no viable options. We heard very strongly this morning from Pamela Hall and Jack Jackson the reasons why it wasn't ideal, but they could sustain and argue the case for it to happen. The counter-proposals I've heard, I've got to say, do not give me any comfort. Whilst the current proposals avoid a Cheshire East and West boundary split, there is a logic to it, some of the proposals for split wards will lead to total confusion. We heard from the penultimate speaker this afternoon that communities across the ward may be varied, but a ward has got an identity. If you take a part of a ward, of necessity with Upton where clear a boundary exists, that may be sustainable, but to have the multiple splits as proposed by the Member of Parliament, I could use a word, which I'm not going to use in this Commission, but there may be some background to it, which is not wholly within the parameters of the Boundary Commission. He talked about the Dee being a strong boundary. Clearly, it is, and yes, it can be crossed. But I went for a walk at lunchtime to look at those bridges and the links between the two, and it reaffirmed what I had thought and what I'd seen on the map. I would encourage you to look at it at least in detail from maps, and ideally to look at it. You've got the Grosvenor Bridge, just down the road from here, carrying the main road. You've got the Old Dee Bridge, which I'll come to in a moment, and you've got a footbridge. You could say you've got three links. Actually, they are not quite so clear. When Richard Beacham talked about tinkering to restore communities, I found that a somewhat vacuous statement when you are splitting three, four or five wards across to achieve it. Interestingly, Mike Amesbury, the last speaker, made the point that split wards lead to confusion. I think that's actually a very telling argument where you haven't got such a robust boundary as Upton ward in the Wirral.

We come to the issue of the boundary on the river. It actually occurred to me at lunchtime that, as well as the river, the walls provide a fairly robust boundary between the two proposed constituencies, and they've been there for a thousand years as well, so you've got some historic links there. If we look at the bridges, you've got the link from Handbridge Park to Chester City and the Garden Quarter ward, the A483 over Grosvenor Bridge. Yes, it exists, but to access that from Handbridge and to get north is not an easy road connection. There is a roundabout, which can be seen there, but it's not a great connection to say that there is that wonderful connectivity between the two. The suspension bridge, the Queen's Park Bridge by St. John's Church. Yes, a pleasant walk, but not vehicular, with limited access. And the true is exactly the same with the Old Dee Bridge. It is closed to two-way traffic with one-way signals. It is not a robust link, but physically exists. Therefore, I would argue that the contrivance of a scheme by the Member of Parliament with those poor road links is not particularly helpful. If we could look at, as he referred to this morning, the Caldley Valley link between, the two wards of Broughton. That is a pretty robust valley. You've got the one road link of any substance, but it's a nature reserve. It's a clear boundary. On the ground it actually is more robust than it appears on the map even, and therefore I do not subscribe to that being a poor boundary. There are much poorer boundaries across the land. I believe it's also the ecclesiastical parish boundary, which has been in existence for a long number of years

. More worrying is that if we now go to the southwest of that. When you talk about the links between Handbridge Park and Christleton, you will see there are no road links whatsoever. To get through from one to the other you have to go a considerable way south and eventually link up to the A55, but if you look at the A55 boundary, I'm not sure there's actually the road access there. I think it may be a crossover, but I need to check it. Whatever it may be, I would subscribe that there are very limited links between those two wards, those two areas.

Therefore, to do as has been suggested and taking parts of those wards off into separate polling district areas would be perverse because you would be weakening the links between the entire wards. You would almost have an orphan polling district. If orphan wards are undesirable, orphan polling districts certainly are even less so.

.I also want to just clear up one comment made by the Member of Parliament this morning. I'm sure it was a slip of the tongue, but he implied that if the boundaries are followed as proposed, Chester Meadows would be lost from the city. Well, they may be lost from the city constituency of Chester North, they would not be lost to local governance and to Cheshire West and Chester City Council. They would remain within that council's control and council ownership. We're not building a barrier around it and not preventing linkages. I just wanted to put that on record.

The final point I would make about Chester and the consequential naming is that there have been representations that Chester South might be included in the name of that constituency. Whether that is Chester South and South Cheshire or whether it is Chester South and Eddisbury, I leave to the wisdom of the Commission. However, I think that there is a very powerful argument as to why Chester could be included and it's not uncommon to have a north and south. In my own town, we've got Bolton North East, Bolton West and Bolton South East. It's doable, it's liveable. I would've thought that the Dee is a boundary, if you do it off the Dee as the boundary, there is merit in a Chester South constituency.

Could I conclude my remarks at this point by extending a personal thanks to Glenn, who I believe is spending his last day at this inquiry? I have had the benefit of his advice over a long number of years and many inquiries, and he has always been very supportive. I don't pick out individual members of the Commission normally, but on this occasion, I just want to place on record my, and I'm sure many people's, thanks to Glenn for the work he's done in dealing with boundaries here in the North West over many, many years.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much, John. Thank you. I think the vast majority of colleagues, if not all the colleagues in the BCE will be of an equal view as yourself, so thank you very much for those very kind comments for Glenn. I will ask the obvious question. Are there any questions of clarification, please? We have a question. Could you state your name please and who you're representing?

KATE VAUGHAN: My name's Kate Vaughan. I am a resident of Chester and will be in the Chester North and Neston constituency if the proposals go through as they stand today, I'm also area Chairman of Cheshire Rural Conservatives. This is me begging your indulgence rather than a point for clarification, but it will hopefully clarify something that John said he was going to go back and check. With regard to the A55 and Huntington, John mentioned about access from the A55 into Huntington. Just to clarify that for you, John, just looking at the screen now on the bottom left-hand side, you'll see Eaton Road. That road, from memory, runs over the A55, so you can't come off the A55 onto that side of the Dee. On the Huntington side of the Dee, you'll see a road that says Chester Road, just where the word Huntington is above Chester Road and Caldley Valley Road? Caldley Valley Road comes down and you can either go right into Chester Road, which will take you back up into Chester, or if you could turn left onto Chester Road and you head out into a more rural area, that goes over the A55, so you can't come off of that junction. The next junction coming off is north and that junction would be in Chester North and Neston, so there's no way of accessing Huntington off the A55 unless you go into Chester North and Neston and then come back. Hopefully, that helps.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much for that clarification. It is appreciated. John, thank you again very, very much for all your help over the past two days in Chester.

An adjournment.

ANDY BRENNAN: Okay. Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome back. Could Dan Marr please make his representations? Before you start making representations, introduce yourself for the recording and also state what town you're from. Then whenever you're ready, please make a start.

DAN MARR: My name is Daniel Neil Marr and I'm from Moulton, just outside Winsford. I just wish to speak today as a parish councillor for the village of Moulton, just outside Northwich and Winsford, which has been put inside the proposed Northwich constituency. May I start by thanking the Boundary Commission for completing what is clearly a difficult task with sensitivity to local needs? A project like this will always face strong voices from both sides, but I've come here today to give my wholehearted support for these proposals. Firstly, there is the obvious requirement that the new constituency contained between 69,724 and 77,062 Parliamentary electors. This new constituency fits right into the middle of this range, and so is an ideal size. Secondly, the desire of the BCE to use local government wards as building blocks is achieved here in that no local government ward is split in the proposed constituency. Presently, my borough council ward of Davenham, Moulton and Kingsmead overlaps the constituencies of Weaver Vale and Eddisbury. This has long meant that local residents have been at a disadvantage in the issues affecting the entire ward and lobbied for by ward councillors, such as bus services, house building, broadband infrastructure, and more have required communication between two MPs. Even when these MPs agree, this has necessarily meant delays in processes as neither can act unilaterally. Bringing the ward together has long been an ambition of mine and other residents, so I'm pleased that this has happened. But I must go further. Not only am I in support of the fact that the ward has been united, but I'm supportive of where it has been united. Geographically, our nearest town is in Winsford, but other parts of the ward, such as Kingsmead, is in Northwich. Bringing both towns together into one constituency will allow the historic ties to be reformed. Davenham, Moulton and Kingsmead will be brought in with both of their near neighbours in Northwich and Winsford. We also have good community ties with the village of Hartford, for example, where many Kingsmead residents go to school.

The western boundary being drawn where it is, using the river as a dividing line, makes sense. If you speak to residents in Whitegate and Marton, you will find that they see themselves as distinct from Winsford and more connected with the rural constituencies in South Cheshire, so there is little reason to have that ward in the new constituency of Northwich.

Finally, I would say that the lone borders are a success in one other area. The Commission has stated that, 'as far as possible, we will try to have regard to local government boundaries'. The fact that the proposed Northwich seat is entirely contained within Cheshire West and Chester Council borough area is a good move. The old constituency of Weaver Vale was split between Cheshire West and Halton councils, and the old constituency of Eddisbury was split between Cheshire East and Cheshire West. Because of the numbers, one of the new constituencies will need to overlap between Cheshire West and Cheshire East, but it makes no sense for both of them to be done so if it can be avoided. While people in my area look towards Northwich and Winsford, we have nothing to do with Middlewich and Cheshire East, for example, no connection with Cheshire East at all.

To summarise. On the objectives of elected numbers, representing local ties and containing the constituency within one local government area, the Commission has done an excellent job with the Northwich constituency, and I would urge you to press ahead with this unchanged. Thank you for your time.

ANDY BRENNAN: Thank you very much, Daniel. That is really, really clear and we appreciate your time.

CLLR DAN MARR: Thank you.

ANDY BRENNAN: I always ask, are there any points of clarification? No. Thank you again very much.

DAN MARR: Thank you very much for your time.

ANDY BRENNAN: Okay. As I mentioned this morning, during my opening statements, I have the discretion in certain circumstances to vary a timetable of the hearing. In making any such decision, it is important that I take into account the attendance today and the demand for opportunity to speak. There are currently no persons registered to speak between 4.00 pm and 5.00 pm. Sorry, other than the person we've just spoken to, who agreed to step in slightly earlier than anticipated. I am satisfied that sufficient information has been made available by the Boundary Commission for England for members of the public or interested parties to attend and make representations. I've also consulted with the lead official, John Walsh from the Conservative Party, who has no objections in these circumstances to me varying the finishing time of day two. Taking all these facts into account, I am satisfied that it is both reasonable and proportionate to conclude today's hearing at 4.15, and that will be the conclusion of the consultation process in the Chester area. Thank you.