Good morning, everyone. It is 10am and I formally open this public inquiry into the proposed District Electoral Areas for the local government district of Antrim and Newtownabbey. My name is Paul Dougan and I have been appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to conduct this inquiry.

Firstly, I should stress that I am independent of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Dick Mackenzie, and it is not my function to defend his recommendations; my role is to listen to and to consider the evidence put forward at this inquiry and to report my findings and my recommendations to the Commissioner. My recommendations are to be made within four weeks of the close of this inquiry.

I intend to break for lunch between 12.30pm and 1.30pm and finish this evening at 5pm. I do not plan to stop for breaks, but will of course stop for adjournments, if necessary.

Copies of the Commissioner’s provisional recommendations are available for inspection here; there are also copies of the written representations relating to this district, which have been made to the Commissioner during the eight week consultation period which ended on 27th June last.

I should also point out that this inquiry 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 my support staff.

There are maps available and on the screen showing the proposed grouping of wards into electoral areas.

What is the purpose and scope of this inquiry? Well, it is to consider representations concerning the provisional recommendations of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner for this local government district of Antrim and Newtownabbey. It should be noted that this inquiry has been convened to consider
and hear arguments for and against the objections raised to the Commissioner's proposal during the consultation period which, as I said, closed on 27th June.

Please note that new objections unrelated to those already submitted cannot be considered and that is a very important point. I must also 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, or indeed to the Commissioner, after this inquiry has concluded. Some of you may already have made written representations. I have studied those carefully as part of my preparation for today's inquiry and I will certainly take them into account in my report to the Commissioner.

Those of you who have already made written representations will 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 you may simply wish to state that you support or oppose a particular recommendation for the reasons that you've already stated in your written representation. I can assure you that full account will be taken of all the written representations regardless of whether or not they are referred to during the course of this inquiry.

I should also be grateful if other speakers would try not to repeat points already put to the inquiry, but rather simply record their support for views expressed previously. Above all, it is important that you try to back up your proposals with evidence where possible, rather than relying on unsubstantiated statements. Bear in mind that in making his recommendations the Commissioner was constrained by the rules set out in the relevant legislation and replicated in his report and those rules can be found at Paragraph 3.1 of his report on Page 5.

There are, however, a number of issues that are outside the scope of this inquiry. These include the boundaries and names of local government districts and their constituent wards, since these have already been settled under the terms of the Local Government Boundaries Order 2012; the impact of the provisional recommendations on political representation and the third issue is any issue that does not relate to the Commissioner's proposal for the grouping of wards within this
particular local government district. I therefore ask you please not to raise these issues in your representations.

I will shortly move to call our first speaker and anyone who wishes to make an oral submission can have their name added to the programme of speakers by contacting a member of my staff. If you not already registered, please do so as soon as possible, indicating when you register whether or not you wish to make a presentation.

In terms of the order of speakers, I would ask that everyone be as flexible as they can and I will certainly try to accommodate people as far as is reasonably possible. There may be people, who, due to other commitments require a particular speaking slot; I will try to give them priority. If anyone has difficulty being present at a particular time, please let my staff know so that we can try and make arrangements for a suitable slot.

The procedure we will follow in relation to the oral submissions is as follows. You will be called to come up to the table in front of me to speak into the microphones provided. In making your submission could you please start by stating your name and whether you’re 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 in due course. Also could you please state whether you have already made a written submission.

Your oral submission will be of particular assistance if you are able to explain the reasons why you have taken a particular position; for example, supporting an objection and counterproposal to the Commissioner’s recommendation, supporting the Commissioner’s original recommendation or proposing an alternative to both. When you have finished your submission others may wish to put questions to you from the floor and I may also have some questions for you or points of clarification.

I would like to emphasise that I intend this inquiry to be conducted in an informal manner conducive to all those who wish to contribute. Formal cross-examination is not appropriate at an inquiry 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.

Can I touch very briefly on the topic of site visits? After this inquiry 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, please mention it during the course of your submission. It will be noted and I will try to go and see it.

I will be assisted today in the running of this inquiry by a team composed of staff from the District Electoral Areas Commissioner's Office 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 draw the matter to my attention.

That concludes the opening remarks that I have to make. Unless there's any particular reason not to do so, I propose to move straight to our first speaker and that is Mr Sam Nelson.

Sam Nelson:

Thank you. I am Sam Nelson speaking on behalf of the Alliance Party. First of all, I'd like to record David Ford's apologies; he was hoping to be here today but unfortunately due to DOJ business he has not been able to attend.

We would basically just like to run over a few of the things already raised that our written representation will expand on a little bit more. In regards to the four northerly DEAs, we broadly support the grouping of the wards as a good attempt to consider local infrastructure and electoral identity. We recognise the need for a certain degree of change and, given the reduction in the number of wards, agree that it's important to keep the current Antrim Town together as a DEA. So, on reflection, we think that is a good attempt at covering all those points.

We recognise the need to move one of the wards out of either the current Antrim Town or the current South East, to make up the Dunsilly DEA, and realistically this means moving either Springfarm or Parkgate. We feel that Springfarm has local connections with the town itself and should remain there and therefore Parkgate would be the most reasonable.

In relation to the Airport DEA, we realise that this needs to make up one ward and moving Mallusk into the Airport represents a
good link with local road networks and also historical ties dating back to the United Irishmen 200 years ago.

In relation to the three DEAs in the southerly section, we would suggest there is a need to look at this again. What makes up the urban Newtownabbey DEA, we feel could be better represented within local networks and identities. With most of the wards reduced in the four DEAs in the north, we feel there is a strong case for keeping the urban Newtownabbey area as similar as possible to the current setup.

With vastly increased populations both in Antrim Line and University, we think it's possibly best to reduce Macedon to six, completing the reduction of wards whilst keeping the area intact as best as possible.

The removal of Glebe from Antrim Line we feel should seriously be reconsidered. Given the historical connection it has with the Glengormley area, there has never been a Glengormley area that hasn't included Glebe and we don't feel this is a time to change that. And there are also very little local ties with Glebe and the Macedon DEA itself.

Within the proposed Sandyknowes DEA, it would then move up to eight and we feel that the most reasonable ward to lose would be Mossley and that could be moved into the Three Mile Water DEA. Since 1973 Mossley has almost continuously been part of a university-based DEA, so we feel that that would be reasonable to move.

There are also local footpath and cycle routes and the Three Mile Water walk itself connects Mossley with the current University DEA so it would sit well within that.

Finally, the submission highlights the Carnmoney Hill ward - this is our original submission to the proposals. We feel that the Carnmoney Hill ward doesn't sit particularly well with any DEA but with the majority of the north and westerly populations sharing significant ties with University, we feel that could be moved into University making it a seven ward DEA.

We suggest that it should be grouped in with the Three Mile Water DEA, making it seven, and this represents the local identity of the area. It's a large population area and we feel that the seven ward DEA would suit that as well. We've also had a
chance to look at it again and we feel that there is also a case to be made for the Abbey ward moving in with the University DEA, but we realise that the DEA cannot go above seven. Again, the area itself, there is a clear identity within the local road networks that connect it all and so either the Carnmoney Hill or the Abbey ward moving into University we think would keep the identity.

Finally on the names - we believe the proposed names could be changed so that the current names remain the same or as similar as possible. Particularly Sandyknowes and Airport refer to local infrastructure landmarks that don't capture the character and mix of the areas and we feel that there's little reason for changing from the current proposal.

Paul Dougan: Obviously we've a rather small number here and I recognise the other member of the public who is here is a colleague of yours so I don't imagine he has anything to take issue with or to endorse but is there anything just for the sake of completeness that you want to add to that, before I ask a few questions?

John Blair: Not at this time; I'll speak separately.

Paul Dougan: I have a number of questions. And I think because this proposal or the recommendations submitted by Alliance represents a fairly significant reconfiguration of things, I want to make sure that I understand this so I am going to go through this in detail. Can we start with Antrim and the three proposed DEAs of Dunsilly, Antrim and Airport?

Now, your written recommendation and again, you've used the same phrase in your oral presentation, you've described being “broadly content”. That doesn't sound to me like a ringing endorsement and I have compared the existing electoral areas of Antrim North West, Antrim Town and Antrim South East - there's not a massive difference that I can see between what is proposed and what currently exists in those three wards.

Sam Nelson: Yes, I would agree. I think “broadly content” really represents the fact that there is significant drop in the wards in that area so we recognise that it does drop in wards.

Paul Dougan: It drops the wards from nineteen to sixteen. Now, the dropping of wards has nothing to do with this exercise; the ward architecture was settled in another forum so there's nothing that the Commissioner could do about that even if he wanted to. But
because you’re effectively the only objector during the consultation period, where do you sit in respect of these three Antrim DEAs? Do you accept the proposals?

Sam Nelson: I accept the proposals.

Paul Dougan: Again in your presentation you talked about possibilities of moving a ward in and a ward out and changing it ever so slightly. But can I take it that you accept the proposals in respect of Dunsilly, Antrim and Airport?

Sam Nelson: Yes, we accept that.

Paul Dougan: We'll move then to Ballyclare. Again it seems to be as far as is possible a direct transfer across from what was there before to what is allowed. I know the two wards of Ballyclare North and Ballyclare South have clearly been changed by the 2012 Order, so can I take it Ballyclare meets with your approval?

Sam Nelson: Yes, we didn't mention Ballyclare; but it's very little change so we accept that.

Paul Dougan: Moving on then to Newtownabbey. We'll deal firstly with Three Mile Water. The five wards that are proposed are largely reflective of the seven wards that exist in the existing construct. Your oral presentation suggested a couple of permutations, so could I ask you to list for me the wards that you propose should be included in Three Mile Water?

Sam Nelson: Yes, we believe that Three Mile Water should be ideally a seven ward DEA with Mossley moving in and with either Carnmoney Hill or Abbey moving in. We respect that we can't go above the seven. We feel that there's a case to be made for either Carnmoney Hill or Abbey.

Paul Dougan: Just stop there, why?

Sam Nelson: First of all because of the north westerly sections of the Carnmoney Hill would mostly be tied to the University area. It also looks neater on the map with the Carnmoney Hill ward going in.

Paul Dougan: So the north west section of Carnmoney Hill is tied to the University. What do you mean by that?
Sam Nelson: The local populations have been connected through local routes, road networks; the local shopping area is in the Carnmoney Hill area as well.

Paul Dougan: How does the new ward of Carnmoney Hill differ from what was the existing ward of Carnmoney which is currently in the University area?

Sam Nelson: The Carnmoney ward wouldn’t have taken in quite as much of the southerly part of the Carnmoney Hill. The ward itself is based around the Carnmoney Hill so it has populations that are quite distinctly different and would have ties with different areas, but the majority of the population from that ward we feel sits closest to the Three Mile Water area.

Paul Dougan: I’ll just have a look at it on the map.

Sam Nelson: The original Carnmoney ward, which I believe is going into the Antrim Line or Sandyknowes area, it was originally with the University district electoral area as well.

Paul Dougan: And the alternative then, either Carnmoney Hill or Abbey, you said? Why Abbey, bearing in mind that Abbey is currently in Macedon?

Sam Nelson: Abbey is an odd-shaped ward and the easterly area we feel traditionally sits within the University area; it’s connected by main road networks, the Shore Road and the Circular Road.

Paul Dougan: So the easterly part is connected to the University?

Sam Nelson: Yes, I believe there are parts of Abbey that are currently sitting within the University DEA around the Circular Road; the far easterly area in Whiteabbey is connected by road networks that would be used by most people in the Three Mile Water area, the Jordanstown area.

Paul Dougan: The ward of Abbey, the boundary is with Rostulla? And number seventeen which is Monkstown?

Sam Nelson: Yes, and Jordanstown, the lower Jordanstown Road.

Paul Dougan: You see the purple line above the E of Abbey, which is the DEA line?
Sam Nelson: So the road that runs up at that north east section is the Circular Road. It currently sits within the University area and that connects the Shore Road and the local Whiteabbey area to the rest of Rostulla and Jordanstown.

We accept that this section here of the ward traditionally sits with Macedon so that's why we say there is an equal argument for Carnmoney Hill or Abbey. Neither wards are ideal but sitting with University, we feel there is an argument for the both of them.

Paul Dougan: Macedon is proposed as a seven ward DEA. You're suggesting it should be a six?

Sam Nelson: Yes.

Paul Dougan: And the wards that you propose for it, on your written submission you proposed five, those that were proposed by the Commissioner minus Glebe and Carnmoney.

Sam Nelson: Yes, sorry that's five if it loses Carnmoney Hill.

Paul Dougan: So tell me what you want Macedon to have. The five that I have are Whitehouse, Valley, O'Neill, Rathcoole, and then it is as per your written representation, Abbey.

Sam Nelson: Yes.

Paul Dougan: And if Abbey was transferred to Three Mile Water, what would replace Abbey in Macedon?

Sam Nelson: Well we have suggested in our written submission that Carnmoney Hill should be moved, so it's either/or. We recognise that both of them can't move because the area that does not sit with Macedon at all is Glebe and that would be the priority to get right, in our opinion.

Paul Dougan: I'm going to come back to all of this but can we deal with Sandyknowes, and again it may have been a slip on your part, but you suggested that it should move up to an eight. Obviously the rules don't allow for that; seven is our limit.

Sam Nelson: We suggest that it should definitely take in Glebe.

Paul Dougan: Let's go through what Sandyknowes should have - Collinbridge and Hightown?
Sam Nelson: Yes, and Glengormley, Ballyhenry, Carnmoney, Burnthill and Glebe. And it would have to lose one ward because it would obviously go to an eight and we feel that Mossley currently sits in University and would be the most appropriate.

Paul Dougan: So Glebe replacing Mossley?

Sam Nelson: Yes. Obviously Glebe comes out of Macedon and Mossley would then go into Three Mile Water.

Paul Dougan: Now again something you said in your written submission - why do you say the ward boundaries make entirely coherent DEAs very difficult to achieve, bearing in mind that the Commissioner is stuck with the ward boundaries as delineated?

Sam Nelson: It is because of mainly the Carnmoney Hill and Abbey wards. The Carnmoney Hill ward is based around the Carnmoney Hill but it takes in populations on all sides which have traditionally sat with different areas within Newtownabbey. We recognise that the wards are already agreed, we're not disputing the wards at this stage, it's just a recognition that it does make it difficult on the part of the DEA formation.

Paul Dougan: Other than Glebe being already in what is currently Antrim Line, which would be the proposed Sandyknowes, so other than the fact that Glebe is in the existing Antrim Line Electoral Area, and I'm specifically asking for evidence of this, why do you say Glebe should be part of a Glengormley based DEA?

Sam Nelson: The Glengormley town centre represents the main centre of that proposed DEA. The Glebe ward itself runs right up to the very edge of Glengormley, the ties with the population there are to Glengormley. There are some streets that stop right on the very edge of Glengormley yet the Glebe ward itself moves out into Macedon.

Paul Dougan: Now, on the map, what is that boundary? So what I'm asking is the purple line that separates number nine and twelve, nine being Glengormley, twelve being Glebe, the purple line that runs from the blue to almost the C of Carnmoney Hill, is the proposed DEA boundary. In reaching his provisional recommendations, the Commissioner took account of natural boundaries; specifically he says “The use of physical features such as loughs, estuaries, rivers, hill ranges and major roads as DEA boundaries”. Now, I don't imagine there is a lough or an estuary or a river but where
do you believe that boundary has been drawn? I'm assuming it's a road.

Sam Nelson: Yes. I think that's running up the Prince Charles, which is a major road that runs through Carnmoney.

Paul Dougan: When you say it runs through Carnmoney, is that a natural divider between Carnmoney?

Sam Nelson: It doesn't really separate Carnmoney from Glengormley at all. I think the most significant feature within that area, is the town centre and the Antrim Road itself and that is connected with the Glebe area, mostly. Some of these questions the local councillor might be able to answer.

Paul Dougan: Yes, certainly. I'm addressing you and your colleague; these are things that speak to me from the written submission. Again, can you provide me with an example why it would be equally logical to move Mossley from Sandyknowes to Three Mile Water?

Sam Nelson: Given that we feel Glebe should be part of the Sandyknowes, it's then part of which ward you move out and currently the ties between Mossley and the University DEA; that would sit well with it. There's also the Three Mile Water river walkway; a cycle route has opened up and it connects Mossley right through to where the Abbey ward is now.

Paul Dougan: Is there a danger that, given that you feel Glebe doesn't belong there, you're then just trying to make the other construct fit?

Sam Nelson: No, not at all. As I say, with Mossley currently sitting, so it doesn't represent a major change, it also prevents that Antrim Line or Sandyknowes DEA from being incredibly stretched out, which starts around the Collinward area and ties Mossley with Collinward. There's absolutely no connection between those two areas, it's just very stretched out. So it would actually bring the Sandyknowes DEA down to a more suitable size or length geographically.

Paul Dougan: But if the size of the DEA is based on the number of wards, irrespective of how the geography plays out, again there's a straight seven for seven; Antrim Line currently has seven and Sandyknowes as proposed has seven.

Sam Nelson: Yes, we're not disputing with the population size.
Paul Dougan: It’s more to do with the number of wards that are in it. You said it's stretching Sandyknowes but Sandyknowes has, as proposed, seven; Antrim Line, its predecessor, has seven.

Sam Nelson: But with the removal of Glebe and the addition of Mossley it brings in areas that traditionally aren't connected to that main population of Glengormley and removes Glebe, which would be traditionally connected to the Glengormley area. So it shifts the boundaries out of what we see as a clear identity area.

Paul Dougan: I want to move onto the whole question of names. I think at the outset of your presentation, Mr Nelson, you recognised, to use your phrase, the need for change. When we look at names, there doesn't seem to be any recognition of the need for change because there's no change; you effectively suggest that all of the existing electoral area names remain. How does that recognition for change sit? First of all you are proposing Antrim Town, Antrim South East and Antrim North West.

Sam Nelson: Or North, yes. With Parkgate proposed to move in with Antrim or with Dunsilly, it's probably best to keep it Antrim North.

Paul Dougan: And then Antrim Town – Antrim. Airport - Antrim South East. Bearing in mind that this is a new regrouping and a new drafting, what is the objection to a new architecture for local government?

Sam Nelson: Yes, I appreciate that. It is felt that naming Airport after the main infrastructure in the area doesn't really capture what the area is. It certainly doesn't have much connection with people in Mallusk, which is moving into that area.

Paul Dougan: Mallusk was taken from the current Antrim Line and the current Antrim Line is the proposed Sandyknowes. What resonance does Antrim South East have to the people of Mallusk that Airport doesn't have to the people of Mallusk?

Sam Nelson: The people of Mallusk, as I've said, there's a historical connection with Templepatrick and that area represents a distinct historical link that runs around the current boundary. I feel that represents well the area. It's just the name; I don't think people in Mallusk would consider themselves as living in an Airport area.

With keeping the name as similar as possible, it would also create clarity for electors in that area.
Paul Dougan: It's keeping the name identical, it's not similar; it's straight like for like.

Sam Nelson: There are other DEAs across Northern Ireland that have been kept very similar with names and we feel that probably represents best practice.

Paul Dougan: Obviously everything here is specific to this area; what works in another area may do so for reasons that are peculiar to it and not necessarily here. I suppose the old Antrim South East has changed, whether it's a welcome change or not, with the addition of Mallusk and therefore it isn't just the old DEA.

Sam Nelson: I respect that.

Paul Dougan: You've made your point on that. There's obviously no issue with Ballyclare. If we deal then with the names for Newtownabbey again, no real change, if any; it's the same University, Macedon which remains, and Sandyknowes reverting back to Antrim Line.

Sam Nelson: Yes. And the reason on the Sandyknowes, locally Sandyknowes is known as a roundabout. I don't feel that's necessarily the best way to describe the DEA. There are also people in Collinbridge who have very little connection with Sandyknowes. Keeping it as Antrim Line, represents the main Antrim Road stretch, it encapsulates that.

Paul Dougan: The name for the district is Antrim and Newtownabbey. And obviously Ballyclare has resonance with the town of Ballyclare and its surrounding area. But for the Newtownabbey, where is the recognition of Newtownabbey as part of this new Local Government District if four or five of the proposed DEAs all share the name Antrim?

Sam Nelson: I think the electors in the current Antrim Line would recognise that Antrim Line is a Newtownabbey-based area. Just because it has Antrim I don't think it would be connected with an Antrim-based area. The main Antrim Road runs through Glengormley and is a major road in Newtownabbey itself, so I don't think that specifically says it is focused towards Antrim.

The main civic building in Newtownabbey as well as the Mossley Mill and the area of Mossley in the ward names significantly ties that up as well.
Paul Dougan: And the resonance with a road, as you would suggest, Antrim Line being inappropriate for Sandyknowes; obviously you suggest Sandyknowes is synonymous with a roundabout.

Sam Nelson: One roundabout in the far edge of the proposed DEA. I think the connection is between areas of Collinbridge and Hightown; there's very little connection with Sandyknowes roundabout at all.

Paul Dougan: I think that concludes everything that I wanted to say. As a result of what I have asked you or any questions I have made, do you want to make any comment?

Sam Nelson: Yes, just in response to something that you said that we're suggesting significant changes to the council area, it is really just a few minor tweaks in the urban Newtownabbey area. We respect that with the task in hand there is going to be a degree of change but it's only really a few wards in the urban Newtownabbey area that was suggested and, by and large, it remains intact, as proposed.

Paul Dougan: In my opening remarks I discussed the issue of site visits. It strikes me that an obvious site visit would be to - is it the Prince Charles Road that you describe? Is there anywhere that you think I should go in order to take on board the points that you have made and see them for myself, rather than looking at a map?

Sam Nelson: I would suggest the boundary between what is Glengormley and the Glebe and you can see how close ties are within that area.

Paul Dougan: So the boundary between Glengormley and Glebe is that Prince Charles?

Sam Nelson: I think the councillor will know a bit more about this.

Paul Dougan: Can you address that better? Yes? Ok. Is there anywhere else from your own perspective?

Sam Nelson: Yes, the Three Mile Water area with the walkway, the cycle routes that connect that entire area and the Jordanstown Road that connects up through to Mossley.

Paul Dougan: Over the railway line?
Sam Nelson: Yes, the main directions of travel run between the Shore Road at Rostulla up to Mossley. I think that would be worth having a look at to see the character of that area.

Paul Dougan: Thank you very much for coming and taking the time and effort. Thanks for your oral presentation for answering my questions.

Sam Nelson: Thanks for listening to us.

Paul Dougan: I don't know if anybody else will attend but you're very welcome to remain and see how the rest of today pans out. Thank you very much indeed. Mr Blair, would you just state your name and read the points on the sheet there in front of you just for the record?

John Blair: John Blair, Alliance Party Councillor for the current Antrim Line District Electoral Area.

Before I start I would like to thank you for the opportunity, and give you some of my background. I've told you already I'm a councillor for the existing Antrim Line District Electoral Area. I have previously been a councillor for the current Macedon District Electoral Area going back to the 1988 by-elections and the 1989 general council elections. So I have some history of elections in Newtownabbey and the boundaries associated with those elections.

As a current member of the Statutory Transition Committee, tasked with the job of merging the councils and the practicalities of that, I am keen to see the change and I welcome the change in local government in general. But I'm hoping that part of the work I do in the STC is to, as far as possible, maintain the local identities that a lot of people have worked hard to establish since the current local government structure was formed in 1973.

I am very specifically here today to appeal to you that the ward of Glebe is not placed in the Macedon District Electoral Area, and I would contend that it is, with respect, inconceivable that Glebe would be in any electoral area other than the electoral area centred around the Glengormley village vicinity.

I would point out, and I can be more specific later if required, that there are addresses that I can give you in the Glebe Ward which will point out very clearly that there are people currently living a couple of hundred yards from the centre of the village that they've
identified with for a very long time who will now be placed in a different electoral area than that village.

Paul Dougan: Rather than interrupting, but I think it is relevant, when the transcript is produced so that I can see it, would you just list those now?

John Blair: Absolutely, I'll give you an address, 1 Tobercooran Avenue. For example, that is a short stroll up a local cul de sac to the centre of the village that those people have lived beside for a long time and identify with. And I use the word very deliberately - to me it is inconceivable that they would be placed in any other electoral area than the one centred around that village, whether that be called Sandyknowes or Glengormley; I'll come to that separately.

I'm keen also to look further at the geography and the topography of all of those factors. Touching on the names issue, I would point out that the perception in Glengormley, for some of us at least who are already elected there and from other people who are involved in community work, a perception has started and is likely to be that the electoral area has been named after a roundabout rather than the town around which the electoral area is based.

And just to elaborate on the history, we recognise that in respect of local identities that have been established, the history of Newtownabbey is that it's a collection of villages that were collected together to form a borough in 1973. The borough's motto, for example, is that Many Will Arise as One. So I would say that whether through ward names or DEA names, if we can try to retain some of the local identity, village names and town names, I would be most grateful for that and I expect others would be also.

I might add to that, although I am very specifically, as I said, wanting to hone in on the Glebe and Antrim Line issues, the Sandyknowes issues, I would point out that if we were to take seriously the issues around retaining names and local identities and trying to preserve some sense of history and identity there, that the Three Mile Water electoral area, as proposed, will in fact mean that the mouth of the Three Mile Water river, after which that electoral area is named, will be flowing through the Macedon electoral area. I think a closer look at a map will show that a substantial portion of that river is in the Macedon area, in the Abbey ward.
Paul Dougan: Can you point that out on the map?

John Blair: I understand the mouth of the Three Mile Water river to be...well certainly, there's Abbey village and as I understand it, it will be somewhere around that area. But if you track the Three Mile Water river through Newtownabbey, it flows through Mossley, down through Monkstown and reaches Belfast Lough at the Shore Road junction with a road...in fact at that point it runs parallel with Glenville Road.

I think those are issues worthy of fine inspection and tweaking because I am keen that one thing that we learn in public life is that there are many, many people who do voluntary work for a long time for the betterment of their areas and I am keen that the work they have done to maintain and improve local identities and quality of life in their areas be respected as best as possible. If local identity is important to them, and it is to some people, that we try to acknowledge that as we move forward.

That is the crux of what I'm here to do and, as I said, my main purpose is to hone in on the Glebe Ward. I'm very happy to take any questions on that.

Paul Dougan: Mr Nelson dealt with the totality of the district and I went through ward by ward, DEA by DEA. I take it that you agree with what the Alliance Party has submitted from the generic presentation?

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: So what we are really dealing with in respect of your presentation is Macedon and Sandyknowes in terms of whether Glebe is in Macedon or in Sandyknowes?

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: If Glebe comes out of Macedon as proposed, what do you place there?

John Blair: The easiest one and the most straightforward, and I speak again as someone who represents and lives in the area, is that Mossley goes to Three Mile Water. Mossley is also on an important part of the Three Mile Water river, after which the other electoral area is named.

Paul Dougan: So Mossley comes out of Sandyknowes; that, as it currently stands, keeps Sandyknowes to a six, and then you're suggesting
Glebe comes out of Macedon into Sandyknowes; Sandyknowes remains as a seven.

John Blair: I am directly appealing that Glebe comes out of Macedon for reasons of geography and demography and the proximity of some of the residential addresses in the centre of Glengormley.

Paul Dougan: And into Sandyknowes. Does Macedon then, on the basis of your presentation remain as a six?

John Blair: It might. I know that we may not get every single change that we have suggested in our party submission, which I support; I am aware there may be tweaks and changes that I didn't envisage. But I appeal directly as I have done on the Glebe one and point out that the switch of Mossley, from Sandyknowes, as it's proposed, to Three Mile Water, would also fit in that.

A substantial portion of the Three Mile Water River is in the Mossley ward centred on the council headquarters which is called Mossley Mill. And if you look at the Three Mile Water river walks and all of the things that have been established in recent years, a lot of those are centred on the general proximity of Mossley Mill.

Paul Dougan: So I understand that, under your proposal, Three Mile Water would be a six seater with Mossley added?

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: Macedon would be a six seater with Glebe removed and Sandyknowes would remain a seven.

John Blair: I'm not making individual proposals; I support what the party has said.

Paul Dougan: I'm just teasing out what you want. You want Glebe out of Macedon and in order for that to happen something has to give. Sandyknowes can't be an eight.

John Blair: I'm very clear on that one, that Mossley goes to Three Mile Water. The party submission, as you will know, and the papers submitted today discuss the options of Carnmoney Hill and/or Abbey either being part of Macedon or part of Three Mile Water and I'm quite prepared to look at all aspects of that. But my absolutely priority is the Glebe and Mossley ward issue, to keep
Antrim Line or Glengormley or Sandyknowes or whatever it's called as a seven seater ward.

Paul Dougan: Let's move to the naming. A couple of times now you have referred to it as Glengormley. Can I discern from that that your suggestion for a name would be Glengormley?

John Blair: It would have been inappropriate in the past - Antrim Line was never a title with which I was totally comfortable, again named after a road, and I think there are better and more legitimate local identities than that.

Paul Dougan: Like what?

John Blair: However, the current Antrim Line DEA includes the area of Mallusk which will now be excluded from the proposed DEA. So, as it was perhaps not suitable in the past to call it Glengormley and exclude Mallusk, I think it's entirely appropriate that now that it could be called after the town around which the electoral area is based, although that is another issue on which we might expect that Glebe be included, so that that's more coherent.

Paul Dougan: One of the factors that the Commissioner has to consider is the creation of complete settlements. On the issue of Glengormley, does your proposals with Glebe in and Mossley out for Sandyknowes perhaps suggest that Sandyknowes be renamed Glengormley? Does Collinbridge, Hightown, Ballyhenry, Carnmoney, Burnthill and Glebe, does that preserve the settlement which is Glengormley?

John Blair: It does. Carnmoney itself was one of the original villages and would have been seen and is perhaps still seen by some as a separate village. But in general the vast majority of the population that we're talking about is centred on the town of Glengormley, including all of the other wards.

Paul Dougan: What about Collinbridge?

John Blair: Likewise, built around Glengormley.

Paul Dougan: Even though it is on the southern tip?

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: And for those who reside in the Collinbridge ward, would they have a resonance and a connection to Glengormley?
John Blair: Absolutely. I’ll point out to you that the entrance to Collinbridge, called Collinbridge Road, is a relatively short stroll from the Glengormley village, the Glengormley Presbyterian Church and the local Catholic Church. They’re all not that far from the entrance to Collinbridge.

Paul Dougan: You gave one address as an example. As I said in my opening remarks, examples and evidence is what we want. Are there other addresses you’d like to add to that list?

John Blair: Absolutely; there’s Tobercooran House. I would point out to you that the main recreational park in the centre of Glengormley was renamed Lilian Bland Park a couple of years ago, named after a female aviator who lived in Tobercooran House.

Tobercooran House is situated in between the entrances to two residential streets called Tobercooran Avenue and Osterley Park, both of them a few hundred yards from the centre of Glengormley, a few hundred yards from the park which had been named after one of the original residents of Tobercooran House. Yet Tobercooran House, Osterley Park and Tobercooran Avenue would be placed in the Macedon electoral area if the proposals went ahead as planned.

Paul Dougan: Because of the Glebe issue?

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: Are there any other addresses that are relevant?

John Blair: Ashgrove Road, in general. And I would suggest perhaps if a site visit is going to take place that the addresses I mentioned. Glebe Road West is another one; Glebe Road West is a residential road mainly, connecting the Church Road with the Carnmoney Road, all local fairly important arterial routes. Glebe Road West connects two of those.

As I read it, for at least a section of the Glebe Road West, one side of the road would be in the Macedon electoral area and the other side of the road would be in the proposed Sandyknowes electoral area. I think if you look at those sites in relation to the centre of Glengormley you will see my concerns are realistic.

Paul Dougan: Names and the importance of preserving identity and preserving a hard earned identity, as you described. What disservice do the current names as proposed do to that on the basis of what you've
said? Obviously you've talked about Antrim Line being a road, Sandyknowes being a roundabout, Glengormley being the village so I understand that.

Bear in mind ward names isn't part of this, ward names are settled; they've preserved some, they've amalgamated others. But is the area Three Mile Water or University, what do you plump for?

John Blair: This is a personal opinion and if it deviates in any way from submissions from others then I will own up to it; but the Three Mile Water, I believe, is an opportune time to move away from a name University in light of the fact that the university will not be there in a number of years time; they’re going to have some facilities there but it’s not going to be the university that we know now.

So I've no major issue with the Three Mile Water name. I certainly have no issues with the Macedon name. It's a very historic name, named after a local landmark point on the shore of Belfast Lough, and I pointed out to you earlier that I used to represent the area.

But that perhaps adds weight to my argument that Three Mile Water has been named after a local fairly substantial and well known river, Macedon is being named after a natural landmark on the shores of Belfast Lough and the area that I represent and live in is being named after, if I can be mischievous for a moment, a roundabout rather than the town with some history that is in the centre of that electoral area.

Paul Dougan: So your argument would be for consistency of respecting history and identity and heritage. Can I take it you would prefer Glengormley over Antrim Line?

John Blair: I would. And I would point out again that Ballyclare is named after a town, Three Mile Water named after a local landmark, Macedon named after a local landmark. Glengormley named after a roundabout is, I believe, verging on the inconsistent.

Paul Dougan: Then the Antrim based wards.

John Blair: I have no issues on those.

Paul Dougan: Then we'll not get into that. I think that covers the points that I have. Again, Mr Nelson, you're here not only to speak but to
contribute to the exchange, any thoughts that have struck you. So if you want to now just make sure that we go on the transcript, even if you want to come back up to the seats at the front. Would you read your name again for the record?

Sam Nelson: Sam Nelson of the Alliance Party. I'd just like to add to the point of the Three Mile Water not being a wholly objectionable name. I was saying in our submission where originally I suggested Carnmoney Hill moves, but on reflection we were looking at Abbey, that was basically what we were looking at; we were seeing the local river running from the Mossley area through to Abbey and the westerly part becomes a difficulty with that strange border. But it does represent a connection to the rest of the area by looking at that river stretch itself.

Paul Dougan: If we focus on Glengormley as reflective of the settlement, and obviously things change and a new strategic plan for areas will have to be looked at in the light of the new council structures, is there anything on the table as an experienced councillor for the area that would alter the Glengormley settlement that would suggest its name could be somewhat redundant at a future point if developments spread and sort of urban sprawl takes over?

John Blair: The area, as proposed, is almost entirely built up; I don't imagine you're going to have another village based on the edge of what's currently there.

Paul Dougan: Or large housing developments that would take it?

John Blair: Even if there were they're going to be identified with Glengormley; the boundary is fairly consistent. Could I point out that the green line to the right of number twelve on the map is the Prince Charles Way?

Paul Dougan: The green line is the ward boundary; now that is set in stone. The purple line is the Commissioner's proposed DEA boundary.

John Blair: The reason why I want to return to this again centres on the Glebe Ward. My understanding is that at least a portion of that green line is a natural District Electoral Area boundary because it is a main arterial route. The purple line, which is the current proposed District Electoral Area boundary, actually chops and changes through residential streets. Like for example Tobercooran and Osterley, if you see the crescent that I'm currently trying to put the laser around there.
That is, with respect, a bit of a mishmash through residential streets that are currently focused around the centre of Glengormley. That's the Carnmoney Cemetery there. That's Prince Charles Way, a major, in part four lane road, that runs up through. That's a much more natural boundary than that. That bit of the Glebe Road West, that District Electoral Area boundary, is putting a residential street in two District Electoral Areas. If you look there, a short walk through that cul de sac or that residential street to the local park, that's the centre of the village.

Paul Dougan: What is that street?
John Blair: Ashgrove Road. I know that portion where the light currently is, is Glebe Road West.
Paul Dougan: So the DEA boundary is, what did you say?
John Blair: Ashgrove Road and Glebe Road West will form part of that. That is Ashgrove Road coming from a roundabout at the top of Prince Charles Way. Ashgrove Road comes right down there, the White Road there. You'll see that the bottom half of Ashgrove Road has residential streets on one side of it, the proposed Sandyknowes residential streets on the other side of it and the proposed Macedon.

And I'm going to go back to this, the house named after a famous local female aviator. That in a straight line through one residential street takes you to the park named after that aviator. That park is a focal point and main recreational bowling green, local pavilion where meetings are held, events during the summer, etc. That area is named after that house, the former occupant of that house.

Paul Dougan: Trace your DEA line, your boundary that you would prefer.
John Blair: Oh absolutely, very simply there's the main road, a cemetery on one side, cemetery on the other, two major cemeteries. There are a couple of dotted houses around the edge of Carnmoney Hill, former farm houses, etc, but from that point to at least that point there are no residential properties on that road.

Paul Dougan: So the C of Carnmoney Hill, we'll call it that junction, you would take your purple line the whole way down Prince Charles Way, straight down.
John Blair: I will point out that that's the continuation of Prince Charles Way there, that main road from roundabout to roundabout; that's all Prince Charles Way from there to - and I'm probably deviating slightly from that - but that's a roundabout there called the Ashgrove Roundabout. That is another link of Prince Charles Way to another roundabout taking you to the Manse Road.

Paul Dougan: Just stop there, the item shaded, the sector in eight as the ward, that's how the ward has been defined.

John Blair: I don't mind that; I'm not querying any of that.

Paul Dougan: But even though logically you are saying if Prince Charles Way continues right through the bottom of the eight through up to the seven there I'm assuming, there at the A8, is it?

John Blair: Eight is Carnmoney, I'm assuming, yes.

Paul Dougan: But in terms of the road that you're talking about, that continues right up there to...?

John Blair: Yes, to seven, yeah. And seven is Mossley, I'm guessing?

Paul Dougan: Seven is Burnthill.

John Blair: There's a good and further substantiation of my concern towards Glebe. That's an area which has no residential occupancy worth mentioning. The cemeteries are on both sides of the road and no residential properties at all facing the road. Now you'll see parts of Ashgrove Arterial up here; Glebe Lodge and Glebe Manor are adjacent to that road so none of them front that road. In relation to the residential streets I mentioned and their proximity to the centre of Glengormley, it is, as I said, inconceivable to me that that one of the oldest residential areas - If you could imagine how Glengormley has built up around an old village over the years, the 50s and 60s, the streets around here called Glebecooele, Osterley, Tobercooran, those places. Glebe Road West would have been one of the first residential developments around the village of Glengormley. If you visit the area you will see from the style and brick and age of the houses that that would substantiate that.

That would have been one of the very first settlements built around the village because of the proximity to the village. Other places like the Antrim Line and other parts of Burnthill, etc, would
have been added more in the 70s than in the 60s but these houses around that square are all late 50s, 60s.

Paul Dougan: You’re very graphically articulating your argument, part of my function is to consider where lines are drawn on maps, so just so that I’m completely clear, your purple line would come down the Prince Charles Road? Effectively your purple line would be the ward boundary line for Glebe?

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: And that would follow that kink in the map here?

John Blair: Yes. I also think it’s neater to have the main arterial route. Prince Charles Way is a main road that was driven through fields on the edge of Carnmoney Hill and there are no residential properties fronting that road.

Paul Dougan: If you were to put a name on the road that is the current proposed DEA boundary, the purple line, you’re saying that’s not one road, that it is a selection of different smaller roads.

John Blair: I’m guessing that that is the upper part of the Carnmoney Road; that is a small section of road called...

Paul Dougan: Can I just stop you there, is this the lower, the middle part of the Carnmoney Road?

John Blair: Yes, from the centre of Glengormley right up there and then there’s a short road called Burnthill Road to the roundabout there and then that’s the Ashgrove Road.

Paul Dougan: So the area that is preserved in Glebe.

John Blair: That is slicing through established and long established residential areas.

Paul Dougan: But that must also be the Glebe Ward boundary.

John Blair: Yes it is.

Paul Dougan: So the Glebe Ward boundary slices through areas.

John Blair: Yes.

Paul Dougan: And the Glebe Ward boundary takes in side roads. But for a major boundary, an electoral area boundary, you are arguing that
the major road, and nobody could dispute that the Prince Charles Way is the major road?

John Blair: Absolutely.

Paul Dougan: And again, because it is relevant to go to the factors that the Commissioner sets out in Paragraph 3.6. "On the basis of the above considerations, the approach which I adopted in the grouping of wards into DEAs was where possible to have regard to the following: 1) the use of physical features such as loughs, estuaries, rivers, hill ranges and major roads as DEA boundaries".

John Blair: Prince Charles Way is the major road there and any examination of the site will show that.

Paul Dougan: The creation of distinct urban and rural DEAs, it doesn't really apply in what we're talking about here. The inclusion of complete settlements within a DEA, so the settlement, you would say of Glengormley.

John Blair: Glengormley and more specifically for me, Glebecoole.

Paul Dougan: I think when he talks about settlements he's talking about towns and villages. And then the creation of geographically compact DEAs.

John Blair: With respect to the Commissioner, it's not geographically compact to have a ward on the edge of Glengormley on the other side of Carnmoney Hill from a huge long established and well known area called Rathcoole; to put that ward of Glengormley in with an electoral area which includes a huge housing estate called Rathcoole on the other side of that hill and does stretch round to there. That is, to me, another inconsistency.

Paul Dougan: Rathcoole is number fourteen.

John Blair: I think there is a very natural boundary there between number twelve and number fourteen, which would suggest that the electoral wards on either side of them aren't quite coherent, cohesive.

Paul Dougan: I want to take a look at this map. This will be a useful exercise for me, just so that I have a visual when I go away. I appreciate these are quite small but could I ask you just to mark out your proposed Sandyknowes DEA to take into account everything that
you've said. Can I ask you to mark with perhaps slightly more detail on the OSNI map. My clerk has marked with the pen; you will see the roundabout of the B513 which is in Grid 82 - 83. We see a yellow line which seems to split the cemetery and we are assuming that the yellow line is the purple line on this map. If you could confirm that, and if you could take the highlighter and use that as best you can, because you'll be familiar with the roads. This will be useful for me when I go away from here to visualise what we've discussed because this is very important.

John Blair: So are we putting in the current purple line onto this?

Paul Dougan: No, just confirm for me that the current purple line on the overhead is the yellow line that has been marked and then effectively transpose what you have done on this map, do the exact same on the OS map.

John Blair: Do you want the entire electoral area or just this ward boundary at Glebe?

Paul Dougan: If you can do the entire DEA just to give it a sense of completeness.

John Blair: It's very difficult here.

Paul Dougan: If I have an idea, so the contention is the purple line going from the blue apex up to Carnmoney, if we've addressed that, then the rest of it is probably less because that is effectively the line that comes down that causes the most problems because it puts your Glebe Ward on the wrong side of the line.

John Blair: Can I go back to this point about natural boundaries? The Carnmoney Hill ward makes this task a lot more difficult, there's no point, we can't revisit what's already been established, I didn't challenge it when it first came out so I'm not going to sit and bleat about it today. We have to work with what we have but if we could still see that huge area called Carnmoney Hill as a natural boundary, despite the fact there's an edge of an electoral area all round the periphery of it.

There's still a natural boundary between number fourteen there and number thirteen and number twelve, whichever way you look at it. And in my mind, and consistent with number twelve, it should be grouped in with number fourteen, thirteen and fifteen, for that reason.
Paul Dougan: I think maybe my final question, as both of you are at the table, it’s very easy when only one or two objectors come along but you’re both ultimately from the same party so you’re very much aligned to the single objection and it was the only written representation that was received, as you know, from the public consultation. However, other objectors or other political parties indicated that they were either not making a submission or they were content with what has been said and obviously I have to factor all of those things in.

Just because you have come along and you have very passionately and very eloquently articulated your point, is there anything that you could leave with me so that I can give serious thought to what I have been told by yourselves? But I don’t hear anything from the silence of those who have accepted what is proposed. Do you want to make any observation about that?

John Blair: I will be specific again. Glebe Road West is an area closely centred on Glengormley, on which all of us who represent the area have worked on many local issues, mostly around anti-social behaviour etc. A big history of that and in recent years a lot of hard work by community groups, individuals, the formation of a Glengormley Community Group.

And there are members of that Glengormley Community Group who live on either side of Glebe Road West and it’s so impractical to me that they would not have the same group of councillors when they’re working on very important local issues and they’re working together on a regular basis on those issues. I’m glad to say that a lot of the issues have been resolved and those people are now working on positive things like improvements in the local park, vegetable gardens, things for young people, and it’s come full circle really.

My final thought on it is that it’s simply inconceivable that a residential area so closely associated and geographically linked to the main hub of the village would be split into two different electoral areas and grouped with established populations which are really quite separate and geographically further away.

Sam Nelson: Sam Nelson. Looking at why there are no other submissions, I think when you look initially at the urban Newtownabbey area there is a fair amount of change and with the ward boundaries it is quite complex initially to look at it. We feel that we’ve looked at it in depth and we’ve gone through it quite rigorously today and
we offer quite a simple solution to keeping a better identity of the area. It sounds as if we're making a lot of changes but it basically boils down to moving one ward into the Glengormley area and then that just has the chain effect of tidying up other DEA boundaries on the way round.

Perhaps because initially it looks quite difficult to move it without major change, that may be one of the reasons there's not many submissions, but I think looking at it we've got quite a simple solution ultimately to fixing it.

Paul Dougan: I have no further questions unless you have anything that you wish to add or clarify. I again thank you very much.

I have certainly gleaned a lot from our exchanges and I hope that will enable me to give very serious and informed thought to the proposals that you have made. As I said, we remain here until 5pm for anybody else that chooses to come along and I don't know if you propose to stay but for now thank you very much for your contribution and attendance.

In formal terms, there are no other speakers who have indicated an intention to speak so for the present, I propose to adjourn the inquiry until such time as a speaker comes forward. If nobody has come forward by 12.30pm then we will adjourn without reconvening for lunch and sit again at 1.30pm but I am available to come back to the inquiry as and when anybody arrives but for now we adjourn. Thank you very much.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Good afternoon, it is 1.30pm and the public inquiry into the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Government District resumes after the lunchtime adjournment. As no further speakers have come forward or made themselves known or indicated a desire to speak, I propose to adjourn the afternoon session once more until such time as a speaker comes forward. We will remain open to the public until 5pm and will resume as and when required. Thank you.
CLOSING COMMENTS

Paul Dougan: It is now 5pm and I am bringing the public inquiry for Antrim and Newtownabbey local government district to a close. Since I adjourned the inquiry at 11.37am, nobody else has presented themselves and indicated that they wish to speak; I also confirmed at that time that all present were content that they had had an adequate opportunity to make their representations.

Before I formally close these proceedings, I would like to place on record my gratitude to everyone who has attended, particularly those who have made representations. I want to thank my support team from the office of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Morrow Communications and the transcribers and audio engineers for the help that they have given me in preparing for and conducting this hearing. I would also like to thank the management and staff at this hotel for the excellent facilities they have provided.

My immediate task now is to consider carefully all of the evidence I have heard at this inquiry as well as the written representations that were received during the recent consultation period and to prepare a report for the District Electoral Areas Commissioner within the next four weeks. My report will be made publicly available on the Commissioner’s website, together with the Commissioner’s final recommendations report.

It will ultimately be a matter for the Commissioner to decide whether to accept any or all of my recommendations. Thank you all very much for your assistance and participation.