

BOUNDARIES SCOTLAND

PUBLIC HEARING

2nd Review of Scottish Parliament Constituencies

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SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS

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START OF AFTERNOON SESSION:

(14.00)

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I will just introduce myself. I am Nigel Ross. I am the Sheriff Principal for Lothian and Borders, and we are here for the purposes of taking the evidence from members of the public and others who wish to comment on proposed changes to the boundaries for the elections to the Scottish Parliament. I am not part of the Commission and I have accepted appointment only on a temporary basis to advise and assist boundaries Scotland. My assistance is limited to conducting local inquiries such as this one for the review of the Scottish Parliament constituencies. My function here is not to represent anybody, but simply as a neutral party who will take evidence and comments and prepare a report which summarises the points raised by you and that report will be submitted to Boundaries Scotland and it will be made publicly available.

For today's purposes I will take a few minutes to explain the purpose of this inquiry, the purpose of the review and how Boundaries Scotland has gone about the whole exercise. This local inquiry is one of six being held around Scotland where you have an opportunity to make further comments or suggestions on the Commission's provisional proposals for constituencies. A transcript of today's proceedings is being prepared and will be available on the website later.

Local inquiries are held by the Commission in areas where a local authority has objected to their proposals, where there has been a strong local response or where they feel they want additional information. The Commission welcomes this inquiry which provides an opportunity for local views to be heard as part of the process of reviewing Scottish Parliament boundaries. The Commission also welcomes the opportunity to explain the legislative provisions and procedures which it must follow.

The population, and therefore the electorate, of each constituency is constantly changing, with people moving into or out of areas as well as within the same area. As a result of these changes, some MSPs may represent considerably more or fewer electors than others. These variations in levels of representation are one of the reasons that the Commission carry out regular reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries, in order to ensure electoral fairness.

Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 requires Boundaries Scotland to conduct reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries for constituencies and regions at intervals of every 8 to 12 years.

The existing constituencies for the Scottish Parliament were defined following the First Review of Scottish Parliament boundaries, completed in 2010. Those boundaries have been used in the 2011, 2016 and 2021 Scottish Parliament elections.

The Second Review, this one, must be completed by 1 May 2025 when the legislation requires that the Commission submits its final recommendations to Scottish Ministers.

In formulating its provisional proposals for constituencies, the Commission has a statutory duty to apply Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 as amended. That schedule sets out a set of rules to be applied when designing constituencies.

These rules can be summarised as follows:

There are four rules. Overall, there are 73 constituencies. Three of these are protected so they are not under review: They are Shetland, Orkney Islands and the Western isles. The remaining 70 constituencies must meet a set of requirements and must do so in a way which, so far as practicable, is consistent throughout the whole of Scotland.

Rule 1 - So far as is practicable, regard must be had to the boundaries of local authority areas.

Rule 2 - The electorate of each constituency is to be as near the electoral quota as is practicable, while having regard to Rule 1. The electoral quota is determined by dividing the total number of local government electors on the September 2022 electoral registers for all of Scotland, except of course, for these three preserved island constituencies, by 70. The electoral quota remains fixed throughout the period of a review, and at present is 59,902 electors. Best practice comes from the Venice Commission (Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters) and previous reviews suggests an electorate within plus or minus 10% of the electoral quota is acceptable.

The Commission may depart from Rule 1 if it thinks that it is desirable to do so to avoid an excessive disparity between the electorate of a constituency and the electoral quota or between the electorate of a constituency and that of neighbouring constituencies.

Rule 3 - The Commission may depart from the strict application of the preceding rules if it considers that special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, make a departure desirable.

Rule 4 - The Commission must take account, so far as it reasonably can, of inconveniences attendant on altering constituencies and of any local ties which would be broken by doing so.

Sometimes these rules can be seen as conflicting, and the Commission must exercise its discretion in deciding the appropriate weight of each in any given constituency.

The Commission recognises that changes to constituencies are often unwelcome. However, the legislation requires that Parliamentary boundaries are regularly reviewed and places a duty to do so upon the Commission. As in previous reviews, the main concerns have generally arisen from the need to take account of the movement of electorate within Scotland.

The Commission wishes to emphasise that its review relates solely to boundaries for the Scottish Parliament and does not affect the structure or arrangements of local government areas or the services they provide. Parliamentary boundaries do not affect the provision of council services, health services, or council tax, nor do they signal a desire to change any other boundaries, including school catchments or local authority boundaries or the remit of community councils. Electoral boundaries are purely for the purposes of identifying constituencies for parliamentary elections.

The Commission also wishes to emphasise that, for the purpose of formulating proposals for revised constituencies, the results of previous elections have not entered into its consideration. Similarly, it is not for the Commission to speculate

upon the effects which its recommendations may have on future voting patterns or the partisan composition of the Parliament.

The Commission considered provisional groupings of council areas as part of its approach to constituency design for the Second Review, which included a group of six constituencies contained wholly within South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders Council areas. This is a new grouping of council areas for constituency design as the current constituencies sit within a grouping of North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire council areas as well as a grouping of East Lothian, Midlothian and Scottish Borders council areas.

The Commission discussed a number of options for this grouping and agreed on provisional proposals which proposed six constituencies, with a variation from the electoral quota within 10%, retained one of the existing constituency boundaries, namely, Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire and minimised change to two other existing constituencies, namely, Rutherglen and East Kilbride. The proposals also split a single local authority ward.

During the one-month consultation, held between May and June 2023, Scottish Borders Council objected to the proposals, specifically the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale County constituency. Under the terms of the legislation, if a local council objects to a proposed constituency within its area, then a local inquiry must be held.

Other responses to the consultation also opposed the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency, with residents from both the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire Council areas stating communities in Clydesdale and Tweeddale have little in common.

The Commission welcomes all comments and alternative suggestions to its provisional proposals, not just on those issues raised in my statement today, noting again that the alternative constituency designs must meet the legislative requirements for this review.

At the end of this local inquiry, I will draft a report for the Commission with my comments and recommendations, if they can be made, from today's proceedings. As I said earlier a transcript of today's inquiry will also be published on the Commission's website. The Commission will then consider the report with all of the responses to the public consultation on its provisional proposals for constituencies as it develops revised proposals for constituencies. The Commission will consult with those boundaries in Spring 2024 and may need to hold a further local inquiry on those boundaries if required.

I now move to invite the speakers to come and give evidence, if I could ask all of them, just maybe to come forward and sit there. There is a microphone available, but we probably won't need it. I have a list of attendees in no particular order. So, taking the person at the top of my list, I have Cllr Fay Sinclair. Is she here please?

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Cllr Sinclair, if you would like to come forward, please?

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Right. Cllr Sinclair, if you just want to tell us what you have to say -

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Thank you. Yes, I have objected to these proposals, both as an individual and as the councillor for Galashiels and District. I don't feel that these proposals take into account our communities. There are no links between the Gala Water area that I represent and the Clyde Valley whereas there are historic geographical and social links that are well established between Galashiels, Tweeddale and the south of Midlothian.

The review guidance states that the rules they must follow include taking into account geographical considerations as well as local ties and other inconveniences. To outline a few of the issues that I've identified and that have been raised with me by constituents, a big part of it is about accessibility and connectivity between, particularly, the Galashiels and Lauderdale areas and the Clyde Valley. The existing links between Midlothian South, Tweeddale, Galashiels and Lauderdale are well established. We have main routes that join Midlothian with the Borders, the A7, the A68, the A72, all main routes. In addition, there is the Borders Railway which links stations in Tweedbank, Galashiels and Stow with Gorebridge and Newtongrange in Midlothian. In order to access across the proposed new constituency boundaries this would require several different buses and a period of up to a couple of hours to do that. I think while transport is not necessarily something that needs to be taken into account when looking at a boundary, I think it speaks to the larger picture of the lack of social, cultural, even business ties across the area. Very much in Galashiels we are orientated up the A7 towards Midlothian, towards Edinburgh. We don't make those same links west into South Lanarkshire.

The current Parliamentary office for the constituency is in Galashiels. We've got a busy transport interchange which links all of the main settlements within the constituency via Galashiels. Therefore, it's accessible. I think the geography of the proposed new constituency is a much larger area making that connection more difficult, making the time for MSP and staff to travel to various parts of the constituency greatly increased. Even looking at - I know it's separate to local authority, but MSPs do have a lot of interaction with local authority. Rather than the 30 miles between the Scottish Borders and Midlothian Council's headquarters, you're talking 70 miles between South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders, again demonstrating that this would be to the detriment because they are further apart. Again, with local ties, NHS services, while they wouldn't be impacted there is interaction with the MSP and currently NHS Borders do have a lot of cooperation with NHS Lothian, for example, cancer services. Some cancer screenings and services are operated by NHS Lothian for NHS Borders. Again, those links don't exist to the west and into the Lanarkshire area.

Other local links such as community councils, Heriot Community Council, for example, on my ward has worked with Moorfoot in Midlothian in dealing with large wind farm applications that impact both areas. There are connections, there are links, there is already cooperation between these areas, and I don't believe that that exists to the same extent across into South Lanarkshire. Even down to a very small, very local level, my children this afternoon before I finish up here will attend their afterschool childcare in their primary school. It is operated by a community interest company which runs provisions in Holmsford, Peebles and Penicuik. It is just one of many examples of communities naturally aligning themselves across the Borders and Midlothian area and the same can't be said across Borders and Lanarkshire.

In my wards, in both Galashiels Community Council and Stow and Fountainhall Community Council discussed these proposed boundary changes at length and strongly objected. I note that in the published responses so far that even Skirling Community Council, which is closest to that boundary with South Lanarkshire, has also submitted an objection. The objections also come from across the political spectrum. I am an SNP member, but I note that in the responses that Labour have also objected to these, and I recognise some names as being Scottish Greens as well.

I would like to just very briefly give a couple of comments that I've received from my constituents in Galashiels, which includes mention that, "I object to this change in the strongest possible terms". "This is shocking". "Doesn't reflect the history, even recent history". "Parliamentary constituencies should reflect other boundaries, the ones that matter to the constituents, such as local government, NHS and transport". "This recent development is appalling". Just some of the comments that I've received.

And finally, I do understand that there's a need to adjust the boundaries to reflect the changes of population, so a potential alternative would be to move part of what is council ward five into the Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire constituency, which could increase the electorate in there bringing it closer to the quota and leaving the rest to the Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency as it is with a reduced number of electorates, again, bringing that down closer to the quota. This would maintain the historic, geographical, connectivity and other benefits and connections between Scottish Borders and Midlothian and create constituencies with broadly the same number of electors. So, I do believe that there are alternative options that should be explored and that would better reflect the community ties that exist in the area.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Would anyone --

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: I thought I was going to escape there.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: I will leave you in the hot seat for a moment just to see if there are any questions.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes, Mr Mundell?

DAVID MUNDELL: I am David Mundell. I am the member of Parliament for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale. I am sure, Cllr Sinclair, you didn't mean to mislead the inquiry when you categorically stated that there were no NHS links between the Borders and South Lanarkshire when in fact, you may not be aware, but most residents of Broughton, Tweedsmuir and Stobo the area in what is known as that part of Tweeddale, they access medical services in Biggar. If they are required to go to hospital, they would often be required to go to the Wishaw General Hospital. So, in fact there are significant links and indeed, I was involved along with the existing constituency MSP, Christine Grahame, in many issues that related to those individuals during the Covid pandemic when different rules were applied. Sometimes health boards administered vaccines, sometimes it was GP surgeries and

obviously that created some issues in that nature, but I think it's very important, for the record, that we're clear that there are significant links for some Borders residents with NHS Lanarkshire.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Yeah, I would accept that, that some of those small settlements nearer the border do have cross links. I did say that it was largely connected, more connected, with NHS Lothian. I accept also some patients get seen at hospitals in Glasgow for operations when that's required. So, obviously, there is a degree of cooperation, but it's not the majority.

DAVID MUNDELL: I think it just came across as sort of quite categorical. When in fact, as you say, there are different arrangements in different places. The second question I'd like to ask you is in relation to the existing constituency MSP for the current constituency, because my understanding, having worked with her for many years is that she holds surgeries right across the existing constituency and doesn't require constituents to come to Galashiels, but instead sees it as her role to get out and about and meet constituents in their own community.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Yes, that's true. Christine Grahame, who is the current constituency MSP holds monthly surgeries in Galashiels, Peebles, Penicuik, Newtongrange and Gorebridge. All of those places are accessible to other places. There are regularly people that travel from Gorebridge down to Gala on the train, people who maybe are in West Linton will pop over to Penicuik for a surgery. The point I was making was about accessibility to those places. She holds surgeries in all of those locations, but people can travel from other areas. Those travel links, those connections, don't exist across into Biggar and Lanark from the Borders.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right. Yes, Mr Tosh?

MURRAY TOSH: Thank you, sir. One of the things that Boundary Commissions tend to expect when a political party makes a counterproposal is that they spell out the consequences in a wider area. And I wonder if you realise that keeping the existing constituency across the two councils means that there will be almost 50,000 voters in Midlothian and almost 90,000 voters in East Lothian who would have to be re-grouped because their constituencies would have to be changed. I wonder if you have any suggestion as to how those constituencies might be formed and indeed if you've taken that to the extent that you've looked at the Edinburgh arrangements, which would also be changed as a result of keeping the current constituency.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: I haven't, and I would just like to clarify that I'm not bringing this forward as a political party. This is my submission as an individual and as a councillor for the area. It is not being put forward by my political party. I've not had any input from my political party. I am aware that the proposals for Midlothian have received a lot of comments as well. I don't believe it's for me to fix that. I understand that that will need to be looked at. I have made a suggestion for how the Borders areas could meet the quota for the electorate. I haven't looked at it wider than that.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: I suppose there is nothing wrong with saying that that's Boundaries Scotland's problem.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Well, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Fair enough.

MURRAY TOSH: Could I ask a quick supplementary?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes, absolutely.

MURRAY TOSH: Would I be correct in believing that Midlothian Council has not objected to the proposals other than to suggest the name change and that there is, therefore, no support from Midlothian Council for what you are proposing?

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: I'm not aware of what Midlothian Council's done. I've not discussed it with the Midlothian Council.

MURRAY TOSH: Right.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Could I just have your name for the record?

SHONA HASLAM: Of course. My name is Shona Haslam, I'm a resident of Peebles and a former councillor for Tweeddale East.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Okay.

SHONA HASLAM: Thank you. Cllr Sinclair, that's really helpful. You mentioned, obviously, the children's after school club that your kids go to. Can you give me some examples of perhaps some social or cultural links that exist between the Galashiels area and specifically Newtongrange and Penicuik which are areas that fall within this inquiry?

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Yes, things like our local Gala Days, for example. So, at the Braw Lads gathering in Galashiels, we regularly have people from Penicuik. The Penicuik Hunter and Lass will come and join our festivities. I happen to play with the town band, and I know that we have members that come from Newtongrange or from Penicuik down to join us at these kinds of events. That is one example. I mentioned at the kid's afterschool club they do meet up with their counterparts at the other places in the summer holiday for joint outings, going to Ryze Trampoline Park, for example or Vogrie Park. So, there are various things like that where there are cultural links. I think, particularly, the common riding events - Penicuik is obviously part of that as well and we do welcome the Hunter and Lass down to the Borders.

SHONA HASLAM: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Can I make a point that time moves on and we've got a lot of other speakers, and these points can be raised either personally or with others, if you don't mind. I won't set up the councillor as having to defend the whole of Boundaries Scotland.

SHONA HASLAM: I have one super quick question.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: All right.

SHONA HASLAM: It's a factual question about what you said about the Gala Community Council objecting. I was just worried. I'm not entirely clear. Was that minuted or perhaps you could expand on that a little bit?

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: I haven't seen their objection in their published responses. It was discussed at a community council meeting. They had indicated that they intended to object. The discussion was one of objecting to the proposals. Whether that was submitted by them or not I don't know. Stow Community Council ones I have seen. It's in there. I haven't seen the Gala one although it was discussed at the meeting that they wish to object.

SHONA HASLAM: Could I ask the inquiry just to check --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: No, no - please, no.

SHONA HASLAM: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: We will bring this to an end, but the point is that we have these written responses which Boundaries Scotland can cover and, therefore, all of this information is, in fact available, we do have that. All right, thank you councillor, you are free to go.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: The next person on my list is Cllr Euan Jardine. All right, good afternoon, councillor, just the same format. What do you wish to say?

CLLR EUAN JARDINE: Yes. And so, thank you for the opportunity to attend and speak this afternoon. I want to be clear that Scottish Borders Council decided to trigger this hearing because we wanted to allow communities to have a place to express their views on this matter and I want to clarify that Scottish Borders Council do not formally object to the proposed changes. Now, in my role as the leader of Scottish Borders Council and also a member of Galashiels District Ward Councillor, I have to think very strategically as a leader and for me that's really important. It's not just one specific ward, it is the whole region.

So, I am going to talk about some of the close links we have with existing boundary partners across the country. So, for South Lanarkshire we are part of a £22.8 million levelling up project called the "Three Rivers Active Tourism Project", which involves projects across Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway and South Lanarkshire. We fund the 101 and 102 bus with South Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders Council. We work together to save and sustain that service, each putting in £103,000 and that bus travels through five council areas into Edinburgh. So it was through Midlothian and Edinburgh and most of the highest patronage is in Midlothian and Edinburgh area. But we work together to combine £103,000.

We also have similar rural issues for parts of South Lanarkshire region, so we work across boundaries and I have had meetings between the two leaders and chief executives. There is a natural daily cross-over between residents in Tweeddale West constituency and people living in South Lanarkshire. Things like people not able to get school shoes in Lanark or Biggar because there are no shops that sell them, so they come into Peebles to get their school shoes - schools all over the area for that.

We also have young people from the Scottish Borders attending school in South Lanarkshire. I do not believe there's any young people attending school in Midlothian. The Destination Tweed programme is a £24.7 million capital programme that is part of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. 13 projects will be delivered across the Tweed from Moffat to Berwick-upon-Tweed. It involves four local authorities (South Lanarkshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Scottish Borders Council and Northumberland County Council).

Again, strategic thinking across the boundaries. Dumfries & Galloway, like South Lanarkshire, we have similar rural issues on our boundaries - so, meetings between the two leaders and chief executives. We work and collaborate with Dumfries on the South of Scotland Enterprise and the Borderlands Growth Deal. The Borderlands Growth Deal is worth £450 million, and we also collaborate with Cumberland Council, Northumberland Council, Westmorland and Furness Council, Scottish Borders Council. From this Growth Deal, have secured £65.3 million and 10 regional projects and programmes so far. We do work with Midlothian on the East Region City Growth Deal, which is worth £1.3 billion, and the members of that deal are City of Edinburgh Council, Midlothian, East Lothian, Fife and West Lothian Council. We have received £15 million for projects so far. So, you can see the difference of the two: £65.3 million for Borderlands and £15million for the City Deal. And further points I have to make on this are: we are a rural region with transport links to Edinburgh via bus and rail network, already expressed by Councillor Sinclair. Now, stats have indicated that one of the buses, the 51 bus, that we pay £308,000 for, which travels through Galashiels, Lauder, Eddleston, Newtown St Boswells, Midlothian and into Edinburgh, had 62,500 tickets sold in '22/23. Of those 62,500 tickets there were only 65 instances of people using that bus to go from the Scottish Borders into Midlothian. Now, as a Council we agreed to propose a name change to the constituency. That was put forward by the Boundary Commission and it was to change it to Lanark, Tweeddale, Galashiels and Lauderdale Constituency. We believe this emphasises the strong local identity across the proposed boundary region and does not scare people to think they are going to lose there. It gives us that really strong historic links with each other.

Now, if the boundary proposals were to go ahead, I do believe there would be a great chance of a rural voice, which would naturally connect with the neighbouring constituencies, which covers the rest of the Scottish Borders. There are many difficulties in rural areas and the likeness and kinship these boundary proposals offer would further enhance the Council's ability to work together more collaboratively. Midlothian is naturally a better fit in the Lothian region, it is not a significant partner in our day to day work as a Council, and I am talking from a strategic point of view, and I think the points laboured here indicate that. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much. Any questions?

MS SINCLAIR: It was just a point of clarity really. You opened by saying that Scottish Borders Council did not formally object to the plans. I would like to say that that's not true. That is not what was agreed at the Council and, indeed, in the written representation made and published on the Boundaries website: it does say, "Scottish Borders Council objects to the provisional proposal ..."

CLLR EUAN JARDINE: Yes, so, at the full Council, as you will remember, you put forward a motion to formally object to it, but that motion was removed and we set up a further group to discuss it, and at that group we discussed that. We couldn't come

to a full conclusion on it, so we decided to trigger this, so we could come in and we could discuss and we could have that real opportunity for everyone to come across because it was not fair if - I did not believe we should politically put a staple on it; I think it was up to the communities. So, it was not in principle the boundary change.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you. Mr PURCHASE, you have a question?

MR PURCHASE: Yes, as someone who is a resident of the Lanarkshire part of the new proposed constituency, my feeling is that the proposal would actually split a community which is naturally aligned with one another. For instance, the Carluke and Lanark area, and this proposal for the new constituency. You mentioned that people in the Lanark area use services in the likes of Peebles or in other areas. I would suggest that people in Lanark are much more likely to travel to Carluke or even to Livingston or other areas round there for services. You mentioned shopping for school supplies or shoes, for example. People in Lanark would generally go to shops in Carluke to get their school shoes, just to use your example. The local newspaper, the Carluke and Lanark Gazette, is the local newspaper for Lanark. You know, as part of the South Lanarkshire Council area, local services are very much aligned between Carluke and Lanark and the rest of South Lanarkshire. So, I would just add the point really that, in terms of people and communities naturally aligning, it is the communities of Carluke and Lanark which are far stronger as opposed to a community of Lanark and Peebles or Galashiels. I think the connection there would be quite weak, to be honest.

CLLR EUAN JARDINE: Just talking about your newspaper, I think the local papers are a great thing in this country, but the Peeblesshire News, that's quite regularly got things from Biggar in it, and they've got a bigger talk on the rugby situation, they've got pictures of young players who are away playing, they're talking about whoever. Biggar, I think, they had a really good bonfire night, so there are those ties with Tweeddale as well. But I'm talking strategically as well, and I think it ...

MR PURCHASE: I said Lanark, not Biggar.

CLLR EUAN JARDINE: Yes, Lanark, but I'm talking about the boundary opportunities here that we have got here. So, I am not talking about your area, but what I'm trying to say is, we have an opportunity to be a real strategic - so, if you're in Lanark, that ends up way across in other areas and you will really have the same identity as the Scottish Borders does. We have this great opportunity for a rural strategic case, with two voices perhaps at Holyrood who will be shouting for the rural area, and I think that's the important point we need to remember. Forget about the rural area, don't forget about pushing to the west. You've got a real chance here, as outlined with all the work we are doing with South Lanarkshire Council on this end of the boundary.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much, Mr Jardine. Next we have Councillor Marshall Douglas.

MR DOUGLAS: Thank you. Yes, I am Councillor Marshall Douglas, I represent Tweeddale East on Scottish Borders Council and I am also representing Scottish Borders Council on this inquiry as agreed by the full Council, along with my colleague, Councillor Euan Jardine. Scottish Borders Council have, of course, formally objected to these proposals, that is what has triggered this inquiry. There is some division over whether or not the existing proposals are acceptable or not, and it was felt that an inquiry would be useful so that the public could debate it and look at all the wider

issues in context of that. The proposal for a Clyde Valley and Tweeddale Constituency appears really to be more about the numbers, juggling the numbers, rather than actually taking account of the communities or the traditional boundaries that are spread across the area.

To propose a single constituency stretching from Lanark to Lauder does not account for any local communities at all, it crosses local government boundaries, which, of course, the existing Seat does, but these are local government areas that have never really had ties in the past other than through the Westminster Parliamentary Seat, and people in these areas tend to look - you know, people in the Borders will look towards Midlothian and Edinburgh for their travel and for socialising and cultural activities, they do not tend to look across to Biggar or Lanark. And, likewise, in Biggar or Lanark, they do not tend to look towards Peeblesshire or across to Galashiels or Lauder. The sign of that is that the public transport is not there. If there were the community links, then the public transport would reflect that. Public transport very much reflects the links through Midlothian on to Edinburgh, either by bus or by rail now. So, really, some of the areas, as we have said, bordering Lanarkshire, there are, of course, links; people might go to a local high school, they might go to a doctor's surgery across the boundary. But that does not affect the whole of the proposed constituency.

You know, to have any connection between somebody in Lanark and Lauder is just - it is real nonsense. There is no historic link there. And even if we look back beyond the existing constituency to the old Counties, you are talking about stretching from Lanarkshire through to part of Lauderdale, which was formerly Berwickshire. It is so remote in every sense, historic and cultural. Now, I know that the road network does not form an actual consideration of itself, but I think it does highlight the boundaries that exist in communities.

The name, as Councillor Jardine has mentioned, is also totally inappropriate; to talk about Clyde Valley and Tweeddale and have no mention of the Galashiels or Lauderdale areas. I think it does not help tie people into this new proposed constituency and, if the proposals are to go ahead, then I think the new name should reflect the new area, whether that includes Lauderdale or Galashiels in the title, but I think the Commission need to have a look at that again.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: So, do you have a suggestion?

MR DOUGLAS: Well, I would think Clyde Valley, Tweeddale and Lauderdale as a potential.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Any questions?

MR TOSH: Yes. Councillor, I assume that you also are not representing the Scottish National Party, you are representing the Council?

MR DOUGLAS: Yes, the Scottish National Party have not taken a position on this.

MR TOSH: Thank you for that clarification. Did your Council consider any alternative proposals for either the Borders or Midlothian as a consequence of rejecting or objecting to the proposals, or was it the case that they really only objected to the name?

MR DOUGLAS: They objected to the name and to the change, but they did not actually go into the depths of looking at the actual boundaries. They came up with no alternative suggestions.

MR TOSH: I'm sorry, you say that they objected to the change, but the statement that I have read said that they wanted a balance struck between the necessary boundary adjustments and the preservation of established links. It seems to me that they accepted that there were necessary boundary adjustments?

MR DOUGLAS: Well, there are necessary adjustments and that needs to be looked at, and that is why the Council wanted this inquiry and why they formally objected.

MR TOSH: And could you suggest what those necessary boundary adjustments should be?

MR DOUGLAS: No, that's up to the Boundaries Commission to come up with that. That is not my remit.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes.

MS HASLAM: Yes, I was just thinking again about the cultural links. We have focused quite a lot on the cultural links between kind of the eastern part of - so, around the Galashiels area. In terms the cultural links between Tweeddale and Biggar and Lanark, obviously there's lots of kind of cross-overs (music groups and walking groups and all of that) - the John Buchan Way goes from Biggar right through to Peebles. The historical links between those two places are there and I just wondered if you wanted to kind of acknowledge that or understand that those links do exist? So, it is not to say that there aren't any historical links because they do exist between Tweeddale and Clydesdale.

MR DOUGLAS: Yes, I think they do within certain boundary areas of Tweeddale. I don't think it applies to the whole of Tweeddale. I don't think people in Innerleithen, for instance, look towards Biggar or Lanark for anything; they would look towards Galashiels or Peebles. But certainly in the areas west of Peebles, yes, there are links, indisputable. In fact, you know, there are links anywhere you go. If you look around any boundaries there will always be links across boundaries and borders, but that doesn't mean that you should be in the same Parliamentary Constituency.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Mr Euan Purchase?

MR PURCHASE: Yes, can I make a quick comment?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: A question.

MR PURCHASE: It's just that you were talking about the size of the constituency. For me to get here today it was an hour's drive, from Lanark, whereas at the moment in the Clydesdale Constituency or whatever, I can get about to most parts of it in a more reasonable length of time. So, even to get here, it's not the full length of the new proposed constituency. It's a very massive constituency that's proposed geographically speaking. So, do you think that - you know, is there any changes which might enhance the more kind of local feeling of community within that particular constituency in this area?

MR DOUGLAS: I think it would be very difficult on these proposals because the transport links, as we're all aware, east to west, are not good. Most of the links throughout the area, and indeed through Lanarkshire as well, are north/south links. People don't tend to travel east/west. Even within the Borders itself, some of the links east to west are pretty poor, and, you know, people in some parts of Berwickshire have to travel down through to Berwick in order to get across to Kelso. So, there are issues on an east to west basis, but the size of this, it's as though you're using the numbers just to justify the Seat, basically. I don't think the natural community, the natural links are there and that's the issue.

MR MUNDELL: Can I ask a short question? Councillor Douglas, you did acknowledge just in passing that, of course, for 20 years, Clydesdale and Tweeddale have been linked in a Westminster Parliamentary Constituency, and that was up for review recently, and I think if you could just confirm the Scottish Borders Council did not object to that constituency being retained. The Boundaries Commission decided to essentially retain the constituency, with a small number of changes at the edge of the constituency. But if, you know, there was such strong feeling that Clydesdale and Tweeddale did not have these links, why didn't we see more objections coming forward to the continuation of that constituency?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: I see your point, Mr Mundell, but that raises historical issues, and Westminster issues we cannot go into those.

MR MUNDELL: No, Mr Ross, but the point I was making is, I think that, as I heard Councillor Douglas' remarks, it was about the lack of a connection between people in these two areas, and for 20 years they have been in the same Westminster Parliamentary Constituency, and that there was an opportunity to challenge those connections and say they should not be, when the last Westminster boundary review was held, because there wasn't connections between those two communities.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes, but that is the historic part and I do not think we can go back into the past, but I accept the point.

MR DOUGLAS: I think there are existing Westminster links but the Westminster Constituency is quite different, of course, because the Westminster Constituency does not include Galashiels or Lauder. It includes Tweeddale along with Dumfriesshire and Clydesdale. It doesn't include Galashiels and Lauder, which is really the extension of this constituency that is proposed here today. Also, that was very much the existing constituency. So, any complaints or observations at that time were more geared to ensuring that communities weren't split by those proposals, such as there was a proposal to take Clovenfords out of the neighbouring constituency and put it into Dumfriesshire and Clydesdale and Tweeddale. That decision was altered and the Boundary Commission have left Clovenfords within that constituency. So, there were issues but it was over specific parts of wards rather than redrawing the whole map. That was the existing one. We weren't looking at redrawing the whole map.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much. Next is Councillor Ian McAllan.

MR McALLAN: Firstly, can I thank you for the opportunity to address you today? I am a councillor in South Lanarkshire representing the Clydesdale East Ward, SL3. This encompasses the market town of Biggar as well as a significant number of smaller villages, including Carnwath, Carstairs Crawford, Abington and Leadhills. I have represented the Ward since 2017. As a resident of Clydesdale I object to the break up

of the existing constituency, I also do so as an elected representative. I have not met one constituent who doesn't think it is a really bad idea. "Irrational" and, "Dysfunctional" are two of the more polite responses I have received. I have also spoken to residents and colleagues in the Borders area, which would be incorporated into the new Clyde Valley and Tweeddale Constituency and Larkhall from the Larkhall and Clydesdale Constituency. Again, not one person thought the proposals were sensible or workable.

I, as do most of my Ward residents, completely accept the need for periodic review. However, the break up of the existing Clydesdale constituency seems illogical and, at best, incongruous. Indeed, the proposal as far as I can see only meets one of the four rules set out as guidance.

Rule 2, whereby, "Constituencies should have a broadly similar electoral number." So, can I ask the inquiry to rethink this proposal and retain the existing Clydesdale Constituency, in summary based on the following reasons. The Clydesdale Constituency is currently wholly within and coterminous with one local authority area, South Lanarkshire Council. The proposal will see Clydesdale split between two local authorities, Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire. This will have serious implications for efficiency, cost effectiveness, lines of communication and cause severe confusion with the constituents. Currently, Clydesdale is a constituency only 30 miles or so from both Edinburgh and Glasgow. The new Clyde Valley will be geographically very big indeed, necessitating a very long round trip.

Crucially, and this has been emphasized by a few speakers so far, the current Clydesdale constituency is virtually wholly linked with a very efficient transport infrastructure (bus and train) with only Strathaven not having a direct route to other major towns. I'm at Carlisle and Lesmahagow. Indeed, one of Scotland's major motorways, the M74, runs through the constituency, linking all the communities, including Strathaven. The creation of a Clyde Valley and Tweeddale would see a very dramatic reduction in transport facilities, with no links between the biggest town, Lanark, and the Borders towns, including Galashiels.

Indeed, the only bus route available would be between Biggar and West Linton, which would be hugely problematic for the constituents meeting their MSP, raising accessibility issues for those constituents without cars. In these circumstances, would the MSP currently based in Lanark have to open a second constituency office in the Borders, with the ensuing cost to the public purse, including rent and accommodation, hiring of staff, etc.?

Next, there are significant historic and cultural links between all the communities in existing Clydesdale, with virtually no connection with the Scottish Borders. In this respect I would envisage and unfortunate and entirely understandable tension between the two main towns in the revised constituency, Lanark and Galashiels, where the Borders Council HQ is currently based. Finally, separating the two biggest towns in Clydesdale, Lanark and Carlisle, does seem particularly incongruous and very inefficient. The towns are inextricably linked through business, administration and family. So, I implore Boundary Scotland to rethink this option. I know colleagues in the Borders, in Tweeddale and the Borders, are equally opposed to this irrational change and have put forward rational options whilst retaining most of the existing boundaries in their areas. Similarly, there must surely be scope to retain most of the Clydesdale constituency, currently 72,000 population, as it stands whilst meeting the electoral quota, which is around 60,000, by relocating in areas such as Strathaven,

population 7,500, to perhaps East Kilbride, where close links already exist. Again, I ask Boundaries to rethink this option and to retain most of the existing constituency in Clydesdale and Lothian South and Tweeddale and Lauderdale Constituency, taking on board the completely workable alternative options put forward by elected representatives but, most importantly, the public. Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Any questions?

MR HOY: One of the MSPs for the South of Scotland and I cover obviously from the east to the west, from Dunbar to Dumfries, would you concede with the benefit of modern technology and obviously the generous expenses that MSPs already have, that it is possible to oversee a large constituency without asking your constituents to travel to a central point. That is possible these days, is it not?

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Well, I am just thinking that the transport infrastructure is so poor between this proposed change. You know, the A702 is a major route and the bus virtually stops at West Linton and goes to Edinburgh thereafter, So, there is no railway, there is no other means of transport, whereas the existing Clydesdale constituency has excellent transport links and it makes it very easy for the public to attend MSP surgeries, etc.

MR TOSH: Could I ask a quick question? Sorry, I made a mistake with the SNP councillors earlier. Are you speaking as an individual or are you speaking on behalf of South Lanarkshire Council? And is the proposal to put Strathaven to East Kilbride an official proposal by anyone or is it just your own idea?

CLLR IAN McALLAN: So, in terms of the latter, it's my thoughts. So, I'm speaking as a councillor who has spoken to many community councils, I've got about eight or nine of them in my Ward. I'm also speaking as an individual; a person who lives in Clydesdale, who understands the cultural, the infrastructure issues that currently exist.

MURRAY TOSH: I understand. Did South Lanarkshire Council make a representation at all --

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Not as far as I am aware.

MURRAY TOSH: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much. Oh, sorry.

SHONA HASLAM: Sorry. Yes, it was just when you were talking about transport and that kind of thing, and it does strike me that, wouldn't it be incredibly helpful if we had an MSP that represented both Clydesdale and Tweeddale, who could advocate for better public transport, rather than two separate MSPs looking after their own areas?

CLLR IAN McALLAN: I could not argue with you; I think transport is one of the big issues facing all of the country, to be honest, but I think the transition to this new alternative constituency would be hugely disruptive. Whereas at the moment we have a transport infrastructure... well it would, because you would have people in Galashiels, I think it would probably take two or three hours to get round the constituency, round trip.

SHONA HASLAM: But Highland MSPs have that issue, and they manage.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Yes, but where we have a very efficient constituency boundary at the moment in Clydesdale, why break it? It is unnecessary.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Do you have a question?

EUAN PURCHASE: It is on the transport matter, and you have an example, you were talking about the links to Edinburgh. If somebody was in Lanark and hoping to get to Edinburgh they are more likely to travel either to Carluke to get the train to Edinburgh, or go to stations on the line that goes from Livingston for example.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Yes.

EUAN PURCHASE: If you were to suggest how somebody was to travel from Lanark to Galashiels solely on public transport, I mean I am struggling to think of any...

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Having travelled up and down recently to suss out the particular challenges, you have got... there is only the car. The car is the only means of travelling from the two biggest areas, or biggest towns, in the constituency.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, thank you.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, so the next name on my list is Philip Frame, is Philip Frame here? Alright, thereafter Craig Hoy MSP. Mr Hoy.

CRAIG HOY MSP: Thank you very much. I am Craig Hoy, an MSP for the South of Scotland, and I operate from an office in Harrington, and the second office shared with South of Scotland Conservative colleagues in Ayr. As an MSP who covers East Lothian, the Borders, areas of Midlothian and Clydesdale and the wider South Scotland region, I wish to reflect on the impact of revisions on the neighbouring seats to the proposed constituency. This is because these have a direct bearing on the viability of the commission's proposal for a Tweeddale and Clyde Valley constituency, which we support, albeit if the name was to be more reflective of the geographic area. And so therefore, to deliver this we must look to revise the proposals to neighbouring seats and today I will set out proposals to retain the proposed Tweeddale and Clyde Valley constituency while creating three neighbouring constituencies of: East Lothian; Midlothian North, Musselburgh and Fa'side; and Midlothian South.

All would be within quota and in observance of the commission rules. To a degree, I agree with many of the points made at the Musselburgh hearing by Colin Beattie MSP, the former East Lothian MSP Iain Gray, and councillor Norman Hampshire, the leader of East Lothian council. I don't want to condemn the neighbouring constituencies proposed by Boundaries Scotland, but I do think that they can be improved upon, if the commissioners take on board some of the comments that they heard both at that hearing and that I will present today. I would like to start with Colin Beattie's point about the inclusion in the grouping of electors from Portobello and other parts of Edinburgh.

I appreciate that we've just had a review of Westminster constituencies, and that Musselburgh was linked to Portobello in a Westminster constituency; but that was a quite different review, in a different context. That review had to create 55 constituencies with a quota of over 73,000 electors. As Midlothian was entitled to a constituency in its own right, under Rule 1, it was effectively necessary to link part of East Lothian with part of Edinburgh. But, that said, in this review for the Holyrood constituency, I don't see any reason to include part of Edinburgh's Portobello and Craigmillar ward in East Lothian and Midlothian. And I'm sure that all of the Edinburgh electors would rather be in an Edinburgh constituency than spread over two areas.

My colleague Murray Tosh has shown, and will show in a written submission, that the City of Edinburgh and West Lothian councils have an electorate which can readily be divided among 9 coherent constituencies. This will be spelt out in a separate submission. Equally, East and Midlothian have enough electors for their own constituencies and I think that the Commissioners should take that on board. I agree too with concerns from Colin Beattie MSP that Dalkeith, the town in which I was brought up, is divided by the proposed constituency arrangements. The model I will outline will bring Eskbank, where I grew up, back into Dalkeith.

This is both reasonable and rational: in fact, the gate into the terrace of houses where I grew up opened into Kings Park in Dalkeith, but the driveway exited into Waverley Road in Eskbank; such is the blurring of those specific boundary lines. We cannot agree that there should be no change to the proposal in East Lothian. This is because the proposed electorate is well above the quota and is continuing to grow rapidly. Like Midlothian, East Lothian tops the league table when it comes to recent and projected growth, and this is relevant when we consider boundaries, including the boundaries we are reviewing today. Indeed, when I conduct surgeries in Gorebridge, Newtongrange or Penicuik many of the issues that arise relate to the pressures felt to infrastructure through population growth, and this is very different to the majority of the casework that I receive from residents in the Scottish Borders.

Similarly, a press release issued to the East Lothian Courier and the Midlothian Advertiser may comfortably run in both newspapers, particularly if it relates to the western towns of East Lothian, but there is seldom little chance of such a release making it into the Peeblesshire News or the Southern Reporter. These papers are also far more likely to report events in Biggar than they would events in Dalkeith. It is also worth noting that there are very different arrangements for policy, for example in healthcare, and different demographics and different policy challenges between Midlothian and the Borders.

These include agricultural support or transport connectivity between towns and villages, where there is often poor inter-connectivity in rural areas such the Borders. Similarly, Borders residents will generally be treated by NHS Borders or in Edinburgh, but seldom within Midlothian. And yes, while there are shared transport services, for example the X95 Edinburgh to Carlisle bus, or the 101 from Dumfries to Edinburgh, those journeys tend to be towards and from Edinburgh and not, for example, from Galashiels to Newtongrange or from Biggar to Penicuik. For East Lothian, there are no special geographical considerations to justify making it an exception to the quota, and that is a point we would like to stress today.

We do however recognise that East Lothian Council has a strong desire to move the constituency boundary away from the crucial regeneration project at Cockenzie, and we do not oppose this, therefore, retaining Prestonpans within an East Lothian constituency. However, this does mean that the Tranent ward must be linked to Midlothian as an alternative to Prestonpans. We think that Rule 3, which addresses factors like shape and accessibility, means that Macmerry, which is close to and connected by bus services to Haddington, should remain in East Lothian. All these points are relevant because we can only achieve the constituency which we are looking at here if we can effect those changes elsewhere.

That means that Ormiston in the Haddington and Lammermuir ward, which I represented on East Lothian Council, should move with Tranent into the constituency shared between Midlothian and East Lothian. Indeed, in terms of the East Lothian Area Partnerships and the Community and Police Partnership, Ormiston already sits with Fa'side, sharing greater links with Tranent than the rest of the local authority ward.

The proposal that we will present therefore divides the Haddington and Lammermuir ward instead of the Preston, Seton and Gosford ward, and it divides the Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry ward in a different way from the Provisional Proposals. In ward terms, the effect is neutral. I will not go into the specific detail of the wards included in each of the proposed constituencies, but shall submit this following this hearing. But briefly, the detail of our counter proposal is as follows: East Lothian would have 55,332 electors; Midlothian North Musselburgh and Fa'side would have 55,392 electors; and our proposed Midlothian South constituency would have 53,946 electors; therefore all within quota. In two respects we felt that the creation of these new constituencies might be premature to Boundaries Scotland, however a closer look would suggest that that is not the case because all three have significantly gained population electorate, and all have large and effective land services and vigorous housebuilding at present, and it is clear that the electorates will continue to grow in these areas.

There is also a further incidental but not insignificant benefit to be gained from the counterproposals that we are making, because our model concentrates the lowest electorates in the Lothians in the four constituencies which will contain most of the housebuilding to be expected over the next decade, and indeed it is distinctly possible that these four constituencies will now not need to be altered in the next review, or will require only minor adjustments.

I must also put on the record that regional planning in the greater Edinburgh area recognises that there is limited capacity in the city itself for new housing to accommodate local housing formation as well as migration, and it has been a deliberate policy in recent years to meet the regional demand for houses in East, West and Midlothian, and this has been the driver in the steady increase in electorate of these council areas in recent years. We had hoped to include Pencaitland in the new Midlothian North, Musselburgh and Fa'side seat, to align the school catchment areas more closely with these three constituencies. We realise that there is no requirement for constituencies and secondary school catchment areas to be aligned, and we are aware that Roman Catholic pupils from both council areas are zoned to attend St. David's High in Dalkeith, and therefore full alignment will never be possible.

We think that a closer alignment in the non-denominational sector can be achieved in the next review, when the electorates will be higher. For now, therefore, we think Pencaitland for example has to remain in East Lothian, but in the longer term, we hope it would be possible to place the village with the other Fa'side communities. The central fact, however, and what matters most, is that these three constituencies all meet the quota requirement in this review, and therefore comply fully with the Rules for forming new constituencies.

Changes in the future will only improve on a model which will therefore be fit for purpose. As the criteria for forming constituencies are entirely met within East and Midlothian, we see no value in disrupting local constituencies in the area by bringing in a Borders electorate as is proposed in the new counterproposal. We are not aware of any significant shared services between the Borders and Midlothian, and as I said earlier much of that transport connectivity goes through Midlothian rather than to Midlothian.

Now, I accept that Borders people have to travel through Newtongrange to get to Edinburgh, so transport communications are good, but that does not necessarily mean they are utilised to get between two fixed points in the Borders and Midlothian. Finally and obviously, the proposals we make today are contingent upon achieving a viable model for Edinburgh. At this stage, we feel that it is only necessary for us to show that there are nine viable constituencies that can be created from West Lothian and in Edinburgh. We intend therefore to submit a definitive scheme shortly for Edinburgh and West Lothian constituencies, which will augment the case for retaining the constituencies as proposed by the Boundary Commission. Thank you, and I will draw my remarks to a close there.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you. You and Mr Tosh have clearly done a lot of work to address the consequential, which are outside the region that we are talking about today but nonetheless are in fact the difficulty or the challenge that Boundaries Scotland have to meet. We will not discuss those, will not go into East Lothian and things; we in fact had an inquiry on that already, but obviously we are obliged to you for doing the work and making the suggestions that we can possibly work with. Against that background, do we have any questions from the floor? Yes, Counsellor.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Just a question to clarify. You talked throughout of "we", as in "we will present proposals", who is the "we" you are talking about, who are you representing?

CRAIG HOY MSP: I am speaking as an MSP and a member of the Conservative Party.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Yes.

CRAIG HOY MSP: So we will make submissions in that regard.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: So as a party you will make the submission, or...

CRAIG HOY MSP: Murray Tosh will make his submission on behalf of the party, yes.

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Okay, thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright. Well, thank you very much.

CRAIG HOY MSP: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: The next name I have on my list is Councillor Julie Pirone.

CLLR JULIE PIRONE: Good afternoon. I am Councillor Julie Pirone, I am a Tweeddale East councillor --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Excuse me, could you just talk up a little bit?

CLLR JULIE PIRONE: Yes, of course. I am Julie Pirone, I am one of the Tweeddale councillors, one of the six councillors. I cover Tweeddale East ward for Scottish Borders Council. I appreciate being able to speak to the inquiry this afternoon, and I want to touch on probably some of the points that you have already heard this afternoon but which I think are important, particularly the links from Tweeddale into the Clydesdale or the South Lanarkshire communities.

I believe that there is a strong connection, and I know others have said otherwise here this afternoon but I believe there is a strong connection between the towns in South Lanarkshire and the Borders. We have already talked about that for a long time, for twenty years, David Mundell has been the representative, so it is my understanding from speaking to people that they are well aware that the constituency covers and straddles those council areas. And I think you have also heard this afternoon from our Council Leader, Councillor Jardine, that we have been very successful as a council working with South Lanarkshire, and Dumfries and Galloway, in bringing money into very rural areas.

Because that is what we are, and if you think from the Clydesdale side right across to Lauderdale, we are a rural area, and many people who live here see themselves, in fact relish the fact they live in a rural area with some splendid market towns. I think it is important that we focus a little bit on that market town view because Biggar is a market town, so is Lanark, so is Galashiels, so is Peebles, and so into Lauderdale, and they are all very similar. And my view, and speaking to people and constituents, is that from the South Lanarkshire end they do travel to Peebles, and Councillor Jardine made that point. I know some others say that people will go the other way, we are not saying a hundred percent each way but we think we know, on both sides, that people travel to different areas, and particularly the links from Biggar into Peebles, from the villages round about, they all come this way and vice versa.

But what I want to talk about is also culture, and my colleague Councillor Sinclair touched on this about Gala Days are more known in the Borders as Common Ridings. We have a fantastic series of Common Ridings within the Borders, which are all interlinked. They are interlinked throughout all our Borders communities and into our South Lanarkshire communities, and they are strong ties many of which go across hundreds and hundreds of years. And I think that is important because that is a cultural rural link, and those Common Riding festivals do not exist anywhere else in the world; there are some in Spain but they do not exist in Scotland or anywhere else, and those links are crucial to lots of people who take part in these events every summertime. And some of those, Councillor Sinclair made the point about Penicuik, Penicuik does have a similar Common Riding theme, but it is a relatively new in the scheme of Common Ridings, festival or Gala Day; it was started in the 1950s, the other ones extend well back into the 1800, and that is

important. And as Councillor Sinclair did say, and I will reinforce, that every Principal in those festivals, from Biggar and Lanark right across to Hawick, takes part, and they spend at least three months of their lives visiting those other communities representing their own communities, and they are made welcome no matter where they go. And those links, I think, in a constituency cannot be underestimated.

We are also a huge farming community, from Clydesdale right through to Lauderdale, and those links between our farming communities, our farms, and how they work together through the NFU are also important and should not be discounted, because we are a rural area, and if you ask people in a rural area they are more likely to shop in their market towns. Peebles here is a thriving town centre to compare to lots of other towns, and I do not mean this disparagingly but in Midlothian and into other parts of the Lothians. And I think that is important because those people want to stay in their communities, and they value the links that they have to their nearby neighbours in those rural communities.

I think you have already heard from Councillor Jardine this afternoon about the links across the south of Scotland, a very rural area that covers from one end to the other the Southern Uplands, which is also a huge cultural link; if you go onto any map of the south of Scotland and you look at Clydesdale, South Lanarkshire, right across to the coast, you will see that you can walk from one end to the other, and we are actively encouraging that in the Borders with the Tweed Valley rails, which will go from the Tweed right along to Eyemouth, which is a slightly, is a different constituency. But that opportunity that Councillor Jardine outlined earlier, about being able to bring in growth money from both the UK and Scottish Governments, is important, and I believe that if we have this constituency that is suggested that actually there could be more work that can be done there, and it will solve those transport problems. We are already doing that, we have already as a council put our hands in our pockets and paid for those services that run into Edinburgh, and we intend to do that again if we can and if our budgets allow, but those extra funds from the UK government and from the Scottish government will allow us to do that, to join up those links that we know exist, you cannot get from one side to the other, and hopefully that would be solved in the future.

My very final, last point is about the name of the constituency: I think the Boundary Commission have got it wrong. I agree with the Scottish Borders Council's representation that it should include our main towns, Lanark and Galashiels; that is where people live, that is what they recognise, and including the Lauderdale part as well. Because that is what they recognise, and Clyde Valley can cover lots of things; they need to know where they live in their main towns, and I would ask that the commission take that on board as well. That is all I have to say this afternoon, thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright thank you. Any questions to the councillor? Yes.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Yes, thank you. Do you accept, as it currently stands, that you would not be able to cover the breadth of the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency unless you have a car? There is virtually no other means of transport in existence.

CLLR JULIE PIRONE: I do accept that, but I believe that what the Boundary Commission is doing is looking at a constituency, it is not, as I heard from the

Sheriff earlier, it cannot take into account those transport links. What I am saying, if there is one MSP that covers both of those constituencies those transport links can be better solved than they are just now, and Councillor Jardine outlined quite clearly the amount of money we have been able to harness from governments to allow us to do those kind of transport links, and I think that is what we should be focusing on: the future and how we resolve those issues together, and I believe the new constituency, or the proposed constituency, will allow us to do that very clearly indeed.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Could I have just one more, in response to that: that could take decades, and in today's financially constraining climate.

CLLR JULIE PIRONE: I accept that local government moves very slowly, but I think we have a good record at Scottish Borders Council of moving much quicker on those very vital issues for constituents, and I would hope that we would be working together as councillors in South Lanarkshire and in the Scottish Borders, and with those MSPs, to solve those issues as quickly as we possibly could.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, thank you.

CLLR JULIE PIRONE: Thank you very much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: The next name in my list is Murray Tosh.

MURRAY TOSH: Well good afternoon Mr Ross, again. I am Murray Tosh, I represent the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. I am a resident and elector in the current Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency, and also in the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency. I was a South of Scotland MSP in the first Parliament, and I worked at that stage from a parliamentary office in Kelso. Now, I am going to skim over much of what is in the initial stages of the presentation I had prepared, sir, because we had asked the secretariat if I could speak first and Mr Hoy after me, and that has got a bit disrupted but it is not a problem.

What I wanted to say by clarification is that we have met before, because I came to Musselburgh to speak in the initial inquiry, and I made no counterproposal then because we were broadly satisfied with the commission's proposals for the grouping as a whole in the Lothians, and also in the Lanarkshire-Borders corridor. In the course of the discussions at Musselburgh it became clear that there were other matters which needed to be addressed, Mr Hoy has referred to some of them, but complaints are made that the rules have not been properly followed, and we went back and looked at the rules again from first principles. And the first rule is that local authorities must be used as the basis for forming the constituencies, and the second rule is parity. And a case was made that the scheme did not meet with Rule 1, that it did not pay sufficient attention to local authority boundaries. We went back to first principles and we looked again at the whole of the East Lothian - Midlothian side, and that was what Mr Hoy was setting out: that we believe those councils can stand on their own to form three constituencies.

That is supremely relevant today, although I sense it tried your patience a little bit sir because you have already reported on those councils, but it is supremely relevant today because of the counterproposals which have been brought forward, I understand now not by the Scottish National Party but by the Scottish Nationalist

councillors, or some of them at any rate, on Scottish Borders Council. And we take that counterproposal seriously, because any genuinely worked out alternative has to be looked at. We think that Rule 1 has not been properly applied to the Lothians, both West and Edinburgh, and East and Midlothian. My paper explains why, it is evidence which will go before the commissioners in due course, so I do not need to say any more about that today, other than that we believe we can bring forward a proper scheme for Edinburgh as well as a proper scheme for the Lothian councils, and that there really is no scope within that for including a large number of Scottish Borders Council electors.

I should therefore turn now to this particular grouping. The essential point that we want to make is that the proposals for the Lothians are coherent internally; whether you accept the Boundary Commission's proposals or our counterproposals, there are enough electors in there for twelve constituencies. The question therefore arises: does the current constituency covering Midlothian and Scottish Borders Council have any further relevance in this? And of course, Midlothian council has chosen not to oppose the proposals and has asked for a name change.

That is consistent on their part, because in the first review they did actually oppose the creation of a cross-border constituency between Midlothian and the Scottish Borders. Their case then was that there should be a stand-alone council for Midlothian on its own, so they have a track record in not supporting; they do not feel that they belong with the Scottish Borders I suspect, at least they have refused to agree to it twice. I think what people need to understand, the criticism was made today that this is driven by numbers, well the whole purpose of the Boundary Commission is to equalise constituencies within a reasonable parameter. And therefore the requirement, that is what they exist to do so of course numbers are relevant, they are highly relevant, and I think people have to take on board that in the period between the last review and this review the electorate of the four Lothian councils has risen by over 100,000 people, and that is why they have got an extra constituency. The Lothians are bloated; house-building is rattling like nobody's business in all sorts of locations across the Lothians. And the last thing that the Boundary Commission needs, or the Lothian councils need, is the inclusion of 33,500 additional electors from the Borders, who probably would rather be in a constituency which is largely Border based anyway. The sad fact for the Borders, which used to have two constituencies, is that it is not entitled to two constituencies any more; it does not have the electorate.

Therefore, Boundaries Scotland has proposed a combination with South Lanarkshire, and this does follow the precedent set in the 5th Periodic Review of Parliamentary constituencies, which created a constituency with the Tweeddale wards in the Borders and three former South Lanarkshire wards, and that constituency has existed now for almost twenty years, and it was consolidated recently in the 2023 Review of UK Parliamentary Boundaries. That means that within the constraints of Rule 4, community ties, the Parliamentary Boundary Commission has twice concluded that there is sufficient connectivity between Tweeddale and Clydesdale for a parliamentary constituency to be formed, and that is an important point to make.

Now, a further important point is that South Lanarkshire cannot realistically be combined in four constituencies, which would have an average of 64,599 each. And if you put Clydesdale North and East wards, Lanark and Biggar, into the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency means that the remaining South

Lanarkshire wards can be put into four coherent constituencies, three based on Rutherglen, Hamilton and East Kilbride, and then a large rural one with Larkhall, Carluke, Strathaven and so on. If you took the Lanark and Biggar wards out, you would have to knock those electors who are surplus to requirements on to some other location; there are almost 20,000 electors who would be displaced if the Commission's proposed Larkhall and Clydesdale constituency were not formed.

If you kept the current Clydesdale constituency almost 5,000 electors in the Stonehouse area, and 15,000 electors in Larkhall would have to be put somewhere else, and if anybody wants to change those proposals it really would be helpful to the Boundary Commission if a concrete alternative suggestion could be made.

The gentleman at the back who spoke earlier made an attempt to do that, and I think he illustrated the difficulty that the Boundary Commission has here, because he suggested that Strathaven could be put with East Kilbride, and that was a constituency that existed before; although Strathaven doesn't relate particularly well to East Kilbride on the ground it could be done. The problem is that Strathaven has around 10,000 electors, and East Kilbride is almost 62,000 electors; your constituency then would be 72,000, that is way, way above quota, and the numbers do matter.

This is about the democratic principle that all votes should have equal value, and I just do not think that the commission will agree to put Strathaven into East Kilbride. And I do not want to go on too much about the practicalities of forming constituencies within Lanarkshire but there is no realistic way that I can see, or that any of the people in my party who have looked at this can see, to make four constituencies in Lanarkshire without artificially carving up great big chunks of Hamilton and jacking them off into East Kilbride or into Rutherglen, and that would not respect the local ties of the people in those communities in Hamilton who would be affected. And this is not easy; you cannot just naturally group communities and say: that is fine, do that.

You have to bear regard, it is a statutory requirement that you must achieve electoral parity, and I think the ten percent margin which the commissioners have agreed to is a realistic and internationally recognised framework. The models that I have tried to work out for South Lanarkshire all point to at least one South Lanarkshire ward being forced out if you put Biggar and Lanark back into the Clydesdale constituency; I cannot tell you whether it would be Carluke or whether it would be Uddingston, though there is precedent for both because Uddingston is currently linked with North Lanarkshire in a Scottish Parliament constituency, and under the new boundary proposals for the Westminster constituencies Carluke is placed with Motherwell and Wishaw. And it is worth pointing out, although it is historic because it happened last year, that Carluke and Lanark are now in separate UK parliamentary constituencies for the pending general election. And I think Mr Mundell's point was fair, that when these constituencies were formed people did not object; there weren't objections, or there might be one or two --

EUAN PURCHASE: I objected.

MURRAY TOSH: You objected, right. Well, there were insufficient objections for the Boundary Commission in its final report on the 2023 review, when it detailed where the objections had come from and where it had held the public hearings it did not mention that there had been objections from Carluke or Lanark, and nobody turned

up at the public hearing to say that that was wrong. And it is a very difficult argument to sustain, that you don't object when they are separated in a UK constituency but the world is about to come to an end when they are separated in a Scottish Parliament constituency; I think we have got to get this into some kind of perspective.

Now, the paper which has often been put before these hearings is that you have to show consequential effects, now I appreciate that if we are talking about individual councillors it is a bit unfair to say you should spell out how this will ripple out all across South Lanarkshire, all across the Lothians, all across Edinburgh, but that is the reality of the job that the commission has to undertake. And this is a rules-driven process; the commission must follow those four rules, it must group the constituencies within councils.

I quite take the point that was made about the disruption caused when council boundaries are crossed, but you have to understand that there are only six councils in this whole review which have been given a whole number of constituencies within their own boundaries; the other 23 councils all have to be grouped in order to attain parity. And what is proposed here by the Boundaries Commissioners is not exceptional; it is in fact the general practice that you group councils and you cross the boundaries. What they do try to do is to minimise where they cross boundaries, and try not to create multiple large constituencies containing more than one council area. And this is where I go back to my text, sir, because I have to make the point, this is paragraph 2.7.

The Provisional Proposals from the Boundaries Commission cross Edinburgh's boundaries with West Lothian and East Lothian, and those between East Lothian and Midlothian and Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire; that is four boundaries crossed. Their priority is to minimise, they have got it down to four. The proposal that has been put forward today by a group of councillors who are SNP members, but I understand it is not an SNP party proposal, would eliminate the crossing between Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire, but it does introduce two further crossings.

We think their proposals would mean that Midlothian and Borders' borders would have to be crossed, and also those between South Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire. We think that their proposals, if you followed them through all the areas which would be affected, would cross five boundaries. Our counterproposal is to group West Lothian with Edinburgh, one council boundary crossed; East Lothian with Midlothian, one council boundary crossed; and Scottish Borders with South Lanarkshire, which is another boundary crossed: three boundary crossings. If the objective is to minimise boundary crossings our proposal minimises the most; we have the least minimum. Under the SNP, sorry under our SNP colleagues' proposals, I didn't mean to be impolite, I just did assume this was an SNP proposal, Midlothian would have 49,482 electors to add to East Lothian's 88,539; that is 138,000 people. You cannot contain these within two constituencies in East and Midlothian; some or all of Musselburgh would have to be put into an Edinburgh constituency.

That's going to divide East Lothian Council among three different constituencies, which we think disregards its boundaries because it would be an unnecessary crossing of the Midlothian-Borders boundary, which forced that on East Lothian. It also would create a great difficulty for Edinburgh, because it would be getting a

great chunk of Musselburgh plus all the Portobello electors which are currently proposed to be put in the Midlothian North constituency. So the Boundaries Commissioners would need to go back and reallocate the best part of 30,000 electors within seven Edinburgh constituencies; they would have to scrap the whole scheme and start all over again.

Now I am not saying it could not be done, but I think if you really are going to push that you ought to give some assistance to the Boundary Commission in working through the whole scheme, and I know that is difficult for individuals and small groups of people. The case that we wanted to make was that we have now come up with a counterproposal; it is not in this area because we support the proposals in this area, we agree that there should be a more appropriate name and that should feature Lanark. What we are saying is that having worked our way through three inquiries and taken a lot of information from the written submissions, we think that a better proposal is to stick with what is proposed here, and we think there are lots of community ties which justify that and meet the requirements of Rule 4.

But looking again at Rules 1 and 2, which are the critical ones really, we think that Boundaries Scotland could look again at separating out the two groups of councils in the Lothians, leaving this one as it is and considering carefully the community ties at the margins. That is certainly perfectly valid, it may be that the model that they have produced is not exactly right; you could for example follow the model set out in the Westminster constituency, which has taken the Forth-Braehead-Wilsontown-Climpy area in with Carluke to the Motherwell constituency.

Maybe that is where they should be, rather than in here. I am not saying that should be done, it is not a formal proposal, but that is the sort of consideration that I think is open within the framework. I think it would also be appropriate within the framework to consider whether the proposal made by Councillor Douglas is correct, that Melrose should be separated from Earlston and Lauderdale when they share a ward at the moment, and where they share a school catchment area.

These are the sort of community considerations that I think Scottish Borders Council had in mind when it passed this motion at its council which asked for a public inquiry, but it is very clear that in their motion Scottish Borders Council asked for Lanark to be included in the name, and they also recognised that there were necessary adjustments to the boundaries. My final point on that is that there is no necessary adjustment of the boundaries arising from Rule because the current Midlothian constituency, Midlothian and Borders constituency, is within quota; it does not have to be changed.

The necessary boundary adjustments arise from the new grouping, which as you said at the beginning sir is a totally new grouping, and the necessity for the boundary to change stems from that. So I think that what Scottish Borders Council has said is that they accept the grouping, they want the name changed, they realise that there are community issues to be addressed within and at the edges of the constituencies proposed, that is what they wanted this hearing to do. And of course it allows people to come forward, allows other political parties or councils to come forward with a detailed counterproposal, and so far we are the only ones who have done that and I think that is something that the Boundary Commission needs to take into consideration. And that, I think, concludes all that I need to say now. Sorry I have had to depart a lot from the script that I gave you in advance, but the way it worked out it was not appropriate for me to cover a lot of that again.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Not at all. The point is that we have your written submissions --

MURRAY TOSH: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: -- so we have the detail of what you say. Well, I am sure the commissioners are very grateful for that eloquent explanation of the challenges which they face, and you set that out. Any questions arising from that? Mr McAllan.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Yes, thank you. You stated that the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency has a viable transport infrastructure, could you elaborate on that please?

MURRAY TOSH: I do not think I said that at all, I think I am well aware of the transport difficulties within the area, but I am also aware of a great range of constituencies right across Scotland. I used to live in Ayrshire, not in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley but next to it. That constituency runs from way below Ballantrae up almost to the borders of Kilmarnock; there is no way you can get a bus from Ballantrae up to Mauchline.

You can repeat that in every Perthshire constituency, the Highland constituencies... it would be very nice if buses went everywhere, if we had an MSP or an MP bus service which could take people to central office; that is not possible. Every single Highland MSP that I am aware of has an office in Inverness or Dingwall or somewhere else on the east coast; people have to come from Skye to Inverness to see their MSP. Now I am not saying that is a good thing but that is the reality of life, that you have to have an office somewhere, it is the MSP who decides where that office is, and every MSP worth his or her salt will do so in a place which is as central as they can get to and which affords the maximum opportunity for people to get there, but nobody expects that in a constituency every constituent must be able to travel from the bottom to the top.

People from Ballantrae never go to Ballochmyle; people in Skye will rarely go to Inverness to see their MSP, they will expect that their MSP will come to them. And that is what offices are for, and staff are for, and Zoom is for, and the internet allows. It used to be that the MP for Inverness-shire had to go to the top of the Western Isles on a horse and coach to see constituents; these days transport is so much easier, physical transport is so much easier. And anyone who knows anything about rural areas knows that just about every does have a car, and there are people who do not have them, and there is a social infrastructure which supports them: neighbours will take you somewhere, friends, family will take you somewhere, and if you need to see your MSP in Lanark and your MSP has an office in Lauder, which is ludicrous, it is not going to be in Lauder, there is no way your MSP is going to say: you cannot get here to see me, tough. They are going to say: right, where can I meet you? Can you come into Edinburgh and meet me in my office in Edinburgh? Or: I will be in your area next Tuesday, will you be in? I will come and see you.

I did that as a councillor for nine years, I did that as an MSP for eight years, every elected representative does that. And you cannot create a constituency, except in an inner-city area, where you can guarantee that people can easily cross the constituency and be on the other side of it in five minutes. Let's see this in some sort of perspective: this is a huge country with enormous population disparities and

dispersal, and we all have to cope with that in many aspects of our lives all the time, including political representatives. And I know a lot of political representatives, I know more former political representatives these days than current ones, and they all work extremely hard, the great and the good, whatever their abilities and qualities are, the vast majority of the people I have known go the extra length to serve their constituents, and sometimes the extra length can be a long, long way indeed. And I know all about transport difficulties right across the south of Scotland, I was an MSP for the area, I used to have to travel from Haddington to Ayr on a regular basis, and I find it difficult enough getting from Galashiels to Peebles much less taking on that journey.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, Councillor Sinclair?

CLLR FAY SINCLAIR: Yes, it was interesting to hear your proposals for the Lothians and a recognition that the issue here is in the Lothians, and people in the Borders are facing a big change in order to address an issue in the Central Belt. I wanted to highlight a couple of figures of the constituencies in the Borders as proposed, which you are not proposing any change to. The electorate would be almost 60,443 for Clyde Valley and Tweeddale, whereas Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire would be 55,131, and it would be one of the lowest electorates in mainland Scotland. So I wonder if you did have a look at whether they could be better balanced in any of the calculations that you have been making?

MURRAY TOSH: You could certainly put an argument for that. I am not a member of the Boundary Commission, or Boundaries Scotland, and I do not know what their reference points were for this, but I suspect that they might have been guided by the fact that the areas in the Ettrick constituency were largely in the old district councils of Berwickshire and Roxburghshire, and that most of what is on the other side was Ettrick and Lauderdale.

I think that they might have considered the transport links within the Ettrick constituency, and the population dispersal there from Newcastleton all the way over to Eyemouth; bus services can be a bit patchy in those areas as well. And they may just have felt that was the appropriate balance to be struck. It may have been driven by a feeling that they wanted two big chunky wards in Clydesdale, in order to make it a balanced constituency so that it was not dominated by Galashiels or Borders voters, or indeed by Lanarkshire voters.

It may be that they should reduce the Clydesdale... I have already suggested that there are something like 3,000 electors in the Forth area; they have gone to Motherwell and Wishaw in the Westminster constituency with Carlisle, maybe that is the correct framework. I actually do not know if that is appropriate or not, I am not putting that forward. And I think you could have a decent argument about where the boundaries are drawn within the Borders. All I am saying is that wherever you draw the boundaries in the Borders you are separating communities which are closely linked; you do not really affect people's daily lives and I do not think there is a huge issue about the boundary in the Borders between the two constituencies. I think you have to accept is that what happens in the Lothians does impact on the Borders because it is a shared constituency. We have talked about the Lothians today because of the motion you put down and the representations that you have made; we thought that Midlothian had to be addressed. And the point about Midlothian is that we do not see any real evidence that anybody in Midlothian particularly wants the Borders connection. Their council has not said so, and the

representations we have had today are very much from a Galashiels point of view that your links are closely with Gorebridge and Newtongrange.

I live in the Galashiels area, I live near Melrose, I do not feel any connection at all with Gorebridge and Newtongrange; I do not disrespect them in any way whatsoever but I do not feel they are really any closer to me than people in Perthshire or Argyll and Bute. I pass through Newtongrange regularly to go to Edinburgh; I have set foot in Newtongrange once in my life, to go to the Mining Museum. I have never set foot in Gorebridge. I used to go to Penicuik when I was an MSP because Penicuik was then in the constituency and Gorebridge and Newtongrange were not, but I have set foot once in Penicuik in the past twenty years. I have no reason to go there, but I pass through regularly when I go to Edinburgh, and I think I speak for the vast majority of Borderers that that is how they see Midlothian: it is a neighbour, sure, occasionally you might go there for some reason, but by and large you pass through it.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright. Do you have a question, Mr Purchase?

EUAN PURCHASE: Yes. Most of this discussion would seem alien to people who live in Clydesdale like myself; you have mentioned areas which are several hours' drive away from where I stay. I mean, it has taken me an hour just to get here today, for example.

MURRAY TOSH: Took me half an hour.

EUAN PURCHASE: So I guess my question is, do you not think that underlines the sheer geographic size of the proposed constituency, and really the truth is that the Clydesdale wards in the proposal are just add-ons to make up the numbers?

MURRAY TOSH: No, I think there's a recognition that there is a commonality in the nature of the Clydesdale wards and the immediately adjacent Border wards: they are largely agricultural areas with market towns, they have similar problems. They deal with different health boards and different councils, though the councils do cooperate. I think if you look at this from a South Lanarkshire point of view, what South Lanarkshire gets out of this review, and it has not always had this, is a coherent constituency based on Rutherglen, Cambuslang and Blantyre; it gets a coherent constituency based in East Kilbride; it has not always had a coherent constituency based on Hamilton because it is divided at the moment, it has been divided in UK constituencies in the 5th Review of Parliamentary constituencies, I went to a public hearing and was grilled for a morning by South Lanarkshire councillors because they were so aggrieved that Hamilton was being divided; this set of constituencies creates a coherent constituency in Hamilton.

The rural constituency: Strathaven, Stonehouse, Carluke, Lesmahagow... a reasonable group of small towns, villages and rural areas, I think that is a very good constituency.

I think it is probably the best set of constituencies that South Lanarkshire has ever had. And there is another incidental that I think you maybe have not considered: that by taking Uddingston out of North Lanarkshire, for the first time that I can remember in forty years of doing this we have got a set of constituencies that North Lanarkshire Council has not objected to, because they get a constituency based on

Motherwell and Wishaw, one in Airdrie and Shotts, one in Coatbridge and one in Cumbernauld.

Now there are debates there: there has been an inquiry there are representations there, but the council itself is happy with it. South Lanarkshire Council I think has not objected to it, and if you start to move large chunks of electors around you create a ripple effect elsewhere. And we do not see any way, I mean you can come back, you will find me through the Scottish Conservative Party office if you want to contact me. I you find a way to divide South Lanarkshire sensibly, without splitting bits of Hamilton off, I will be happy to hear it, but I think if you tried, if the Boundary Commission set out to create four constituencies at almost 65,000 you would have to take Whitehill and Burnbank out of Hamilton and put it in Rutherglen, you would have to take half the Earnock out of Hamilton and put it in East Kilbride.

You tell me that people in Hamilton would be happy with that, because these are your typical old mining communities, close-knit communities where the family's all around them. They work in Hamilton, shop in Hamilton, go to church in Hamilton, play Bingo in Hamilton, join the SNP in Hamilton, and you are going to take them out, put them in Rutherglen and East Kilbride, and I would do this anonymously if I were you, because you have to take into account not just the local ties to your area, but the local ties everywhere.

EUAN PURCHASE: I am not talking about Rutherglen, I am talking about Lanark and Carluke, and. --

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Can I maybe rein this in, because we are creeping well beyond the boundaries of what I thought we were covering today. We're Hamilton, and I think we mentioned Skye, so...

EUAN PURCHASE: May I make one supplementary, which is that from my perspective it would place the Clydesdale wards at an immediate disadvantage if you were to split them into this new constituency.

MURRAY TOSH: I understand.

EUAN PURCHASE: At the moment we have one coterminous constituency, and you are going to add us on to another much larger constituency. It just diminishes the Clydesdale voice on the national stage.

MURRAY TOSH: It is actually a smaller constituency in terms of electors, and the two wards in question will have a greater say within the new constituency proportionately than they do in the current constituency. And I am not adding on, I am combining; I see this as a joint constituency. It is actually very similar to the Midlothian and Borders constituency, except that there is interconnectivity between the two areas in the proposed constituency whereas there is very little connectivity in the current constituency between Borders and Midlothian. And I do not think that the quality of your life, and the services that you enjoy, or the access that you have and the transport that you use, will be affected in the slightest by a rearrangement in the areas which are selected as areas in which people vote. The constituency you vote in will be changed; where you catch a bus, where you see a dentist, where you go to a doctor, where you shop, none of that will change. So I think a bit of perspective might help you come to terms with something that I recognise you are not happy about.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Well, thank you for that Mr Tosh, thank you for your contribution. We are getting towards four o'clock, I have one further name: Amanda Burgauer, a local resident. Is she here? ... In which case we have come to the end of the people who wanted to contribute. Would anyone else like to have... Sir, do you want to say anything? If you want...

EUAN PURCHASE: I think I have said everything.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: That is good, sitting in the sidelines.

EUAN PURCHASE: I think everything has been said.

MURRAY TOSH: You have done very well.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Fair enough, fair enough.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Can I... Sorry, can I maybe ask: the website is quite difficult to navigate in terms of submissions, can you tell me the number or level of submissions opposing this, in terms of the Clyde Valley?

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: We have a list of submissions, some of which do and some of which do not; they are not divided up into yesses and no's --

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: They are just the general material we receive, so I am sorry I cannot give you a pat answer, but they should be available on the website.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: And they will be summarised in probably in my report, and certainly the transcript.

CLLR IAN McALLAN: Thanks so much.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, well there will be a further session this evening between six o'clock and eight o'clock, you are welcome to come back if you wish to ask questions of people appearing then, but until then I will adjourn this inquiry until six o'clock. Thank you.
(15.52pm, end of session)
(Adjourned for a short time)

EVENING SESSION:

(18.02)

SHERIFF ROSS: All right good evening. If we can just make a start. This is the second section today in the enquiry to be held in Peebles. I read a lengthy statement at the start of the first session and most of you have heard it already so I am reluctant to put you through that again and I have asked those who arrived tonight if they were happy with me just continuing with what I have to say. The

statement in full will be available on the website in the transcripts of this morning's proceedings which will be posted.

In very short terms my name is Nigel Ross. I am the Sheriff Principal for Lothian and Borders. I am an assistant commissioner here simply to take evidence in a neutral environment to report these proceedings prior to them being transcribed with the report and the transcript will appear on the website when they are available, and so they will be publicly available. The intention here is to discuss the Scottish Parliament boundaries not the boundaries of anything else like the local authorities or the school catchment areas or anything like that. This is as required under Schedule 1 of the 1998 Scotland Act.

The boundaries commission are bound by four rules. Reading short, the first is that so far as is practicable regard must be had to the boundaries of the local authority areas. Rule 2 is that the electorate of each constituency is to be as near the electoral quota as is practicable having regard to (1). The electoral quota this time round is 59,902 people, electors. Rule 3 is that the commission may depart from the strict application of these rules for geographical considerations. Rule 4 is that the commission must take account so far as it reasonably can of inconveniences attendant with altering constituencies and any local ties. The commission welcomes your evidence and wishes to emphasise that this relates only to Scottish Parliament boundaries.

In relation to these proceedings the commission considered a group of constituencies wholly within South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders with a number of options discussed, there was an objection from Scottish Border Council hence a public inquiry required to be held and here we are and other responses also indicated preponderantly the negative replies would to the effect that the residents from both the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire Council areas pointed out that communities in Clydesdale and Tweeddale have little in common. We welcome all comments in evidence and we will shortly turn to that and as I have said at the end of this I will draft a report and make any recommendations that I think have come out of what we hear tonight. So without further ado I will invite the first speaker on my list and that is Councillor Alex Allison. Councillor Allison just come forward and take a seat here and say what you wish to say, thank you.

CLLR ALLISON: If you don't mind Mr Ross I will stand.

SHERIFF ROSS: You can do what you like, yes.

CLLR ALLISON: It is to do with the eyesight and the distance from the piece of paper. Thank you Mr Ross for this opportunity to highlight what I believe are the benefits of this proposed constituency but I would also like to start by giving some background on myself and therefore why I believe this would be a positive way forward. I have lived nearly all my life in the parish of Blackmount which is just inside South Lanarkshire. Farming family. Firstly in conjunction with my mother and father and now my son for over 40 years. As you said I am a local councillor for Clydesdale East and I am in my seventh year of service within that.

I stay near the village of Dunsyre which is almost halfway between Lanark and Peebles. West Linton believe it or not is slightly closer than Biggar. I have a Penicuik phone number and one of the local villages has an EH postcode. That

highlights greatly the number of links there are. Constituency boundaries are a piece of line on a paper just as much as anything else and it is important I think to look at the culture within different groups to try and get as many as possible similarities so that no group is feeling underwhelmed if you like. In my case agriculture is mainly upland sheep and beef farming and this brings the rural community together. This is no more evident at our local agricultural shows, the two main ones being Biggar and Peebles, although there are others in the ward if you do wish to attend. Most exhibitors will show at both of these events and those who are not showing will also attend both of those events because they are not just about the agricultural community themselves it is about people meeting up who know each other, a venue where they can come together and that follows through to the many other events within the agricultural calendar where these links are made.

Moving away from farming, Dolphinton residents look east for example for nursery provision. Skirling, not Stirling is within walking distance of Biggar. Broughton residents will use Biggar for shopping and services such as dentist and doctors. Indeed when I was at school pupils from Broughton area had the opportunity to attend Biggar High again strengthening these local links. Looking at the sporting and cultural similarities both have a background where rugby is the team sport with the greatest following, although I am sure there are many closet football fans who have their own colours as well. Peebles and Biggar is seen as a local derby. For many years now this has currently been done at a social level where it is not at first team level but we do see Peebles this year and we would wish them all the best in retaining their leading spot in National 2 and being able to join Biggar next year in National 1 which will allow that local derby to take place at first team level. Curling is another social occasion and there are no lines there about which club you will join. There is Biggar, West Linton and Broughton all in a close proximity.

What tends to happen is you choose the club where there are people around about you that you are going to. My father curled with West Linton for many years. I happen to be with Biggar. A lot of the choices there are actually to do with where the ice rink are and when you can get ice so that you can get a number of rinks there at the one time and neither of them that are local are in this proposed constituency. Another club I was involved in many years ago was the Peebles and Tweeddale Pony Club. It actually covers an area right from Peebles past Dunsyre right up to almost Lanark where there is a different pony club but again it is all within that one area and helping you to make friends within the area that are outwith the farming community.

Culturally both towns are very similar as well. In the number of different organisations that they have which are working whether it be drama, social clubs, etcetera. That is also seen in the main streets in these two towns where you have a lot of independent traders, strong high streets that attract people (a) as day visitors and the willingness to support local businesses.

There is one other similarity that we notice that I am getting closer to myself which is they are seen as good retirement villages. Villages? Towns where people do like to move to out the farming community, very similar in both of them. As I said at the start as well I have lived all my life in Dunsyre yet this would be the first time above council level that I have the opportunity to vote for a candidate that is not

necessarily compromised by the needs of other parts of the community, the community is one throughout. All in this community may have different political allegiances but all would have the same challenges and opportunities and be able to focus on a single group. This gives, as I said at the start, this gives me the opportunity to speak to you sir which I am very pleased to do. I would like to hope that it gives you the opportunity to confirm these proposals and to create a constituency of similar people who have been compromised in the past and I would encourage you to do so. Thank you.

SHERIFF ROSS: Now any questions? All right, thank you very much.

CLLR ALLISON: Thank you.

SHERIFF ROSS: Next on my list is Shona Haslam. You are down as a member of the public but I think you are councillor?

SHONA HASLAM: No, former councillor.

SHERIFF ROSS: Former councillor.

SHONA HASLAM: Yes, I am a member of the public for my humbleness.

SHERIFF ROSS: All right.

SHONA HASLAM: So thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and speak to you today. So, I am the former councillor for Tweedale East ward from 2017 to 2021. I was leader of Scottish Borders Council from 2017 to 2020. I have lived in Peebles for over 30 years but I have also been the parliamentary candidate for the Scottish constituency of Midlothian South, Tweedale and Lauderdale and also the general election candidate for Lanark and Hamilton East. So I therefore have experience of both representing Tweedale, the wider borders, campaigning the current Scottish Parliamentary constituency and part of the new proposed constituency. So during the past six years of travelling and campaigning around this area I am often struck by the similarities and the differences of the towns within them.

From the mining communities of Midlothian to the mill towns and agricultural areas of Lanark and the Borders they have distinct cultures and heritage that can be seen throughout the areas, their people and the communities. This shared heritage has also resulted in strong links between the communities with many in Tweedale feeling close to their neighbours in places like Biggar. Links are strong with many people from Tweedale using services in this part of South Lanarkshire which a point I will return to later in my remarks. The Scottish Borders is very good at working with neighbouring authorities to gain a stronger position and we have seen this particularly in the borderlands growth deal, the levelling up agenda and to a lesser extent the Edinburgh City Regions Deal which while important did not bring us much investment to the Borders as others and with hindsight Clydesdale should have been involved in the borderlands deal. This is an area that has missed out on being represented at the bigger table and with this new constituency it makes a very strong case for it to be included in borderlands 2 when that is being discussed.

So, these strong links across the south of Scotland stood us in particularly good stead when it came to working through the covid pandemic with the local authorities which I was leader of working very closely together. Issues still arose

but they were based around a false boundary that didn't take account of the reality of how people were living. So one example that I can bring is one elderly couple who were over 80 living in the Scottish Borders but registered with a GP in Biggar. South Lanarkshire were inviting people for vaccine who were over 80 and lived in South Lanarkshire and in Borders they were inviting people who were over 80 who are registered with a GP practice in the Borders so this couple fell through the gap. They had actually contacted me about a drainage issue in their garden and it was only when I offered to go and help visit their garden they told me that they were shielding as they hadn't had their vaccine and explained it to me.

We were very quickly able to assist them and get them along to get their vaccine but the boundaries that were drawn on the map simply didn't take account of how people were living their lives. A new boundary that links up the rural communities of Clydesdale with their close neighbours in the Borders would I believe would be helpful. It would allow for clear representation of their needs and their communities.

Gaps exist and cross border issue arise precisely because the people of West Tweeddale regularly use services and access facilities in Biggar. And there are numerous really important examples such as this one centred around health and education and the big issues of life but perhaps it is the more trivial examples that give a better indication how interwoven the best of Tweeddale and Clydesdale actually are.

So, I get my hair cut in Biggar and yes it is due for a bit of a trim. When the Park Run in Peebles is cancelled car loads of eager runners head to Lanark to join their event. There is a Park Run in Midlothian but the runners of Peebles prefer hills apparently and they head for Lanark. The Peeblesshire News is widely read in places like Biggar which have already been covered and my son who plays rugby often travels to Biggar to play their excellent rugby team and enjoy their particularly good hospitality in their club room. And in my research for today I have been looking for links between grassroots, organisations and Tweeddale and trying to find links with Midlothian clubs to see if there are any cultural links within the current constituency boundary and it was difficult. So the bowling club in Peebles for example only play in Border leagues and I asked the chairman do you ever play clubs in Midlothian and he said no we don't.

The annual Biggar bonfire at New Year is well attended by people from Tweeddale West and our local cycling club have races and organised rides all around Peebles and Biggar loops. There is also the St Kentigern Way which is a historic part of the John Buchan Way. It is a popular walking route linking Biggar, Broughton and Peebles and you do not have to look too deeply to find the commonalities between towns like Melrose, Peebles and Lanark. Towns where the river running through that often feels like the lifeblood of the town, the mills and on their banks are repurpose for tourism but still central to the identity of those communities.

As an elected representative of any area outside central belt travel is part and parcel of the deal and as leader of Scottish Border Council I would often find myself in meetings in Eyemouth in the morning and West Linton in the afternoon but you work hard to ensure that you are always accessible, you are available to the public and you travel the areas as much as possible and personally I find this one of the

most rewarding parts of the job. It grounds you in your constituency. It makes you feel part of the place and you see things and experience things that are important.

Having read some of the submissions to the inquiry during my preparation I was struck by some of the comments opposing the change and they felt very Galashiels centric to me as a resident of Tweeddale and it did make me feel uncomfortable. There seemed to be a presumption that the MSP office would be based in Galashiels that was easy accessible for Midlothian but there wasn't recognition that people in West Linton or further down the Tweed Valley find that difficult. Arguments were based on a Galashiels being harder to reach from Lanark or Biggar rather than looking at the bigger picture and we know that transport links are a challenge right across the borders and no one would try to argue that they couldn't be better and our local MSP who covered that who area would be key to campaigning to improve those links.

So, I have stood for election in Midlothian, South Tweeddale and Lauderdale and I couldn't work out how the two areas of Penicuik and Newton Grange and the borders had been lumped together. They were so desperate, with so little in common, few shared services or resources. People from the borders pass through these places to get to Edinburgh but there is no common sense of heritage, culture, shared industry or outlook. There are different issues with it being an urban and a rural constituency and I feel the local MSP must be pulled in lots of different directions as a result and having stood as a candidate in Lanarkshire incorporating the rural parts of the constituency with its sister areas of Tweeddale it makes much more sense. It would result in a constituency of mediums and small sized towns with similar issues and concerns and similar industries. Rural communities need a strong voice in the Scottish Parliament and bringing these towns and communities and people together in this way would show a much better understanding of the character of these areas as well as the way people live and interact with each other.

So I fully support the changes proposed by the boundary commission as one of the few people that has experience of both representing and standing for election in all the areas but I do agree that consideration should be given of the name by retaining the Lauderdale part of the name. So thank you for your time and that's the end of my submission, thank you.

SHERIFF ROSS: Do you have an actual name to suggest?

SHONA HASLAM: It would be Clydesdale, Tweeddale and Lauderdale.

SHERIFF ROSS: I think that has been suggested already, hasn't it?

SHONA HASLAM: Yes.

SHERIFF ROSS: All right any questions? No. Well thank you very much.

SHONA HASLAM: Thank you.

SHERIFF ROSS: Well next is a David Mundell, MP.

DAVID MUNDELL: Thank you, Mr Ross. Now I am very pleased to have the opportunity to give evidence at this hearing. My name is David Mundell and I have been the member of parliament for the Westminster constituency of Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale since 2005. Prior to that between 1999 and 2005 I was a

member of the Scottish Parliament for the South of Scotland region which covered the entirety of the proposed new Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency.

Although its separate, clearly the process of the creation of Westminster constituencies I do think it is relevant just to restate in 2004 there was a full enquiry into the creation of the Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale constituencies and at the end of that process the boundary commission for Scotland as then structured were satisfied that there were local ties between Clydesdale and Tweeddale. That constituency has been in place for the last 19 years and in the process for the last boundary review in relation to Westminster constituencies that constituency essentially was retained by the commission with just a few adjustments at the edges of it and the principle issue which arose in Tweeddale and the Scottish Borders was whether Clovenfords in which there are roughly 1,000 electors should be in the same constituency as the rest of the Tweeddale East ward or whether it should be with Galashiels. But there was no significant opposition to the linking of Clydesdale and Tweeddale in that process.

As we heard earlier Scottish Border Council did not object to that linkage. South Lanarkshire Council did not object to that linkage and as far as I am aware from reading the submission, although you can't, it is not clear from the summary of exactly every detail of every single submission, there was no significant opposition to the retention of a Westminster constituency that contained both Clydesdale and Tweeddale communities.

When the constituency was originally created one of the rationales of the then boundary commission was to bring together a constituency of small towns and villages of communities that would not feel overwhelmed by being within another constituency with larger communities with potentially different and certainly not rural interests and therefore one of the things that I wished to just restate on the record is my support for the creation of an essentially rural constituency made up of small towns and villages where there is not a single dominant community that through its votes can influence the outcome and people at the periphery of the constituency feel that their votes don't matter and again whilst not wanting to go off at a tangent I think of the factors that can be relayed in relation to the Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale constituency and it is a very large constituency going here to Gretna, some 16 hundred square miles, in the last three UK general elections that constituency has had one of the highest turnouts here in Scotland and each occasion well over 70% of electors turning out to vote and whilst it is not directly part of the commission remit in terms of turnout I think it demonstrates engagement and that people had not felt that they were marginalised by being in a constituency with other communities, instead, you know they wanted to actively participate in the democratic process.

The roles of MPs and MSPs in representing individual constituents is not that different. In my experience constituents have generally have an individual issue that they want their MSP to take forward that relates to their own personal circumstances and it is of course for MPs, MSPs and indeed the councillors that we have heard from, to organise themselves in a way that best meets the needs of their constituents. So throughout my time as an MP and indeed when I was an MSP, I held surgeries throughout the constituency at convenient locations for constituents to come to and next week I will have a surgery in the Eastgate Theatre here in

Peebles and it is already fully subscribed in case anyone is thinking of coming along. I have a surgery in Biggar. I have a surgery in Thornhill in Nithsdale and I have a surgery in Annan all on the same day so that I can ensure that I am accessible to constituents. I think, you know it is not a logical position to suggest that the constituency office must be in a particular town or location. Any MSP worth their salt would organise their affairs in a way that best suited their constituents. In addition to the regular surgeries I hold every month, I actually, which many MSPs I see replicate, particularly the regional MSPs, going round every community and having a surgery in a village, in each village hall.

Now that requires me to have a 100 surgeries over the summer but that is on me. It is not on the constituent, that's on me making myself accessible and that is what it should be about for local representatives at whatever level making yourself accessible. I would never ask somebody to come from Annan to see me here in Peebles or ask people to make complicated journeys even within, even within South Lanarkshire or within the Borders. So I think it is a little bit of a red herring to suggest you know the issues about where the office is because the office is where the MSP chooses for the office to be and the way in which they deliver their services which I think some other witnesses alluded to is changing. Many people would communicate by Zoom or Teams. Many people would if they want to see you much rather see you in their own community and of course MPs, MSPs do home visits as well and as far as I am aware, and I would say I have a good relationship with the existing MSPs for both Clydesdale and the Tweedale and Midlothian constituency and I think it came out in questions they hold regular surgeries across the constituency. They are not requiring people to go to Galashiels or Lanark and I think it is easy, you know, to highlight, you know, the extremities. I mean I have constituents in West Linton and although Shona Haslam referred to Eyemouth, I would not imagine that many of my constituents went from West Linton to Eyemouth on a regular basis because they don't have to. It is not part of their pattern of living and most people would not, they want to identify who their MSP, MP or counsellor is but they don't ... It's not for them what the council administrative arrangements are below that. So, and I think sometimes in this process people assume that there will be other administrative changes as you yourself Mr Ross set out there would be no changes to health services. Nobody in Lanark will be required to come to Peebles to attend a hospital appointment if they were not otherwise for some reason doing that. Nobody will be required to change school. Nobody will be required to pay their council tax at a different office in a different local authority. I have represented a constituency that covered three health boards, three local authorities, three police divisions; it is a challenge for me but it is not for the public because to them it is seamless. So if somebody complains about an issue, about local disturbances in Peebles which has been an issue here recently, I or the MSP would go to the Borders police commander. The constituent is not then required to identify that it is Borders or South Lanarkshire, or whichever administrative unit it is, that is the job of the elected representative.

So, for constituents in the new proposed new constituency there will be no change, dependent of course on who they choose to elect and from which party or background they come; there will be no change in their relationship with their MSP and the way in which their MSP is able to pursue issues on their behalf. And whilst I fully endorse, 100 percent, the need for whoever is the MSP, and other elected

representatives, to pursue transport issues in this part of the world it is not relevant to the consideration of the constituency and how it might be formed.

We have already heard of the many local substantial links that there are, the Lord Cornet and the principals of the Lanimers Festival in Lanark, which is a huge local event there, are prevalent at all the principal Borders festivals, and I have met them on many occasions, as are our own principals from the Borders who are at events in Biggar and Lanark. And I think Councillor Allison really set out that really strong connectivity: the local authority boundaries are boundaries which have been set, but they are not boundaries for communities in the way that they see them, indeed the South Lanarkshire-Borders boundary actually goes through the village of Dolphinton, some people in Dolphinton are in South Lanarkshire and some people are in Scottish Borders. Councillor Allison referred to the rugby but the boundary between the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire at Biggar Rugby Club is a burn that runs behind the Biggar rugby fields, step back and you would be in the Borders.

That would not go down well, I think, with the Biggar supporters, but you could be cheering on the team from Peebles from the Borders because it is simply a few feet away. And I think to convey that there is some huge difference in people and their approach is not correct, and it is evidenced by the local media such as The Peeblesshire News that we have heard about, the Biggar and Peeblesshire Shows which I attend; we have a large number of people from South Lanarkshire at the Peebles show and a large number of people from Peebles at the Biggar show, but also a significant number of people from Lanark there as well. The health links we have heard about; the UK government Levelling Up funding, which will see a major £6 million investment into cycle- and walkways in Clydesdale, which is specifically to link with initiatives here in Tweeddale. So I do not recognise the suggestions that there are not local ties; there are local ties at a social, cultural, family level, but there are already established local ties at the administrative level in the Westminster constituency arrangements. And as I said in my remarks, and in one or two of my questions, those ties were not significantly challenged having been in place for twenty years, and I think the reason for that was because the existing arrangements linking Clydesdale and Tweeddale, albeit for Westminster parliamentary purposes, works well. And I think it would work well, for the reasons that I have stated, in the Scottish Parliament too.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much. Any questions for Mr Mundell? Right, thank you very much.

DAVID MUNDELL MP: I must attend more public meetings like this.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Yes, you had an easy ride there. Alright, Keith Cockburn? You are down as "member of the public" here, is that how you appear?

KEITH COCKBURN: Yes, that is correct, yes.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, thank you.

KEITH COCKBURN: Firstly, thank you Mr Ross for giving me the opportunity to speak today, I would just like to speak on behalf of the promotion of the Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency, which I am very much in favour of. My name is

Keith Cockburn, I have been a Tweeddale resident for most of my life and was a councillor for the Tweeddale West ward from 2013 to 2017, which was a great privilege. I spent a lot of time in that ward, that ward encompassed most of the Tweeddale areas that are very close to the South Lanarkshire border, so that would be towns such as Drumelzier, West Linton, Skirling, Broughton, etc. And when we talk about the connections in these communities, I know the importance of Biggar to the communities of Broughton and Skirling which are very close, also Hartree, which are very close to Biggar. Biggar in particular was a big connection to the ward; the people in these Tweeddale West communities are as likely to shop, use the bank, send their children to the nursery, eat, visit the pub or catch the bus in Biggar as in Peebles, and that is very much part of their life and their norm.

The people from Broughton, Skirling and Tweedsmuir can also register at the medical practice in Biggar, and in case of emergencies there is a local fire station in Biggar, too. So there is a massive connection there between Tweeddale West, and as was alluded to earlier the line of the county border, if you will, it is just that: it is a line, and lives cross that on a very regular basis. But we see, obviously they have mentioned the shows earlier on, but I will often see the farmers and landowners from Tweeddale West and the Clyde Valley at both the Peebles and the Biggar Show; it is a big occasion for the local farmers to get together and meet. And as again mentioned earlier on the Peebles Cornet and his entourage will attend the Lanark Lanimer and the Biggar Gala Day celebrations and rideouts. And that is very much, obviously the rideouts are very much part of the Borders scene, but as we are saying that also moves across into the South Lanarkshire area and that is a very big connection.

By all accounts, I spoke to one of the ex-cornets and he said it is a great day, it is a great occasion when they travel across to that. In terms of other connections, sport has already been mentioned, one of the sports that is quite close to me is the football. Biggar United play in the Borders Amateur League, the A division, so their local derby is against a Peebles team, Tweeddale Rovers. Last season the local derby was against my son's team, which is Leithen Rovers, but much to my son's annoyance Biggar were promoted and Leithen Rovers were not so that derby is on ice for the time being, but again just shows you the local connection in terms of sport. And as mentioned earlier, Biggar has got this thriving rugby team, and they are playing against Melrose and Gala in the Scottish National League Division One, and again hopefully against Peebles next year.

That is just a brief description of some of the sport connections that we have, so they are very strong indeed. So there is much in common between Tweeddale and Borders, or much in common with the Clyde Valley: it is a very similar environment, very similar pasts and presents, very similar challenges. That is why I think this proposal is a good fit for the people of the area, and the elected representatives would potentially be chosen for the seat. We all know that resources aren't infinite, and surely it is better for one MSP to represent a similar group of people from a similar area, with similar needs and challenges.

There will be less conflicting needs to address, so the MSP can better focus on the priorities that are most pressing. An electorate can feel much better being represented by a person that can focus on and understand their rural area, and the character of that area. So again, I just wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to speak, and that is the end of my comments.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Alright, thank you very much. Any questions for Mr Cockburn? No, thank you. Richard Elliot Lockhart, you wish to make a statement?

CLLR RICHARD ELLIOT LOCKHART: Hi there, good evening everybody. I think my voice, my wife always says I shout so I think you will be able to hear me quite well even if I am sitting down. Maybe I will stand. Thank you for inviting me along, and I have heard everything that everyone has said already, whether it is Alex, Shona, David, you have all said the same sort of thing, and I think what I would like to articulate is more of a feeling, if you like, than just boundaries, talking lines on a map, things like that. Because the reality is, if you look at the map you have really got a huge long strip, if you like, along that border, above the line in the sand which says Scotland, where you have got massive similarities, in all of the villages, in all of the towns, in all of the things that people do, and their pursuits, and their pastimes, and their attitudes, frankly, which are very similar across the board. And I made a few notes, and I really think what it does boil down to, very simply, is it is almost urban versus rural in terms of mentality, in terms of thinking, and I think that is very important in what we do.

Because I think in a way rural... I always feel in my time as a councillor, I was a councillor in the South Lanarkshire area too, I never know quite what it is, but Lanark and across to Carnwath, Carluke, and I sort of feel, if you like, I am always tripping up into Biggar and frequently across to Peebles, because nothing much changes when I go in that direction. The people, the markets, the towns, the pleasures, the curling, the rugby, the sports, riding, hunting, shooting, fishing, farming, you name it, huge similarities across that broad swath of Scotland, and I think they deserve to be treated specially together because they fit together. Distance is not relevant, it is what they do, how they live, the way they think. The way people are represented, small towns and small villages find it very hard to get noticed a lot of the time, when they are swamped if you like by the mass of the urban business that goes on. I go into South Lanarkshire Council, there are 62 councillors, I think. There are a few of them, Alex corrects me, 64, I thought we had shot two. Anyway, 64 councillors, and I promise you probably... a dozen maybe? Less?

Have any idea of how I live, how the people in my area live. Why should they, how can they? They can't. They live in an urban environment. And I just think that rather than listing or relisting all the actual individual things that everybody has been talking about, and I could name a few, there are a couple of music things which I am involved in in Lanark, music in Peebles, we have a lot of interaction between them. Biggar I go to a lot, I am in a dining club spread right across the Borders, and everybody there knows everybody else, and we all think the same because we do the same. And I would just like to make the point that we have got an opportunity here to effectively create an area which will be a bit of a power centre, if we are all doing the same thing rather than being divided up.

So I do not want to spend any more time than that talking, but I would just like to make sure that people understand that, certainly from my point of view, my area, my constituency in Lanark, is absolutely behind this because we spend a lot of time in Biggar, we spend a lot of time in Peebles, we spend a lot of time in Galashiels. I am so old now I spend my life burying people, and I have had endless funerals across the Borders, they're all Borders people, at least when we get together over a drink, we all have a common topic, we know what we are talking about, we live similar lives, and that is the point I would like to make.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you very much. I imagine that is unchallenged?
Thank you Mr Elliot Lockhart.

CLLR RICHARD ELLIOT LOCKHART: Thank you.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: Thank you. There was one lady who put her name down, Amanda Burgauer. She is not here? Well with that we seem to have come to the end of our list, so there is no purpose really in keeping going unless, are we expecting anyone else?

ORGANISING MEMBER: No.

SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROSS: No. Okay, at which point we will draw stumps there. Thank you very much for your contributions, as I say I will draft a report, I am not entirely convinced I can recommend because we have two distinct camps, but I will certainly set out the issues. The transcript will be available and the Boundaries Commission will take away your comments and work their magic. Thank you very much.

(6.47 pm, end of session)