

**Local Government Boundaries Commissioner  
for Northern Ireland**

Your Transcript  
Thank You.

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Transcript Details					
	Assistant Commissioner			Philip McDonagh	
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Transcript begins on following page.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it is now coming up to ten past ten am and I now formally open this public hearing into the proposed Local Government District of Ards and North Down. My name is Philip McDonagh and I have been appointed by the Department of the Environment to conduct this hearing. Firstly, I should stress that I am independent of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, Dick Mackenzie, and it is not my function to defend his recommendations. My job is to listen to and consider the evidence put forward at this hearing and to report my findings and recommendations to the Commissioner himself. Any recommendations are to be made within four weeks of the close of this hearing. As far as the times of this hearing are concerned, we have two days available if we need it and I would like to start as close as possible to ten each morning, break for lunch between twelve-thirty and one-thirty and finish about four o'clock each evening. I do not intend to stop for coffee or tea breaks but I will, of course, stop for adjournments, if necessary.

Although this hearing is scheduled to last for two days we may, depending on the progress made today, be able to conclude these proceedings by the end of today.

Copies of the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations are available for inspection at the back of the room, as are copies of the Procedure Guide which governs the conduct of this hearing.

There are also copies of the written representations, relating to this District, which have been made to the Commissioner's Secretariat during the eight week consultation period, which ended on 12 November 2008.

I should also point out that this hearing will be recorded and that a transcript will be made available on the Commissioner's website in due course. If anyone cannot access the website and wishes to receive a printed copy of the transcript, please leave your name and contact details with a member of the support staff at the back of the room.

There are maps on display showing the eleven council model, the boundary proposals for this Local Government District of Ards and North Down and the adjacent districts to Ards and North Down and staff from Land and Property Services are also available to advise me on the detail of any boundary proposals brought forward at the hearing, and also to assist any person making representations with mapping matters.

The purpose of this public hearing is to consider oral representations concerning the Provisional Recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, for the Local Government District of Ards and North Down. If you have a view on the Commissioner's recommendations, this is your opportunity to be heard.

I should, however, emphasise that you cannot reserve your position to await my report. It will not be possible for you to make any written or oral submissions to me after this hearing has concluded.

Some of you have already have made written representations and I have studied those carefully, as part of my preparation for this hearing, and I will certainly take them into account in my report to the Commissioner.

Those of you who have already made written representations may want to elaborate on those representations today; however, I will not be assisted by the repetition of written submissions. If you have already made your points fully in writing, as a number of you have done, you may simply wish to state that you support or oppose a particular recommendation for the reasons that you have already stated in your written representation. I can assure you that full account will be taken of all written representations regardless of whether or not they are referred to during the course of the hearing.

I would also be grateful if other speakers would try not to repeat points already put to the hearing but rather simply record their support for views expressed previously.

On the other hand, if you wish to present substantial proposals that you have not already made, it would be helpful if you could inform the staff during the short adjournment.

Above all, it is important that you try to back up your proposals with evidence where possible rather than relying on unsubstantiated statements, and bear in mind that in making his recommendations, the Commissioner was constrained by the rules set out in the relevant legislation and replicated at the back of the Procedure Guide which you can read at the back of the room.

There are, however, a number of issues that are outside the scope of this hearing, either because they have already been agreed by government or because they are matters for the

new councils, the Department of the Environment or the Secretary of State to address. These issues include: the number of new district councils to be delineated; the groupings of current councils from which they will be constituted; the location of the headquarters of the new councils; the financial consequences of boundary changes; the District Electoral Areas into which the proposed wards will be combined; the city or borough status of the new councils. The city or borough status of councils is a matter for the Department of the Environment to address in bringing forward the legislation for the reorganisation of local government. I would therefore ask you not to raise these issues in your representations.

Upon entering the room today, you will have been given the opportunity to record your attendance and to indicate whether or not you wish to speak. If you have not already done this, would you please ensure that you do so during the short adjournment. Signing the register will also assist us in the event of an emergency evacuation because it will enable us to check that everyone is accounted for.

I will shortly adjourn this hearing for a short period, so that anyone who wishes to make an oral submission can be added to the programme of speakers. As for the order of speakers, I would ask everyone to be as flexible as they can. I will certainly try to accommodate people as far as reasonably possible. There may be people who, due to work commitments or personal difficulties, wish to get away early or cannot stay for long. I will try to give them priority. If anyone has any difficulty being present at a particular time, I would be grateful if you could let my staff know so that we can try to make arrangements for a suitable time. That said, it has been the custom in the past to hear first from Members of Parliament and Assembly Members, followed by local councillors, council officials, representatives of groups and organisations, followed by members of the public. There is no significance in this order, except that elected representatives often have other duties to attend to and, while not making light of people's work and time commitments, this is a custom that I propose to adopt as far as possible but we will be flexible.

Let me explain the procedure which we will follow in relation to the oral submissions. In making your submission I would be grateful if you start by stating your name and whether you are speaking in a personal capacity or in a representative capacity and, if so, for whom. Please speak clearly and try not to use abbreviations or colloquialisms as they may cause difficulties for the transcribers. Also, could you please state

whether you have already made a written submission. If you have a summary or a note of your submission, it would be very helpful if you would provide me or my staff with a copy. If you do not have copies of your submission with you, please approach a member of my staff during the adjournment and they will be happy to arrange for copies to be made.

Your oral submission will be of particular assistance if you are able to explain the reasons why you have taken a particular position, any counter-proposals that you may wish to make to the Commissioner's recommendations, and the reasons for those counter-proposals. When you have finished your submission, other people may wish to put questions to you and I may also have some questions for you in terms of points of clarification.

I would like to emphasise that I intend the hearing to be conducted in an informal manner, conducive to all those who wish to contribute. Formal cross-examination is not appropriate at a hearing of this nature, however, I am very happy for people to put questions to the speaker through myself and, similarly, I will facilitate the person answering the question in the best way possible.

The most important thing today is to hear any relevant information available in respect of the Commissioner's proposals, hear any counter-proposals, and conduct the hearing as efficiently and effectively as possible. Further details of the procedures I intend to follow are contained in the Procedure Guide which is at the back of the room.

I want to touch very briefly on site visits. After the hearing is over, I may go to view some areas under consideration. If there is a particular boundary or feature that you want me to look at, then please mention it to me during the course of your submission. It will be noted and I will try to go and see it.

I will be assisted in the running of this hearing by a team composed of staff from the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's Office, Land and Property Services, and Morrow Communications. Please feel free to approach any of these staff with any queries that you may have and they will be pleased to help you or to draw the matter to my attention.

As I indicated earlier, I will now adjourn for a short period to allow those wishing to address the hearing - anyone who has not already registered their name - to allow their names to be added to the programme and to determine the order of the

programme of speakers. It will be helpful when you are registering your name if you can indicate which aspects of the Commissioner's recommendations you want to speak about, whether you have already submitted a written representation and give a general indication of the time that your representation will take. Depending on the number of speakers we may need to ask some of you to wait until tomorrow to speak. I would now like to adjourn for about five minutes to finalise the programme. Thank you very much.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Okay ladies and gentlemen, I would like to call the first delegation, representing North Down Borough Council. I understand there are a number of you. Thank you very much.

**John  
Kennedy**

Commissioner, my name is John Kennedy and I am here to represent North Down Borough Council who have already made a submission. The content of that submission is on the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations in respect of the current North Down Borough. The rest of the delegation represent the main parties on the Council and you will note from representations already made that there has been quite an extent of agreement on views on the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations. What we will do here is elaborate on the representation and the members can elaborate on the reasons for the details and changes in the wards and the suggestions for the detailed changes in the wards. Starting with the name of the district, the Council feels that Ards and North Down is somewhat unnatural for a name that does not really roll off the tongue because historically, traditionally, it has always been North Down and Ards and they feel that that should be continued as the name of the new Council. There are quite a number of organisations in and around the area entitled North Down and Ards but no Ards and North Down that I am aware of.

Secondly, the Council feels that, with regards to the proposed boundary of the new Council, one change in particular should be made in respect of the Knocknagoney area at Holywood. They feel that, as before in the previous submission, the boundary is more logically drawn down the old Holywood Road and then along the Knocknagoney Road and out into the Harbour Exchange. This would take in the Harbour Exchange, which is Holywood Exchange, and is accessed and has an affinity with Holywood town. It would also include the

Cedar Grove development on the Old Hollywood Road which members feel quite strongly about in that it is populated by people who have gravitated from Hollywood and look to Hollywood as their home town rather than to Belfast. Commissioner, the representation under C explains the rationale for the proposed changes and one of those I have just mentioned - the proposed boundary change at Knocknagoney, secondly to avoid splitting housing developments and thirdly to obtain a balance of electors per ward. Perhaps the most important one is the fourth one which is the Whitespots proposal, where the Commissioner has indicated a new ward which encompasses housing developments in Bangor and housing developments to the north of Newtownards. Members felt that that was not appropriate and have made various suggestions for the reconfiguration of the wards which perhaps the members can explain to you or I can go through them and, if you wish further elaboration, the members can elaborate on that.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Well perhaps it would be useful just to set the scene in terms of the principle pieces of rationale for the ward boundary changes.

**Peter Weir**

It does arise from what can be regarded as two incongruous positions. Firstly, it was our concern that there is a degree of imbalance in the electors. The wards that are more or less exclusively in the old Ards Borough Council area are roughly about three hundred below that in the old North Down. North Down and Ards as two Council areas have a very similar population base. In fact, at the moment North Down would be slightly larger but very marginal in that regard. Therefore we felt that a much more equitable solution was if forty wards were being used to have effectively a twenty-twenty split. There will be later evidence, but I think that it would be reflected in all the main local parties from the North Down and Ards' views that that should be the case.

Secondly, there was this very incongruous creation of a Whitespots ward. It lumps in the Conlig Village - although curiously enough there is a ward called Conlig which does not contain any of Conlig but that I suppose we will be dealing with at a later stage. About half the ward is the Conlig village and the other half is the northern end or the very northern strip of Newtownards town. We feel it does give very much the appearance of bits left over sort of thrown in together. In particular, there are two implications to it. All of Conlig's connections, cultural connections, political connections, have

essentially and consistently been with North Down, and with the Bangor area generally. Indeed, for example, the estate at the very northern end of that part of which is Beechfield, which is a reasonably new estate, most people there would not even refer to themselves as Conlig, they would refer to themselves as Beechfield, Bangor. Conlig itself, be it in terms of the cultural organisations such as the Orange, would be as part of the Bangor district. Conlig has been part of North Down Borough Council since 1973 and has always looked geographically to North Down. It is obviously well outside the remit of the Council directly. Clearly that very northern end of Newtownards has always looked to Newtownards, quite logically on that basis. Not only is that a sort of a unnatural coupling in terms of wards, but clearly - this is strictly speaking outside the remit - whenever then we would come to a District Electoral Area boundary you would, whatever direction that ward if it was left alone would go, create a completely unnatural addition to one District Electoral Area or another. You would either have part of Newtownards in an essentially Bangor District Electoral Area, or alternatively you would have Conlig essentially lumped in with other wards that are really just Newtownards town. We felt in one sense that the two problems, that of the unnatural Whitespots boundary and the imbalance of the electorate, could actually be relatively easily solved by way of the partition of the Whitespots ward, absorption of the Newtownards end into the Ards boundaries and I think most of the parties will have proposals which will encompass that. Obviously from the North Down end, we were looking at the implications from what are the current North Down Council wards and consequently we have produced proposals which detail each of the new proposed wards. In many ways I think the detail is there and probably the rationale largely speaks for itself but if there are any areas that you wish us to explore; obviously we do not want to take up unnecessary time. We believe the proposals that we have put forward - which are ones that are shared across the political parties in North Down and to be fair do not contradict anything that anyone else has submitted in terms of the detail of the boundaries - should be relatively uncontroversial changes and we believe it would create a more holistic solution, one that could be seen to be equitable across the boundaries.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you very much. Just for the record that was Peter Weir, lest there be any confusion.

**Stephen**

**Farry**

Both of us are often mistaken for one another - I am not sure quite why. For the purpose of the record, my name is Stephen Farry, I am an Alliance party MLA from North Down and also a Councillor within the North Down Borough Council. In this capacity I am speaking as part of the Council delegation and I hope to have the opportunity later on this morning to make some comments from the Alliance party perspective, as no doubt some other representatives here will wish to do so in a party political capacity.

Could I first of all welcome the opportunity to address you this morning and welcome the fact that these hearings are taking place. The Council's submission reflects work that has happened between the different political parties on the Council. We believe we have reached perhaps an unprecedented level of consensus within the different political interests in the community. We are confident that our proposals are workable within the terms of reference of the Boundaries Commissioner and also the political parties in their overall submissions across Northern Ireland have essentially endorsed the view taken by North Down Borough Council. Hopefully we are not going to be sued for plagiarism in terms of cutting and pasting the Council's submission, but I think that does reflect the very strong degree of consensus as to the way forward on this. We also believe that what we are proposing will fit in well with points that are being made by representatives from the Ards area and that there is not going to be any conflict between the detail of what is said by any of those individuals and what the Council are saying so that the two can actually merge well together.

I wish to make a comment on the issue of the external boundary. The Council's submission essentially has two options with respect to the Loughview ward. One option respects the proposed external boundaries made by the Boundaries Commissioner, the second variation on the proposal extends the western boundary down the Knocknagoney Road. There are essentially two different models with the Loughview ward, and everything else in the submission would be identical. The variation on the issue of that external boundary only pertains to the proposals for the Loughview ward. Our rationale for this is twofold. First of all, it is to reflect the natural existing community that exists, particularly in the area of Cedar Grove. We recognise that the current boundary is not sustainable and it actually runs through people's houses and gardens. It does not make a lot of sense, so obviously a neater boundary has to be drawn. It is our view that it is better to draw it down the Knocknagoney Road than through what is essentially viewed

as the green wedge within the Hollywood community. The people in Cedar Grove are Hollywood residents, they use Hollywood postcodes and Hollywood addresses. In terms of the issue regarding Hollywood Exchange and Tesco, there is an issue regarding ensuring that the new Council has sufficient access to rateable value. I appreciate that is not a formal consideration that the Commission can take into account, but in the wider issue of those shopping areas being considered as part of the North Down community, I think it is a pertinent point in that Tesco in Knocknagoney would be viewed as the major shopping supermarket for people who live in Hollywood. I would also stress that Hollywood Exchange first of all has the name Hollywood within it. In terms of the road network, you access it through what is currently the existing North Down Borough area. The road junction which takes you into Hollywood Exchange will remain within the North Down and Ards area under the current Provisional Recommendations. It seems illogical to have those placed in Belfast when the access actually lies within the North Down area. There are also very strong relationships that have been built up between the businesses at Hollywood Exchange and the Bangor and Hollywood town centre management and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. There are clear linkages in the overall economic and business development in that area between the two, in that a lot of the shops in Hollywood town centre would see a very strong relationship with Hollywood Exchange in that they are not competing directly. They are offering a different mix of trade; people may go for their bulk goods to Hollywood Exchange and then come into Hollywood for a coffee or some of the speciality shops and that has been reflected through funds that have been given by the businesses in Hollywood Exchange to projects within Hollywood town centre for example, the Christmas tree switch on. There is that historical relationship that has built up over the past number of years.

In terms of the internal ward boundaries, Peter has essentially given the rationale for that already and we are more than happy to answer any questions on the detail of that as it arises.

**Peter  
Weir**

Commissioner, Peter Weir for the record again. There are two or three other small points I want to make in terms of the details of the other wards. Whenever the Council has looked at the proposals in terms of our twenty proposed wards - and obviously you will be doing your own checking in relation to this - we have gone into a considerable amount of detail to ensure, in terms of the changes that we have made, to that all

our proposed boundaries are very clearly within the limits. Indeed there is a high level of equality in terms of size between those wards.

Secondly, I suppose just two points of detail, if I can slightly expand. In our proposals we have mentioned one newly-named area, a new ward to be named Rathgael, at point 4.2 of our proposals. We would point out that may actually give it an almost slightly misleading impression because it actually reinforces something that is there already. On the existing North Down wards, there is an existing ward called Rathgael and there is a natural affinity that people have in connection with it. The new proposed Rathgael ward would actually be quite similar to the old Rathgael ward in that I think it would contain all of the old Rathgael ward. The numbers would be expanded a bit, although it would expand areas that are very clearly still Rathgael in that regard. Even when we are making reference to a new ward it is actually reinforcing something that is in existence there already and where there is already a local connection. The other point which I just made reference to briefly earlier on, on our proposals at 4.13 for what is currently named the Conlig ward which, from a geographical point of view, we have made...

**Leslie Cree**

You are not going to leave anything for me to say, are you?

**Peter Weir**

I am sure as the local man he can expand on this. It was made very clear that that was one of the areas which, with the best will in the world, struck us as complete nonsense by way of naming of the ward, because Conlig itself is generally thought of as the village as you go down the Newtownards Road on the right hand side. The other areas, the other estates, are not in that sense properly considered as Conlig and therefore this ward was named Conlig without containing any elements of Conlig. When there were discussions, I think, within the Council we felt that there was not a perfect solution in terms of renaming, but Ballygrainey was the best possible name, it sort of covers the overall area. There are a number of estates such as Breezemount, Stonebridge, Ardvanagh and large parts of Rathgill come into the thing, all of which are sizable areas. None of which have a great deal of resonance greatly outside of their own area and all of which are maybe at most no more than twenty or twenty five percent of the population of that ward. From the Council point of view, we felt that if the ward was to be named after one of those areas, it could be incongruous and it would not be a natural affinity. We think that Ballygrainey is one that would be well understood within that area. I know that Alderman Cree is someone who has

lived in that area all his life, more or less, and would be very much a local expert in terms of the history of the area as well. Having set him up in that regard, I wonder whether he wishes to expand on that.

**Leslie  
Cree**

Commissioner, my colleagues can say it, I am Leslie Cree and I am an Alderman in the area and also an Ulster Unionist MLA and for my sins the Mayor at the current time. The Council has spent a lot of time looking at the differences between all the various wards with a view to trying to get the numbers right, and I think we have come up with what is a logical solution to the problem in our opinion. My colleagues have dealt with that at some length. That will result in us having twenty wards and the Ards area having twenty, which again would represent an equitable distribution of the population and hopefully provide twenty- twenty vision as well.

Conlig is the biggest problem together with Whitespots and we think that our suggested solution would overcome that in a logical manner. Conlig is one of the oldest villages in Northern Ireland and we would want to make sure that they continued as such under the name of Conlig. It made sense to us to have them in the Conlig ward. On the one that is currently in the Provisional Recommendations as Conlig, as Peter has said we have opted for Ballygrainey and the logic in that is I live in that area. We have followed over the years the old townland names and you have, for example, Ballycrochan, Ballymagee, Ballyholme. This townland of Ballygrainey has probably the largest area in it, whereas the population is more in the town centre that is going to change over time anyhow. We would like to see that townland name, Ballygrainey, preserved. It means in fact that you will have a range of Ballys, Ballys all the way right round to Ballyholme. There is a logic in that, apart from preserving it. I think that is probably all I need to say, we have probably covered all. We have spent a lot of time developing it and it is good to see that we have unanimity in the proposal.

**Stephen  
Farry**

Stephen Farry again. I would just like to make a couple of further points in relation to some of the detail. First of all with respect to the proposals we are making in relation to the Conlig area. I think the Council will recognise that in the end there has to be a sense of a new joining of the Ards and North Down area into a single Council. It is not a case of North Down and Ards being plugged side by side and trying to preserve everything that is the current status quo and not seek changes.

However, we feel that the proposed Whitespots ward does not reflect the natural realities of communities on the ground. We are very wary of wards that we will refer to as dumbbells in the sense that you have made your populations at one end and perhaps at the other end and a relatively low population in between. We do not think those wards reflect natural communities and natural identities on the ground. The second point I would wish to make is in relation to the proposed changes we have made to the ward boundaries. We feel that our design is actually neater in terms of the way it respects natural boundaries on the ground, perhaps to a greater extent than the Provisional Recommendations. We have respected, for example, arterial routes as being the dividing line between wards which avoids confusion in terms of public representation as to what ward people are actually in. I think also to an extent we have used the ring road around Bangor and there is I think only one ward that perhaps crosses over the ring road. We have also used the railway line within Bangor as well. On other occasions, we have tried to tidy up some of the boundary lines where we feel they actually run through streets and arbitrarily split two different parts of a street from one another. Where we have been able to make very small modifications to tidy things up, we have tried to take those opportunities. There are probably still examples of that within our proposals and we appreciate that there is no perfect solution to these dilemmas but we feel that our proposals overall are neater in that respect. Thank you.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you very much gentlemen and I have just a couple of questions mainly for clarification for myself. I should say thank you very much indeed for the very detailed submission and the maps, the hard copy maps which are very helpful to understand exactly what you are proposing. I suppose a couple of things that you have mentioned are probably outside the remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner in terms of the District Electoral Area that will emerge from this. The other point, I suppose, is just about the Ards and North Down balance - the twenty-twenty thing, and I think the Commissioner's objective was to have a balance right across the whole new Council area rather than between two existing Council areas but I take the point that you are making. I have a couple of questions just in terms of the proposed boundary, the new split of what is the proposed Whitespots ward. I think you have suggested that the new split should run along the existing Council boundary: is that what you are suggesting? Is that a natural physical boundary as such?

**Stephen Farry** I think it is a reasonably natural physical boundary. Obviously, I think as a Council we would not be absolutely hard and fast because it does not really take in any population as such. Having said that, I think one of the reasons that I think that it is a boundary between wards is that it is very easily understood as being there for the last thirty-five years, and on that basis I think it is a reasonable natural boundary.

**John Kennedy** Commissioner, John Kennedy. I know that part of the boundary follows the estate wall of the Clandeboye estate so that is definitely a physical boundary.

**Leslie Cree** Leslie Cree again. There is a forest line there as well as a wall and then there are green fields after that so on the ground it is a physical boundary.

**Assistant Commissioner** Okay, thank you. One other question then just about the consequential or knock-on changes that affect other wards in your existing Council area. Are all the other proposals direct consequences of that re-configuration?

**Peter Weir** No, not all of those. Peter Weir for the record. The major changes would be consequential although we also feel that it also has the opportunity to bring people into a much more natural boundary. I suppose it may be easier to identify the changes which are not consequential and they would fall into two general areas. There are some changes that we have made in terms of the Hollywood boundaries, between Cultra and Hollywood and Hollywood and Loughview and obviously there is the separate issue about the external boundary. Those, to some extent, stand on their own merits because if the changes were purely made on the Whitespots side of it, you could actually make one set of changes affecting the other in relation to it.

There are also a few, and we would regard them much more as logical and tidying up changes, that would fall into the Ballyholme or eastern half of Bangor side of it. So in terms of the maps for example, there is a degree of adjustment here between Harbour and Ballyholme, where I think effectively part of one street has been shifted so that whole side of the street is in the Ballyholme ward. There is a very logical change between Ballyholme and Broadway in that we seem to have a slightly

unusual situation that the boundary between Ballyholme and Broadway runs more or less along the length of the High Donaghadee Road. There are two adjustments on Ballyholme and Broadway. There is an adjustment between Broadway and Castle which is a small part of that central Bangor part which is more or less effectively isolated from everywhere else in Broadway. We have brought that into Castle and we believe that is where its natural home lies, but also I think from a point of view of almost neatening out the boundary between Ballyholme and Broadway itself. As you see the current proposed boundary runs more or less the full length along from the one set of roundabouts along the High Donaghadee Road for some reason just towards the very end of it, it then seems to dog leg and we felt that a much more natural boundary was that you take it as far as the roundabout. There is a sort of delineation there. I think there might be another couple of small adjustments.

All the west Bangor ones are largely speaking consequential. We also feel there are minor adjustments as well in the Silverbirch, Ballycrochan areas between Ballycrochan and Ballymagee for instance, and the Bloomfield ward again we believe you should neatening that out a little bit. So those are probably in numbers terms relatively small adjustments, certainly compared to the others. None of those in the eastern half of Bangor side of it or in the Hollywood end are consequential or dependent on the other bits. We just feel these are actually creating slightly more natural boundaries and also ensuring that all of those wards balance up in that regard as well.

**Stephen  
Farry**

Just Stephen Farry again. Just to formally confirm that the ward changes that we believe are consequential from the Whitespots issue, but also in relation to the balancing out of the numbers would be the new Clondeboy, the new or restored Rathgael, Silverstream, Bryansburn, Rathmore and Kilcooley with very small consequential changes in relation to the western border of Harbour and some population changes in relation to Bloomfield. Those would be the consequential changes: everything else would essentially be a tidying up exercise and a minor adjustment to Cultra.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Okay, thank you very much and thank you again for the very helpful maps that accompanied the submission. Could I ask just if there is anyone else in the hearing who would like to ask any questions of the Council delegation at this point in time, this is

your opportunity to ask for any clarification? Yes. Please start with your name and who you are representing.

**Stephen Barr**

Stephen Barr from the Ulster Unionist Party. It is just a question to Mr Farry following the Holywood and the Exchange issue. Isn't it a bit ironic that the Holywood traders who fought so long and hard to stop the Holywood Exchange being built are now wanting to have it incorporated into Holywood on the grounds that they are saying it is bringing people into Holywood when they said at the time that it would not?

**Stephen Farry**

No.

**Stephen Barr**

Really?

**Stephen Farry**

Yes, really.

**Stephen Barr**

But you would accept that their view has changed markedly over time? That they now see D5 as a major asset to North Down and East Belfast.?

**Stephen Farry**

It is not relevant to the proceedings.

**Assistant Commissioner**

Could I ask for clarification? Obviously the proposals have come forward through the Council on behalf of all the members of the Council. Is there any evidence from the residents, for example, in Cedar Grove, is that the name of the area that they wish?

**Stephen Farry**

Again, I think there is a slightly nuanced position here, Commissioner. One of the issues in terms of the external boundaries is that there is one area where there may be degrees and diversions between the parties that are on the Council and the Council's position as a whole. There may be, although it is not part of the Council's submissions, speaking off the top of my head, within the area that has been submitted as, if you like, up for dispute in terms of the external boundaries, I suppose there are two issues. There is the wider issue of Knocknagoney indeed and the Holywood Exchange, but which goes beyond that. There may also be a separate issue,

which I suspect there has not been an enormous amount of discussion on, the one cul-de-sac called Cedar Grove. Now where it probably slightly differs is, I suppose the Council making a submission was trying to draw what it felt was a fairly natural boundary in that regard. Cedar Grove is in a slightly unusual position in that, compared with what is the current position of North Down Borough Council and Belfast City Council, Cedar Grove is currently in North Down Borough Council and consequently would be the one street to change on the Provisional Recommendations. I think there would be at least a reasonable amount of argument to look at that. Even if the Commissioner was ultimately minded not to make much change in terms of the boundaries side of it, on that North Down/Belfast boundary, if he was not persuaded by the Council's position and the Council has given the fall-back position, appreciating that quite often in the past, external boundaries have not changed greatly. There may be then a separate argument which is that the two hundred or so people that are in Cedar Grove who have always been in the North Down Borough Council area - whether there is an argument of what is the exact existing boundary between North Down and Belfast - there is a separate argument that it should remain in that regard. I am not sure that there has been a great deal of canvassing of direct opinion in that regard. I think we are just relying principally on the view of local representatives and local knowledge.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Just on Whitespots as well, I take the point that there is wide spread support for that proposal but have the residents expressed a view?

**Stephen  
Farry**

You tend not to find residents getting overly excited by Boundaries Commissioners' proposals, however, it is worth stressing that as a Council we are very conscious of some tensions within the community in the current Conlig area where you have the historic Conlig village which is separated by the dual carriageway from the Breezemount, Ardvanagh area and the people who live in the Conlig village have, over the past number of years, been very protective about their identity. Conlig village would not necessarily accept that the Breezemount area and other developments off the Green Road are Conlig. We are trying to encourage much greater collaboration between the two, but there have been difficulties in that respect. For example, whenever we were doing a project, as a Council, of rebuilding the community centre in Breezemount and while that was not available, we

were asking the community groups from Breezemount to go across to Conlig village hall and there were resistance and tensions in that respect. We are trying to build relations in the area.

**Peter Weir**

Can I also say there is one other thing that occurred to me - Peter Weir here. From the point of view of the linkages on a very practical basis, there is something that has happened within the last couple of months, so it can show actually that it is both a very obvious and actually a very real example of it. Sadly, despite our various objections, the Education Board closed the local Primary School in Conlig which overwhelmingly was servicing children from Conlig village. Part of the problem was that maybe there was not enough support from outside of the village, but when that school closed, there was a reasonable distance to the nearest primary school and parents essentially faced the choice as individuals of sending their children to either a primary school in the southern end of Bangor or alternatively the northern end of Newtownards. They have almost exclusively, there may be one or two, but they have almost exclusively sent their children to Bloomfield Primary School in Bangor because that is where they see the links. So many of them have done that, that arrangements have had to be made in terms of school transport for them. So I think in one sense, given a very real example, which is outside the Boundaries Commissioner's side of it, but in terms of a test on the ground as to where people saw their links, when put in that very real situation, Conlig parents voted with their feet towards Bangor rather than towards Newtownards. That is where their natural nexus lies, I think it is very practical example.

**Leslie Cree**

Leslie Cree, if I could just come in there. I would have close links with the community association there and what Peter says is absolutely right. There is a local identity there. There is a physical barrier between the Conlig ward in the Provisional Recommendations of the dual carriageway; they are two separate outfits altogether. They have been in Bangor since 1973, very much that is the way they would think and as I say they want to preserve that name as well so that is part of our submission.

**Assistant Commissioner**

Thank you very much and you will appreciate the restrictions or the rules that the Commissioner works to in terms of limitations on what he can look at in terms of community identity but I

take the point. Any other questions from the room, does anybody want to raise any other issues?

**Peter  
Weir**

Peter Weir again. Just one small point. One of us as mentioned about the disparity in numbers at present in terms of the equality side of the wards. I suppose to give one other illustration of that, if you take Whitespots out of the picture, which is half in what is currently North Down and half in currently Ards, that left nineteen wards in what is effectively North Down at present and twenty that would be in the proposed area. I think I am right in saying that in the Provisional Recommendations, the nineteen wards which are more or less exclusively within North Down have a higher overall population than the twenty that are in the current Ards area. So again we feel that this would be something, by way of creating this situation that would be very close to equalise the thing and I think strictly speaking it would be still very marginal. North Down would be slightly higher than Ards but it seems to be the most equitable solution that would leave it closest to a very level playing field across the new borough. We feel it would help enhance relations within the new North Down Ards Borough if there is that feeling of equality from the start, rather than anyone having a degree of a chip on their shoulder that they are under-represented or over-represented.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Yes. I know the Commissioner is constrained by the rules and in terms of it as a new single area, but I appreciate the point you are making in terms of balance across the new area.

**Peter  
Weir**

It does create a greater level of balance and obviously one of the key factors in the Commissioner deciding is to provide equality of representation and also that all wards are within a limit to ensure that there is equality of representation for all electorate. We believe that our proposals will actually enhance that as we feel there to be a flaw in the initial Provisional Recommendations.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you very much and if there are no other questions or no other points you want to add to that, thank you very much indeed. I would like to call now representatives from the Ulster Unionist Party, Steven Barr and Councillor James McKerrow who wish to make a representation. You are very welcome. Thank you very much for coming, please introduce yourselves and your representation.

**Stephen  
Barr**

First of all thank you very much for the opportunity on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party to address the review. Stephen Barr, Ulster Unionist Party. You should have a written submission from us and our comments today will basically be in support of that. We have some general points to start with which are related to the history of the review. We had obviously wanted fifteen Councils; we accepted that argument was lost and we are dealing with the eleven as proposed. We also would have preferred to have seen the legislation amended to give greater precedence to community identity, as is the case in GB with the Act over there, but again we did not manage to persuade other parties in Stormont to that effect. But we have to say, in general, with the review as it affects Ards and North Down or North Down and Ards, we are content in general with the external boundary. One of the issues we did have has been touched on by the North Down Borough Council submission, particularly with regard to the issue of electoral equality and the problem which we believe Whitespots ward is a major cause of. When one looks at the map, you can see it is a very incongruous looking ward which does have Conlig village and then a large green space between it and the north-east part of Newtownards town. If one drives along the dual carriageway there, you would see there is not much of a linkage at all between the two areas and I suspect that they have been put together really because they were left over at the end. It could be defended if there was no other alternative but the problem is, when one looks at the wards of North Down and in the Ards Borough Council area it is quite clear that there is a significant amount of over- representation in the Ards area in terms of numbers and under-representation in North Down. I think we identified some of the wards in our proposal. In North Down only the wards of Bloomfield and Conlig were below the average, whereas in Ards we have nine wards - Comber North, South, Comber West, Cronstown, Island Hill, Killinchy, Portavogie and Regent - which were all below. I appreciate you are creating a new Council, but even if you do not regard them as former North Down and former Ards wards, if you look at them just in terms of a north-south issue, it is clear that the southern end of the new Council will be over represented with regard to the northern end. In terms of electoral equality. I think the Commissioner would no doubt wish to address that. We believe Whitespots is the problem and we believe the North Down Borough Council proposals go an awfully long way towards addressing that and we would be happy to support them.

We have also identified some of the wards that would give us a little bit of cause of concern, particularly the Loughries ward. It contains a part of Newtownards town and it also then stretches across to part of Millisle. We are not convinced that that is an ideal configuration. Even in a District Electoral Area arrangement, I do not know if that could easily be addressed and I think some thought should be given to trying to unite Millisle in a ward and trying to unite Newtownards town within wards as well, where possible. Clearly, we would quite agree, Conlig village is not in the proposed Conlig ward and I am aware that there may have to be some re-warding done as regards the Whitespots issue. With regards to Ballygrainey, on a personal note I have some association with the area. Ballygrainey tends to be a townland in the south and east of that proposed ward. I am not sure that people in the northern end where most of the population is would necessarily agree, but that is obviously a call for the Commissioner to make and some compromise has to be found somewhere. I will just pass on now to Councillor James McKerrow to let him make some further points.

**James  
McKerrow**

Thank you, I am Councillor James McKerrow. I am a Councillor in North Down Borough Council, but today I am appearing as part of the Ulster Unionist Party delegation which means that we are looking rather more strategically and wider. Of course, one cannot totally avoid an element of double-hashing here so I appreciate the very cogent arguments. Taking the Knocknagoney area first, cogent arguments have been made by the North Down delegation to keep that area within North Down and possibly even extend it to the Knocknagoney Road, but I think we have to accept there are also serious arguments about how our capital city, Belfast, is developed. As you said before, it has tended to be constrained in its old 1880 Victorian boundaries and you will obviously need to look at natural growth and how that should progress. However, when we look at the D4 development now known as Hollywood Exchange, I think there are arguments that can be put that that commercial development is very closely aligned with Hollywood town centre. Possibly on the large scale maps it is not so apparent, so the small scale maps I can recommend having, both looking at a large scale map to get a much better idea of the geography and also if you have time to visit the area which gives you a natural feel for that. That commercial development, I believe, is far more closely associated with the Hollywood town centre commercial area and there is a major argument that the decision making on

either local authority for the commercial side, because the two are going to be interrelated, would be better in one body than split between the new North Down and Ards Council and the Belfast Council. The same arguments do not apply to the airfield itself or the growing development on the north side of the airfield where the natural entry point is via Belfast and far more towards the centre of the city, whereas for the Hollywood Exchange the natural way of entry is located in North Down and is in fact very close to Hollywood. As you have heard, whilst there was an initial reluctance about D4, now it is up and running it is bringing custom into Hollywood town centre as well, so there is a symbiotic relationship there. As said, we fully support the arguments about Whitespots and I think we draw your attention to the fact that whilst District Electoral Areas do not form part of this Commission and your investigations, undoubtedly work done on getting boundaries right does lead to the ability to create District Electoral Areas without unfortunate anomalies and this is one way of avoiding an unfortunate anomaly in future.

**Stephen  
Barr**

Stephen Barr. Just the final point we would reiterate; throughout the review, and wherever it has been across the Province, our key has been to try and make sure that whatever wards are produced, they will reflect the realities of local communities on the ground. These wards are the building blocks for future District Electoral Areas, future Assembly elections, future Westminster elections and that is why the Ulster Unionist Party from start to finish has been so keen to make sure that local community identity is reflected in whatever is produced.

**James  
McKerrow**

Councillor James McKerrow, again. Could I just finally commend the work done by my colleagues in North Down. They have put a lot of detailed work in. Just to amplify, the current set-up provides an imbalance of two hundred and eighty eight voters per ward between North Down and Ards. The change to Whitespots would reduce that to about sixty.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you very much for your presentation. Any questions from the main floor for the representation at the table?

**Stephen  
Farry**

Stephen Farry again. Can I just clarify, are the Ulster Unionist Party prepared to endorse the proposals from North Down

Borough Council in relation to what is in effect the current North Down area?

**James  
McKerrow**

Thank you for that. Councillor James McKerrow. What we are recognising is there are cogent arguments by North Down. There will also be cogent arguments from Belfast regarding that boundary at the Knocknagoney end and I think both have to be listened to.

**Stephen  
Farry**

Stephen Farry again. Beyond the issue of the external boundary, with respect to the internal modifications to address the current imbalances and untidiness of some of the ward proposals, would you endorse the proposals made by the Council in that respect?

**James  
McKerrow**

We endorse all those proposals.

**Stephen  
Farry**

Thank you.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you very much. Any other questions? Thank you very much Mr Barr and Councillor McKerrow for your contribution. The next representation is going to be from Dr Stephen Farry from the Alliance Party.

**Stephen  
Farry**

For the record my name is Stephen Farry, MLA and in this aspect of the enquiry I am speaking on behalf of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland. I have also contributed heavily to the contribution from North Down Borough Council. First of all, on behalf of the party can I again welcome the opportunity to address the enquiry this morning. For the record, can I just clarify that the Alliance party does have concerns regarding the eleven council model and also the terms of reference that were given to the Boundary Commissioner. We respect those are not issues to be discussed today and we just wanted to clarify that for the record we have made comments in that respect in the Assembly already.

With respect to what is effectively the current North Down Borough Council area, the Alliance Party would endorse the comments from North Down Borough Council with respect to the internal modifications of the boundary and given that we are a cross-Northern Ireland political party, we are not in a

position to give a formal position on the issues regarding the external boundaries between the two Councils. Those are issues to be argued by our local representatives on the ground. In a personal capacity, I have taken that opportunity through the North Down Borough Council representations to give my own views on that, but the party as a whole cannot take a view on that particular point.

Beyond that, we would just wish to stress that we feel there is an issue within the North Down and Ards area about ensuring that there is a balance of representation throughout the new Council area. We do not feel that the current Provisional Recommendations properly take that into account and that there will be an imbalance of representation between the northern and southern ends of the new council, but we believe that the counter-proposals made by North Down Borough Council address that. We would be hopeful that there would not be any counter-proposals or objections from either Ards Council or representatives in the community in Ards that would contradict the proposals made in relation to the North Down or the northern end of the new council. With respect to the southern end of the new council, in relation to what is currently the Ards Borough Council, in our written submission we have made some suggestions in that regard. We believe that they are consistent with representations that are being made by others. I would note that there is a much more detailed submission that has been made by the Democratic Unionist Party in that regard and on behalf of the Alliance Party, I am happy to give my support to the more detailed proposals that have been prepared by them. I believe that that may well be a more comprehensive way forward.

The only concern we have is in relation to Loughries ward, which runs from Millisle to Newtownards town, though the solution to that problem is not readily apparent to us. We feel that, overall, the DUP submission is a more comprehensive response and it is consistent with both the North Down Borough Council proposal in relation to the North Down area and also the intent of our party in that area. I think it is encouraging that there is the opportunity for a wide degree of political consensus being found between the different parties in relation to the proposals.

Again on the issue of names, as a party we would not overly delve into the arguments in that respect. That again would be left to individual elected representatives to make the cases and again I have made those comments as part of the North Down Borough Council area. I would stress that the names that

are passed on to the councils by the Commissioner are going to be of significant importance, because that will be the starting position from which any subsequent changes can be made. I think it is important that we do find names eventually that actually reflect a new common and shared identity between the new councils rather than simply being the existing names appended together.

**Assistant Commissioner** You are talking about the overall name of the council?

**Stephen Farry** Yes. I think as a general point, whether it is North Down and Ards or Ards and North Down, I do not think that is a strong way forward. The same point would apply to virtually all the other proposed names across Northern Ireland. So I have very little to add to what has been said already from our perspective, but simply just to make clear where we stand as a political party and I am happy to take questions.

**Assistant Commissioner** Thank you very much Mr Farry. Would anyone from the audience like to ask any questions of the presentation?

**James McKerrow** Councillor James McKerrow, Ulster Unionist Party. Can I ask the Alliance Party representative what the Alliance Party policy with regard to Belfast is?

**Stephen Farry** I am not sufficiently briefed to make a response on that by the party, but the party is taking a general view that issues regarding boundaries are to be argued by local elected representatives and the party will take a neutral position overall. In terms of the detail I cannot make any further comment.

**Assistant Commissioner** Thank you very much. Are there no other questions? Thank you Mr Farry. I would like to call next Mr Peter Weir and Mr Simon Hamilton from the DUP to make a representation to us.

**Peter Weir** I am Peter Weir, representing the DUP and my colleague Simon Hamilton. It was indicated previously I am a North Down Borough councillor and also a North Down MLA and Simon brings local knowledge from being a Strangford MLA and an Ards Borough Councillor. In terms of our submission we have

made a written submission, and I will make a couple of very brief comments because I think a lot of the evidence that is contained within it has already been given in that regard, so there is no point in re-emphasising it.

I suppose from a party point of view, it may be useful to explain where the similarities and differences are between ourselves and particularly North Down Borough Council in connection with it. First of all, as a party we too take no party corporate view on the name of the overall Council, though I suspect if you would ask members from North Down and Ards you would get a least two different answers in relation to that. I think the one principle area of difference between the party and the Council is on the external boundaries. As a party we have made no proposals to change the external boundaries of the North Down end with Holywood or the Holywood end of it. I do not think there has been a particularly strong view taken on some of the commercial side of it. Certainly we would take the view that the population around Knocknagoney are more naturally fitted in with Belfast, with the caveat at the area particularly of Cedar Grove, but again I do not think it is anything directly in our party submission but it may be something that the Commissioner may want to consider separately but in terms of the overall picture it is relatively small. Beyond that as regards to the North Down end, our submission I think is pretty much identical to that of North Down Borough Council in terms of boundaries, in terms of ensuring equality of representation and also in terms of the name side of it. Obviously as a party we appreciated that with the issue with Whitespots if Whitespots then, as part of the Final Recommendations was to disappear, there would be clearly implications for North Down as a whole. We also appreciated that that also had a ripple and implication effect in terms of the Ards area and it may be worthwhile in terms of the Ards area to hand over to my colleague, Simon Hamilton, to address any of the issues as regards Ards.

**Simon  
Hamilton**

Thank you, Simon Hamilton. As Peter has said there are really two main issues from an Ards perspective that the party would draw to the Commissioner's attention. That is, as has been said, the proposed Whitespots ward and also Island Hill. I think some length has been gone into by previous speakers and different representatives on the Whitespots problem and I do not think I need to elaborate more on that, other than to say that to in some way re-draw that boundary to make it cleaner both for potential District Electoral Area boundaries or future Assembly/Parliamentary boundaries, there is a consequential

ripple effect on into other wards within Newtownards. The party has made a submission making suggestions for where boundaries could be re-drawn to obviously achieve the desired average number of electors within that ward and that has a ripple on right through. That is the majority of wards within the Newtownards town area and I note that the previous speaker from the Alliance Party, Dr Farry, has at least accepted that those proposals that our party are making have some merit.

The problem at the Island Hill end is in some way similar to the Whitespots problem but without the implication for future Parliamentary boundaries. It seemed that the proposed ward had sections of Newtownards in with parts of Comber and we did not believe that that was a neat fit for a ward boundary. It had a potentially consequential effect on the future District Electoral Area boundary where you would have part of Comber within possibly Newtownards District Electoral Area, or vice versa, and this had been a problem in the past. Many years ago on the Westlands estate, which is the principle section of where Newtownards is proposed to be in the Island Hill ward, was within Ards West centred around Comber District Electoral Area. That had created a sort of sense of where people who are from Newtownards had not really an identity or an attachment to Newtownards at an electoral level because they were electing Councillors to a Comber and Ballygowan based District Electoral Area. So we thought that as a consequence of the ripple effect rolling around from suggested changes at the Whitespots end, that afforded an opportunity to change the boundaries of Island Hill, which made it neater. Our suggestion, I think, is a much neater division between Comber and Newtownards. So you have distinctly Comber areas within the Comber North ward and the very defined Newtownards parts within the new Island Hill which we have also suggested should be possibly renamed as Scrabo. Those are the two problems, the Whitespots problem and the Island Hill problem. We have made some suggestions that could possibly resolve those. I am quite happy to take any questions that there might be on the suggestions that we have made.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Thank you very much gentlemen and I have just a couple of questions. What you have said about the proposals for the northern bit of the proposed new Council area and, with the exception of what the Council delegation has proposed in terms of Knocknagoney, all the other proposals and the Council proposal would endorse or support all of those?

**Simon  
Hamilton**

I think I am right in saying, and I think this is the case with each of the parties, the main parties in North Down Borough Council in terms of the party submissions and I think in terms of the Council's submission, are pretty much identical in that regard. I suspect if there is any degree of divergence, with the exception of that western boundary, putting those terms on it, it might be a degree of oversight between the different groupings. I think there was a feeling that this was a sensible solution that people want.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Good. Thank you and I have one question on the southern end. In terms of all the proposals you have put in your written submission in relation to the former Ards Council area, are they all consequences of the Whitespots realignment or are there other proposals that are additional to those?

**Simon  
Hamilton**

No, they are all really consequences of the ripple effect from Whitespots and also bearing in mind the proposed Island Hill ward, suggesting as well there are a few small changes in and around Comber, Comber North, Comber South, Comber West which I think might get a better balance of electors across those wards, so they are all effectively a consequential knock-on effect from the northern-southern boundary.

**Peter Weir**

Peter Weir. We also feel obviously arising out of that, that what we have now identified as the Whitespots problem and the Island Hill problem, the consequential changes actually kill two birds with one stone. You know, they actually manage to marry in and make a solution to both those.

**Simon  
Hamilton**

Simon Hamilton again. The Whitespots ripple affords the opportunity to correct the Island Hill problem as well.

**Assistant  
Commissioner**

Okay, thank you very much. Anyone from the body of the hall like to ask any questions about the DUP presentation? Well, thank you very much gentlemen for that presentation and that concludes the list that I have to date. We will take a five minute adjournment to see if there are any more representations to be made this morning, and if not we will adjourn for lunch. Thank you very much.

ADJOURNMENT

**Assistant  
Commissioner** We resumed the public hearing at one-thirty pm and there being no further submissions we closed the public hearing at two pm.

**ENDS**

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