Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming to the Belfast inquiry for the District Electoral Areas. I have a few housekeeping announcements. We don't expect the fire alarm to go off today but if it does please use the nearest fire exit and staff will guide us to the assembly point. May I ask that mobile phones are switched to silent mode for the duration? The facilities in the hotel, if you wish to use them, are just straight across the foyer. I'll hand over to Eileen Brady who is the Assistant Commissioner for this inquiry. Thank you.

Good morning, everybody, you are very welcome today. It is just after 10am and I am now formally opening this public inquiry into the proposed District Electoral Areas for the local government district of Belfast. My name is Eileen 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 and 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; I 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 2013.

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.

The purpose and the scope of this inquiry is to consider
representations concerning the provisional recommendations of
the District Electoral Areas Commissioner for the local
government district of Belfast. 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 proposals
during the consultation period which closed on 27th June.

I would like to make it clear that new objections unrelated to
those already submitted cannot be considered. I must
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. I am aware that some of you may already
have made written representations. I have studied those
carefully as part of my preparation for this 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
think 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. I would also ask that, in
order to assist me in my role, 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 in his
report.
There are a number of issues that are outside the scope of this inquiry. They 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 any issue that does not relate to the Commissioner's proposals for the grouping of wards within this particular local government district. I would ask you not to raise these issues in your representations.

The procedure we will follow in relation to the oral submissions is as follows. You will be called to come up to the front table before me to speak into the microphones provided and, in making your submissions, could you please 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 into the microphone, try not to use abbreviations or colloquialisms as they can cause difficulties for the transcribers. 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, other people may wish to put questions to you from the floor and I may also have 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 questions in the best way possible.

In terms of site visits, I want to touch briefly on this. 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 then please mention it during the course of your submission. It will be noted and I will try to go and see it.
I am assisted today by personnel who are in attendance today. Feel free to approach any of these staff with any queries that you may have and they will be pleased to help you and draw any matter to my attention.

I think there are people here who haven't registered and, in the circumstances, we will adjourn these proceedings for 15 minutes to allow registration to take place and to get a running order for the inquiry today. Thank you.

Jane Watson: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your patience. I'll just recap on some housekeeping announcements as not everybody was in the room earlier this morning. We don't expect a fire alarm this morning but if we do hear it, the hotel staff will direct us to the assembly point and please use the nearest fire exit. May I ask that mobile phones are switched to silent mode for the courtesy of others during this morning's inquiry and if you need to use the facilities they are just straight across the foyer on this level. I'll now pass you back to Eileen Brady, Assistant Commissioner, to reconvene. Thank you very much.

Eileen Brady: Thank you for that. Once again, just to repeat, before the first speaker is called up, would people please turn their mobiles to silent mode or off. Also I must emphasise that there is a recording being made of these proceedings for the purposes of producing a transcript and I would ask that as much background noise as possible be kept to a minimum so there is no interference with the recording. Thank you very much.

In light of the running order of the programme this morning, I would call Fra McCann MLA of Sinn Fein to come forward. Thank you.

Fra McCann: Fra McCann, MLA for West Belfast. I would have to say that initially I had no intention of coming down here but because of the proposals being put in by the DUP in relation to the Falls and Clonard wards, I felt that it was necessary for me to come down. I probably think their submission has more to do with their political considerations rather than the natural boundaries that exist between both those areas.

I think anyone who knows the area that I represent, in terms of Clonard and Falls, would know that they're near enough natural
extensions of each other and just by way of background, the two big GAA clubs draw their players from both communities.

I come from the Falls end but I have two sisters and a brother who started life off in the Falls and just see moving to Clonard, where they raised their families, as a natural extension. Most people from the Clonard and Falls area share the same shopping precincts on the Falls and Springfield Roads.

The major employer in the area would be the RVH and the people from Falls, Clonard, Woodvale and Shankill would use those boundaries, - what's called the Peace Line - that would divide the areas. Whilst it has gates that allow access through, the North Howard Street gate closes at 6pm, the Townsend Street gate closes at 6pm also. But if you go onto the Springfield Road, the Lanarck Way gate opens to 9pm. So you have that natural extension.

In terms of Cluain Mor, Cluain Mor means Big Clonard in Irish and, again, it is a natural extension of the Clonard area. So there are many things that connect the area and they say that there is a natural affinity between the Falls and the Shankill in terms of crossover. I think is a bit of a nonsense in terms of the DUP presentation. That's basically it in terms of the Clonard and Falls area.

One of the things that I want to clear up is that there have been a number of rumours circulating, in the Clonard area especially, that people will have to go to the Shankill Road to vote. So I would like certainly the Electoral Office, and certainly we will try our best, to quash those rumours because it puts people off registering and, secondly, it maybe puts people off even going to the polls. So I think there needs to be clarification on that.

The makeup of West Belfast is that 70.6% of the people that live there vote for Sinn Fein, so there is always that natural extension, especially down the road.

Eileen Brady: Would you have any submissions in relation to the other proposal by the SDLP in terms of Beechmount?

Fra McCann: I think Beechmount, in terms of area, would be closer akin to the likes of the St James area across the road, the Iveagh area, the Ballymurphy area, and I think many of the community groups and the community partnership would actively work there. If you look
at the area that takes in Cavendish and Cluain Mor, that again is a natural extension of the thing. I know there are arterial routes that separate them but there are arterial routes that run through many parts of that area. So I think it would be better placed with Ballymurphy, St James and Whiterock.

Eileen Brady: Very good. Is there anything further you wish to add?

Fra McCann: No, I think I've covered most of the things that I wish to say.

Eileen Brady: Would there by anybody present who would like to make a comment on anything that was raised there by Mr McCann? It doesn't appear there are any further matters to be raised. Thank you very much. Next on the programme for making a representation this morning is Alex Maskey, MLA.

Alex Maskey: Thank you and a very good morning. My name is Alex Maskey; I am the Sinn Fein, South Belfast representative as an MLA. Just to make a few points, if you don't mind. Obviously I have already made a written submission and the panel would already have that. I want to elaborate on a couple of points, first of all really in respect of some of the DEAs in the South and East Belfast.

In my view, clearly when you take in the consideration the 2011 Census figures, there will be an increasing disparity between the number of councillors to be elected by the electorate in a number of constituencies throughout the city and as that goes forward into the next five or ten years the disparity will increase quite considerably. I think it's quite a serious cause for concern.

When you look at the Ormiston DEA, for example, as opposed to the Black Mountain DEA, the Ormiston census figures clearly indicate an aging and a decreasing population size as opposed to the direct opposite in the Black Mountain, in the west of the city, where that constituency as per the census returns would show an increasing and a younger population in all categories.

I think that that shows that over the next one or two council terms the electorate in Ormiston, would actually return a greater number of councillors proportionately than the electorate in Black Mountain and I think the same would apply with Lisnasharragh and Collin.

So therefore I think that these boundaries are actually unfair; they do not appear to take in the census returns in 2011. I don't think that they properly represent the community connections within
those areas, particularly Ravenhill, Botanic and Rosetta, so I think that the sporting connections, the church connections, the community connections, would lend themselves to a number of shifts in the current boundary recommendations.

That is contained in my submission and I don't think I need to elaborate on that, but the main point for me is that the census returns did not appear to have been taken into consideration when these boundaries were being set and that there will be a increasingly obvious disparity in the next number of years. I think that that's very unfortunate; I think it's wrong and I think it would disadvantage a number of people in the city and will skew the electoral representation that the city would properly reflect.

Eileen Brady: Would there be anything further you want to add in terms of significant features about Rosetta that you feel makes it more suitable for Botanic, over and above what you said.

Alex Maskey: I think primarily for me in there would be the church connections, the community connections, sporting connections; they are very naturally aligned as adjoining wards.

Eileen Brady: And would that be the same for Ravenhill then in terms of the Titanic?

Alex Maskey: Yes.

Eileen Brady: Is there anything further you want to add at this stage?

Alex Maskey: No, I don’t think so, just to say the central point is the census returns that appear to have been ignored in these recommendations and I think that will lead to a serious disparity in the years ahead.

Eileen Brady: Thank you very much. Is there anybody here who would like to make a comment or raise a point in relation to what has been put forward? No. If that’s your presentation completed, thank you very much.

Alex Maskey: Thank you.

Eileen Brady: If I'm correct, according to the record then is it Cllr McGimpsey, Stephen Reid and Cllr Vitty. Thank you.

Stephen Reid: Thank you and good morning. My name is Stephen Reid; I am Chief Executive of Castlereagh Borough Council. The two
councillors want to introduce themselves first and then I'll make a few opening comments.

Denny Vitty: I'm Cllr Vitty.

Chris McGimpsey: I'm Dr. Chris McGimpsey; I'm a councillor for Castlereagh Central.

Stephen Reid: So Chair, if I could begin and just confirm that the three of us have been mandated by Castlereagh Borough Council to represent today and to respond to the submission by Mr Maskey, MLA with regard to the effect on the areas transferring from the current Castlereagh Borough Council into the new Belfast City Council area. I can also confirm that the council unanimously and cross party agreed to support the original submission from the Commissioner, so they would support the initial report and therefore didn't make a submission at the time because they supported it fully.

I'd now like to hand over to Cllr McGimpsey to make some specific comments first and Cllr Vitty will follow up, should that be necessary.

Eileen Brady: Very well, thank you.

Chris McGimpsey: Thank you very much. I think it's important to stress that the Castlereagh Council has representatives from the Alliance Party, the SDLP, the Ulster Unionists, the DUP and the Green Party. We are here at the unanimous request of the members of the council so it's not purely from one section of the community.

Chair, I've read Alex Maskey's letter. The main thrust of the Sinn Fein submission is to move Rosetta into Botanic; that's the target. I think the other movements of wards are simply a means to effect that end, in other words fiddling about with wards so that the plus or minus 10% criteria is met.

I refer you to Paragraph 3.3 of the report about the District Electoral Areas, the Commissioner refers to "the rules for the delineation of districts and wards as set out in part one of schedule four to the 1972 Act which informed the recommendations of the local government boundaries Commissioner" and he specifically refers to the desirability of determining district and ward boundaries which are readily identifiable. That's on page five.
He further refers to the size, population and the physical diversity of the district. He says, "boundaries which are readily identifiable are important" and he states these must "be known or ascertained easily or with relatively little effort". These criteria we believe to be reasonable, we think these are the sort of criteria that should have been used. So when Castlereagh Council endorses the report we endorse obviously his rationale for coming up with his conclusions.

Sinn Fein, according to this letter, has rejected these criteria in this case but they haven't rejected it in other cases. I don't see them arguing in every ward or DEA that should be changed because of the reasons that they give. They also give no evidence that the Commissioner has ignored his own criteria; there is no suggestion that the criteria as set out have not been followed.

So what really are Sinn Fein's criteria? These are set out in Alex Maskey's letter at Paragraph A: “Rosetta ward is included in Botanic DEA making it a six seat DEA, taking into account community, sporting and ecclesiastical connections” and indeed, Alex referred to that specifically in his oral presentation this morning.

Then they say that the community, sporting and ecclesiastic connections must be taken into account. Now, these are not criteria applied anywhere else, as I said a moment ago; these are not the criteria laid down by the Commissioner. The Commissioner has laid down criteria and, to accept these, he must be saying these are better criteria than the Commissioner worked on.

So I want to deal very briefly with that. There’s no specificity in the written submission in this letter from Alex Maskey. He talks about ecclesiastical connections and I think it’s clear that he’s speaking specifically about the ecclesiastical connections within the Catholic community rather than the Protestant community, there being, I think, twenty six different Protestant denominations in that area.

With regard to the, as I understand it - and I stand to be corrected - St Malachy's attracts communicants from the Markets and from the Lower Ormeau. If you're from the Upper Ormeau you're more inclined to go to The Good Shepherd; if you're on the Woodstock or that other part you'll go to St Anthony's. But most
importantly, from our point of view, if you’re in Rosetta you’ll go to St Bernadette’s.

There are churches in each of these areas. I think Alex's argument would hold water if he were to say the only Catholic church that Catholics can attend is in Botanic and therefore they should be moved there. But there's not, there's a full ecclesiastical infrastructure throughout the entire area.

The other argument is with regard to sporting. I find this hard to believe because by checking through the website there are soccer, cricket and Gaelic clubs throughout this area. Again, this is not a magnet pulling people from one area to another to go to a Gaelic football club; they can go to a Gaelic football club close to where they actually live.

There is no rationale, I believe, to move people from their local area, where the Commissioner has linked them together based on his criteria, on really spurious grounds, I think, which are not linked or based upon the Sinn Fein criteria.

There are a number of other areas that could be changed if the entire Belfast DEAs were based purely on community, sporting and ecclesiastical connections. We'd have to link Sandy Row to the Shankill because they're all Linfield supporters; Newtownabbey would come into Belfast because they tend to Crews supporters. It stretches the imagination too far.

I want to get down to what I really believe is the rationale for the Sinn Fein's difficulty with the wards in this area. I think that Sinn Finn, as do ourselves, recognise that Titanic has a massively Protestant, unionist, loyalist population, therefore I believe that that party considers that district of Belfast a lost cause.

Now, if the overwhelming Protestant Ravenhill ward can be moved into the Titanic DEA, it will significantly reduce potential support for Sinn Fein's political opponents and increase the chances of electoral gain for that party.

And that is really what this is all about. It's not about setting important criteria which are acceptable to both sections of the community and seeing how it works out; this is purely about getting Rosetta in and Ravenhill out to increase the potential for an extra seat. You will notice that there will be a seat dropped
here and an extra seat dropped there and I think it's easy to see what they're at.

This is purely party political and nothing more and I think this proposal is politically motivated and it's based on sectarian head counting, which I thought was something we were trying to get away from in Northern Ireland as part of this new dispensation.

Subsequently, I would respectfully suggest that the arguments presented by Sinn Fein and Alex Maskey are spurious and I believe they should be rejected and it is the view of Castlereagh Council that the provisional recommendations contained in this booklet here should be endorsed and adopted. Thank you.

Eileen Brady: Very well, thank you. Has anybody at the table here got anything further to add to that?

Stephen Reid: No, that concludes the submission.

Eileen Brady: In light of that, is there anybody present who would like to make a response or a comment to what was raised? Thank you very much for the presentation.

Alex Maskey: Just for the tape again, my name is Alex Maskey, Sinn Fein representative, MLA for South Belfast. I want to make one or two corrections to Chris and his colleagues' submission; my submission doesn't in any way deviate from the boundary Commissioner's own criteria.

In fact, what we're arguing for is that there have to be these additional conditions borne in mind, particularly the census projections going forward into the next number of years, which will leave a disparity between the electorate's ability to elect a number of councillors which will skew the political representation across this city, whatever about the hue of the politics.

The ecclesiastical connections are quite clear, the sporting connections are quite clear, and it's not a sectarian headcount by any stretch of the imagination, but there are very strong religious and sporting connections within those areas that I have previously referred to and which Chris, in his own submission, has addressed. So I would argue very strongly that those connections do exist, that these are additional circumstances which need to be borne in mind by the Boundary Commissioner.
We have put forward a number of recommendations which will, in essence, bring into line the number of councillors who will be returned by the number of electorate, bearing in mind that the whole entire thrust of local government reform in the last number of years, right through to where we currently stand, is to make local government more representative of the people so that the councillors who will be elected will actually represent in numerical terms. This will not be the case if the current boundary recommendations go forward. Thank you.

Chris McGimpsey: I would like the opportunity to respond to that. It's Dr Christopher McGimpsey again. I want to make a couple of points. Alex seems to be leaning very significantly on what he sees as a potential disparity in the future due to the census; this is not included in this submission, this is a new argument. I haven't had an opportunity to look at the census but I dare say that I could.

I would point out that in those areas of Belfast that he's referring to there were a considerable number of sites for further housing development which of course folded three or four years ago with the recession, but which are now starting to open up. They're now starting to be developed. We would foresee quite a bit of redevelopment and development; brownfield development sites, opening up in the next area. So even if there is currently an older population in, say, Ormiston, this will be alleviated to a considerable extent by the fact that you're going to get more young families moving in as more and more new houses are built.

I would also like to say that when he refers to the population and so on, he shoots himself in the foot by using that argument, I think, because he says in (b) of his letter that Ravenhill should be included in Titanic because of the projected population growths. So Sinn Fein believe that the current population of what is in the Titanic Quarter, which is projected, will actually increase significantly because of the projected population growth as the Lagan Development continues.

I think he's right on that and the way to do that is not to take a large ward and stick it into the Titanic area as well; the population growth is going to make the Titanic a very populous ward and Sinn Fein's attitude to that is “let's put even more electors in”. Now that defies logic, I believe.
And I also think it's fair to say that with regard to Shandon ward, if we look at these criteria, that Shandon ward should remain within Ormiston. Shandon ward has community and religious links with Gilnahirk and Sandown, similar to other areas. Geographically Shandon ward links with the Ormiston ward, with the Glen Road acting as a natural and obvious barrier for the DEA. Going back again to the Commissioner's criteria, road services and transport links all run through and interlink this section of Lisnasharragh.

Rate payers of Shandon, Gilnahirk and Sandown use the same shopping and commercial facilities; they go to Ballyhackamore, they go to King's Square, they shop in the same areas. It doesn't make sense, it doesn't meet Mr Mackenzie's criteria and indeed what Sinn Fein are suggesting, doesn't actually meet their criteria either. Thank you.

Eileen Brady: Thank you very much. Are there any further points arising? Thank you very much. That completes your presentation; thank you for that.

In line with the running order, would Cllr Colin Keenan come forward please to make his presentation? Thank you very much.

Colin Keenan: Thank you. My name is Colin Keenan; I'm a Councillor for the SDLP but today I'Il be speaking on behalf of the signatories of the petition that initiated today's public inquiry. As you will be aware, our objection is that the Beechmount ward itself should not be included within the new Black Mountain DEA but instead be included within the Court DEA, and that would create a seven ward Court DEA and result in a six ward Black Mountain DEA.

The reasons for that, if I can firstly talk about the distinct community identity that exists between the wards of Beechmount, of Clonard and of the Falls, it has been the case now for 130 years that two Catholic parishes serve that entire area; that is the parish of St Paul's and St Peter's. And that has been a common and probably the most significant community feature and probably the longest standing community feature that has existed in that particular geographical area.

It's no surprise to learn that the parishes of St Paul's and St Peter's also share a common geographical boundary between Beechmount, Clonard and Falls. Again, from the church's point of view and an ecclesiastical point of view, they see this area as a distinct community. These two churches are grouped into a
vicarate, which is the church’s recognition that this is distinct identity and, as such, that is reflected in the fact that there are two parishes that serve this area.

The main source of employment in the area for the people of these three wards is the Royal Victoria Hospital and that point was made in an earlier remark by Fra McCann, who acknowledged that fact. So they share a common place of work, they intermingle on a daily basis, they talk about the same issues and they talk about the same things. Again, I would emphasise that there is a common, distinct identity between the people of Beechmount, the Falls and Clonard.

It was quite noticeable when I went out to solicit the information, because I had to take it one step back to when these provisional recommendations were made. That whilst they were publicised in the newspapers and various places, I don’t think the realisation on the part of individual voters was quite that pronounced. I found that the vast majority of voters and residents were not aware of these provisional recommendations and had no knowledge of these provisional recommendations until I took the time at each of those doors to explain exactly what was being proposed.

Certainly in the Beechmount ward, which were the majority of signatories to the petition, they were clear in their verbal responses and by signing the petition that they did not want to be separated from Clonard and from the Falls. I live on the upper side, I would say I live in Beechmount, but according to the new boundaries I live in Clonard. But people would tell me, and we would all describe ourselves collectively, as people of the Lower Falls and that has been the case for tens of years.

So whilst I was soliciting this petition, it certainly was the case that people didn’t want to be a part of the new Black Mountain DEA; they felt that the wards that constitute the remainder of the Black Mountain DEA. Whilst they share a general commonality, in that we are all a West Belfast community, the question should really become where the stronger identity is felt. Is it felt with the remaining wards of Black Mountain or is it felt more with the wards of Falls and Clonard. And the response was clear, that people felt it was Clonard and Falls because, first of all, the geographical area spreads up as far as the top of the Glen Road area.
Eileen Brady: So you mentioned a geographical boundary they're sharing, where would that be?

Colin Keenan: Yes, I'll get to that and it goes back to the Commissioner's report, the Commissioner's criteria, which clearly states that the boundaries should be easily definable, or at most should be easily demonstrated.

If I could just take you through a couple of slides here, this is the boundary, and I've done a bit of artistic work to make it interesting. This is the boundary as is proposed by the current recommendations; here is the ward of Clonard, here is the ward of Falls - and it goes the whole way down here - and then this is the resulting Black Mountain DEA, as proposed.

I blacked out areas which are void of housing in this presentation to demonstrate to you what I'm talking about here which is that this is the boundary; the estate here is known as Cluain Mor, Big Clonard, as was referred to previously. The street here which lie in the Clonard ward - and I know wards aren't under scrutiny today as that was done at another place and another time - this is called Beechmount Gardens but it sits outside of the Beechmount area. These people here see themselves as Beechmount. This is a side street; these are side streets, this whole area is side streets, there are no main arterial routes here.

This area here which is Broadway Road would be considered to be an arterial route. There's a little enclave of houses here, the right-hand side of Broadway Road and Thames Court and Irwell Court. You can see quite clearly, given the fact that the Royal Hospital is here, which is void of any houses and also there is a secondary school here, St Dominic's and St Rose's, that this little enclave is cut off completely from the remaining inhabitants of the Falls ward and also from the Clonard ward.

They share no clearly definable boundary with those people and, in fact, the case is that these people see themselves more as Beechmount. Only just across the road from them are people of the Beechmount ward, again within the Cluain Mors their boundary is almost seamless. On one side of the street you're going to have one particular girl voting for one set of electoral representatives and on the other side of the street you're going to have a different situation. Again, there's no real discernible boundary.
Now, what I propose, and what people support me on, is that this becomes the new boundary. It's quite striking what becomes the discernible boundary by bringing Beechmount, as we propose, into the Court DEA. Look at this here, a quite clearly definable boundary; this is a void area. And I've kept it different colours within each ward I've, so red is the boundary of the Beechmount side of the ward and so forth. It's void of any housing which is quite significant. You're going from what would be hard to tell to what the boundary is exactly to what can be clearly demonstrated.

Again we'll go back to the Commissioner's criteria which clearly states, where possible to have this quite clearly discernible and distinct boundary between neighbouring DEAs. Here there's none more so, and it's hard to ignore because this change would still fulfil the requirements of the legislation in terms of ward numbers. I think given that, it speaks for itself, to be honest.

So my view, and view of those who have signed the petition, is that the spatial barriers give rise to these distinct communities. My position is further and inadvertently supported by the submission the DUP made in their written submission to the Boundary Commissioner, to the provisional proposals, in which they state, and I'll just skip you to the last line of this which says, "The Royal Victoria Hospital site and a main arterial route make up almost all of the boundary between the Falls ward and Clonard wards and Beechmount wards while under the DEA proposals, the DEA division between Clonard and Beechmount would be made up largely of a collection of side streets".

So the DUP have inadvertently supported the position of the SDLP and of those people who have signed our petition and I'll rest my case on that point.

Eileen Brady: Have you anything to say in terms of Fra McCann's submission in relation to this issue?

Colin Keenan: I think in terms of the motivation, the motivation from our part is to keep a distinct community together, pure and simple. I think if you had the time, and you went to every door in Beechmount, they would clearly say to you that they want to be part of the Falls and Clonard where have traditionally been and feel that identity.

I can't go without saying that I do feel that the motivation of Sinn Fein is purely for electoral gain, in terms of keeping the
Beechmount ward in the new Black Mountain DEA. Certainly from our view of things, to bring the Beechmount ward into the Court DEA changes the dynamics of the forthcoming election and would disadvantage or would certainly lead to a worse situation for Sinn Fein and I think that is their pure motivation for arguing this here.

Again it speaks for itself there; that boundary is clear for everyone to see, so why would you want to argue that Beechmount should be part of Ballymurphy, an area where houses don't touch and residents, for all intents and purposes, don't mingle on a daily basis? Thank you.

Eileen Brady: Very well, thank you. Are there any comments anybody wishes to make in relation to that?

Ciaran Beattie: My name is Ciaran Beattie and I'm from the Beechmount Residents Association and I'd just like to respond to Cllr Keenan's remarks in relation to Beechmount. I believe that the Beechmount ward is inextricably linked with the rest of the Black Mountain; it's nonsense to say that it's connected to the Court DEA. Has Beechmount more in common with Ballygomartin, with Woodvale, with Shankill than it does with Whiterock or Ballymurphy? I think that needs clarified because I think it's completely untrue.

As I say, I come from the Beechmount Residents Association and, after meeting with residents in the area, their opinion is that they don't feel disenfranchised about Beechmount going into the Black Mountain DEA; it's quite the opposite. Cllr Keenan mentions that he got 400 signatures. There are approximately 6,000 people living in Beechmount so I think that's a gauge of feelings there too. So I'd just like to point out that from a Beechmount resident's point of view, we don't believe that's the case.

Colin Keenan: Can I just refute that in terms of Ciaran introducing himself as the Beechmount Residents Association and attesting to speak as the Beechmount Residents Association. If you look at the petition, the vice chair of the Beechmount Residents Association has signed our petition and has backed our position on this. Mrs Jackie Duffy has signed our petition so the Beechmount Residents Association is split on this issue and certainly it would be wrong for him to perpetuate that as the view, collectively, of the Beechmount Residents Association.
And he's right to say there were 6,000. I'm one person; I had to spend time at each and every door for about thirty minutes to forty five minutes at each door to explain in depth what this meant, to show documentation. It wasn't simply a case of rapping on a door and saying please sign this and moving on. I dare say if I'd had the time and went harder at it, we'd have a lot more names on that petition and unfortunately I go back to the fact that I was one person rapping on doors and taking the time to explain it to residents. But still it's 200 names more and the reason we're here today.

Eileen Brady: Could you announce your name again for the purposes of the record?

Ciaran Beattie: Yes, Ciaran Beattie, Beechmount Residents Association. I'd just like to come back on Cllr Keenan's remarks in relation to the vice chair. A lot of people in Beechmount told me that Colin was out rapping on doors and asking for signatures; there was a lot of misinformation spread and I think MLA Fra McCann touched on it earlier on. There were people that were given the opinion that they now belonged to the Shankill Ward and were going to have to vote in the Shankill. It was nonsense; it was misinformation that was put out and, if you would like, Colin, I can phone Jackie Duffy now and get her to appear in front of you just to clarify that point.

Colin Keenan: Well, at this point that is hearsay. If people have a point to make they should come in person here today to make that point. I can only stand over what I did on that day accruing that petition which was that I gave the information as correctly and as accurately as I could. If people are being leaned on now to give different accounts of what happened on that day, well that's a thing you can tell from what's happened here today. I didn't want to get into a tit for tat, I wanted to come here and state a very clear case.

Eileen Brady: We will keep to what is the issue this morning and we'll just keep to the paperwork and the submissions and what has been said so as to try and keep some order within this. Would that complete your submission in relation to...?

Colin Keenan: Yes, that would.

Eileen Brady: Excuse me, you wouldn't mind remaining there Cllr Keenan until we finish this.
Fra McCann: Fra McCann, MLA for the area. I was actually quite surprised to see that the people in Beechmount who I represent have a very strong affinity to the Falls and Divis area; as a matter of fact, it would be the complete opposite in many ways. I think that there are natural boundaries there. Oakman Street is one of the main streets that separates the Beechmount area from the Cavendish area and there always has been that affinity between the Cavendish and the Clonard areas. And I think if anybody looks into the history of Cluain Mor or Big Clonard would know it's a natural extension in terms of families, in terms of shopping with the Clonard area itself.

Colin Keenan: Could I just make one last point?

Eileen Brady: Could you introduce yourself.

Colin Keenan: Cllr Colin Keenan, SDLP. Just to make one final point and I think this point really solidly makes the case why this is a distinct community and where it really stems from and Fra McCann's position as the local MLA for the area. Fra McCann for Sinn Fein covers the geographical area of Falls, Clonard and Beechmount; he is a West Belfast MLA but in their election and vote management he covers the Falls, Clonard and Beechmount areas.

Pat Sheehan covers the Ballymurphy and Turf Lodge areas and leaflets would be put out on a continual basis from Mr McCann stating that he is the local MLA of the Mid Falls and Lower Falls area, covering Beechmount, Falls and the Clonard wards. So in terms of that, they accept that it is a distinct community that they serve through Fra McCann and some local councillors. So why in one situation is it ok but in this situation they want it to be included within a different geographical boundary? But that's where I'll leave the case and leave it with you on that point.

Eileen Brady: Once again, just introduce yourself. I know who you are but it's for the purposes of the record.

Fra McCann: Fra McCann, MLA for West Belfast and I would have to say that I take my votes from right across West Belfast, not any specific areas.

Eileen Brady: There's somebody else wishing to make a comment; please introduce yourself clearly.
Harry Connolly: My name is Harry Connolly; I am here today on behalf of the Upper Springfield Federation of Residents Associations. Just one very small point and I'll make it very quickly. Colin had made the point, and the record will probably qualify, that people from the Beechmount area don't necessarily mingle on a daily basis with people from the Ballymurphy Ward.

Just to clarify, I live in the Ballymurphy Ward, I work in the Beechmount area, I play for a local GAA club, St John's GAA club. I'm not here today on behalf of St John's. However, we draw members from right across the Beechmount, St James's and indeed the Ballymurphy areas. So in terms of people not mingling on a daily basis, I completely refute that.

Colin Keenan: I think just to clarify that point, obviously there will always be mingling between people of various communities and Harry has said that he mingle because of the fact that he works in Beechmount and plays for a local club there. But what I'm saying is that if you grade this, where does most mingling occur? Does it occur between people of Beechmount and Ballymurphy or does it occur between the people of Beechmount, Clonard and the Falls? And I would say the majority of the mingling and socialising and community contacts occur between the latter.

And one of the major structures in the Beechmount area is a community centre called The Blackie Centre which takes kids. There's day care facilities, there's other community activities that occur in that building and again, in a geographical catchment area for that building, it takes children from the Clonard, it takes children from the Beechmount area. That would be like second to the church in Beechmount; that would be the next biggest community structure that exists and it exists mainly on a Clonard/Beechmount basis.

So you only have to look at it, these housing developments, especially Cluain Mor, have been built transverse to lateral wards there and you can see that that was the case in the old wards as well. So people there don't see the boundary as you and I do on a map; they're the same streets, they're the same houses. The nearest supermarket for the people of Cluain Mor would be the Spar; the Spar is on the Springfield Road so people at the lower end of the Cluain Mor estate, which is actually in the Beechmount Ward, would probably use the same shopping facilities as the people of the Clonard ward, which is that local supermarket on the Springfield Road.
Again, the length of the Falls Road, especially in the Beechmount where the Falls Road comes down through Beechmount, is all Chinese's and takeaways and various shops there. And again they wouldn't be exclusively used by people of Beechmount. People from the Falls ward, especially on the right hand side of the Broadway Road, in Irwell Court, which is in the Falls Ward, Irwell Court, Thames Street and Broadway Road itself, they would all use those facilities as well.

So there's more interaction and that's the point I'm making. There is more interaction; there is a stronger distinct identity between Falls, Beechmount and Clonard than there will ever be between Ballymurphy and Beechmount. And look at the big area that is void of any housing and there, there is a physical barrier... For someone to mingle with Beechmount they would have to come down the Whiterock Road, take a left and then go back up into the housing estates there.

That barrier is a physical barrier that is separated by schools and wasteland and a cemetery so it's a huge physical barrier; you have to go out of your housing estate, go to that main arterial route and then go back up and into that estate. There is one access point through the Giant's Foot', if you look there it's just here. But again, that's one small access point and it's got a line of houses but it's quite a far way. I'll leave it there.

Eileen Brady: Somebody else wishes to make a comment.

Sean Quinn: My name is Sean Quinn and I'm a resident of West Belfast but I'm also the Secretary of the Blackie Community Centre; I also work in the Beechmount area. I would like to say that I see this as being part of the Black Mountain area, it's one of the things that, working in that area and being on the Blackie Board, I would draw your attention to.

Eileen Brady: Does anybody else wish to make a comment? In light of that, that's your presentation completed; thank you very much.

Colin Keenan: Thank you very much.

Eileen Brady: In resuming the programme, it appears we have a couple of persons present who wish to make a presentation together, Harry Connolly, Breige Brownlee and Fra Hamilton. Thank you very much, you're all very welcome and don't forget to announce your
name and the capacity in which you’re talking for the purposes of the record today.

Breige Brownlee: My name is Breige Brownlee; I am the Chairperson of St James's Community Forum, I'm also on the management committee of St John's Youth Club and I come here today to make an oral submission as a representative of that area. I have to say that initially I was surprised that Colin didn't mention St James's, Rock Streets, Beechview Park, which is the area that I represent. There are 1,300 houses in that area and I am very much a community representative.

I think the people of our area are very confused about the SDLP submission and we would totally reject that. They see the main areas being the main arterial routes; the Whiterock Road, the Falls Road, Donegall Road which join the Beechmount Ward.

I was also surprised to hear him refer to Beechmount, which I assume takes in St James's and the Rock Streets, as the Lower Falls because people in my area would never class themselves as the Lower Falls; we would be more classed as the Mid Falls and therefore we would see ourselves identifying more with that Mid Falls area, which would be the Whiterock, Lower Andersonstown and Beechmount and Iveagh.

We work very closely with various groups. The forum itself is made up of the Residents Group, the Women's Group, Parenting and Toddler Group, Young Men's Group, Young Women's Group and so there's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. There's been a lot of talk about these boundary changes and about the whole changes to the electoral system, so I think I'm well qualified to represent those people here today.

Our area borders on - there's the Falls Road that separates St James's from the Rock Streets; Beechview Park, which runs from the end streets of the Rock Streets right up into the Whiterock. Our area would have a lot of work there particularly on antisocial behaviour issues, and with the Beechview residents. Beechview Park is actually split into two; half of that street is in the Whiterock, half of it is in the Falls.

So it makes sense to us that the boundaries stay as they are because we work very hard on the street to join those different areas, to make strong community links, to make strong
community empowerment. To me, it would be just madness to split those areas up.

St John's Parish also has not been mentioned. St Peter's and St Paul's Parish were mentioned. St John's Parish is my parish, which takes in the Whiterock, Beechmount, St James's, that whole area. It even comes down to things like funerals, so the people in the Whiterock come to St John's. They come to St Kevin's Primary School which is beside St John's, and to split those areas up now when you have that distinct community there...

Eileen Brady: This is for the grouping of wards only.

Breige Brownlee: Well it's for schools, it's for funerals; it's identity and identity is very important to areas like mine. And we identify with Beechmount, we identify with the Whiterock, we identify with the areas as is. We work very closely with the youth providers in the area which I think is very important and part of our work in that area is making our youth aware of the importance of voting, the importance of registering. Our youth club takes in youths up until 25 years old which we see as a very strong body within the youth club because again of the drug use, the antisocial behaviour and stuff.

But one of the things we're making the youth identify with is the importance of voting, the importance of taking part in our society. And splitting it up would just cause unnecessary confusion, I think, to them.

Again, the Royal Victoria Hospital has been mentioned several times. St James's area is a matter of a few hundred yards away from the Victoria Hospital round by Broadway Roundabout and again, if you're talking about causing a barrier there, it sounds crazy to me, to be honest. I'm not very au fait with boundaries and electoral things, but to me as a community activist it just sounds crazy.

We work with all areas; we actually border on an interface with the village area, so there's no question of sectarianism in our point of view. We work very closely with our Protestant neighbours, we work very closely with the PSNI, with the statutory bodies, the Housing Executive and again all that work takes in that whole area. And to me if we were starting to put
borders across that area it would just create division where it's not necessary.

I think that's most of the important points coming from my area. We are working to join communities and to consolidate links, not to create more borders and divisions and, as I say, the confusion that comes about with it.

Fra Hamilton: I'm Fra Hamilton from the Beechmount Residents Association. Could I make a presentation probably more in layman terms? To be honest, I'm not very good with words. But could I just say with Colin's presentation, where he's trying to affiliate Beechmount with the Lower Falls, anyone from Belfast knows the Lower Falls is a distinct area; you are known from the Lower Whack or the Lower Falls. I've lived in Beechmount all my life; over 40 years. I have never heard anybody from the Beechmount area call themselves a Lower Whack or a Lower Falls person, they're two very, very distinct areas.

Another point I would like to make as to why I would have an affinity with St James's on the Whiterock is the school situation. I went to Corpus Christi as a kid; that's where you would meet most people from the Whiterock areas and St James's areas. Also, I've been a number of children there at the minute and they'd be attending St John's, so while I'm from Beechmount and have lived there all my life I would see St John's very much as my parish. My kids make their communion in St John's parish, their christenings in St John's and I've buried my father recently out of St John's. So there's very much a connection between us.

Also I was involved in the GAA. Most people from Beechmount, ODs would probably be their catchment area which is on the Whiterock Road. So I think it's a very distinct area and it's definitely not associated with the Lower Falls area; I can't make that point clear enough.

Also there's a development, as you are probably aware, on a vacant site in Beechmount. This is one of those antisocial hotspots in the area and, in conjunction with the Upper Springfield and Whiterock, we're hoping to build a GAA pitch there. It's going to be a multimillion GAA pitch; this is the link between Beechmount and the Whiterock.

Once this is built it will even reinforce the links between them. That's where the children are going to go; hopefully there will be
hundreds of children and that will be Beechmount, St James's and the Whiterock areas. The ODs and other ones will be participating in that.

There are just another couple of points too. I see one thing too in Colin's presentation, he was talking about the Blackwater River and that it's a natural divide between Clonard and Beechmount. I have lived up the Blackwater; the Blackwater as far as I know is in Tyrone. That river that Colin must be talking about is the Clowney River that runs through that area. Now, it's known by children as the Blackie River but that is a nickname so I don't even know the sense of that argument.

But to say the connection is more with Clonard is just a nonsense; it's absolute nonsense because of the schools and the parish and all that. I would very much see myself as more attached to the Whiterock and St James's and, as I say, I've never in my life heard anybody in the Beechmount area referring to themselves as a Lower Falls person. Thank you.

Eileen Brady: Thank you very much. And yourself, would you like to speak? And after this then obviously I'll give people the opportunity to respond to the three submissions at that time. So we'll just continue at present.

Harry Connolly: Ok, my name is Harry Connolly; I'm here today as a member of the Upper Springfield Federation of Residents Associations that incorporates nine residents groups in the Upper Springfield. I'm here to make a number of short points to lend weight on behalf of the Upper Springfield Federation of Residents, in support of the submissions from St James's residents and obviously Beechmount residents.

The Upper Springfield Federation of Residents Associations enjoys a very close and indeed clear working relationship with other residents groups, namely Beechmount and St James's, working together on a daily basis on a host of regeneration, community and, indeed, youth initiatives and projects. Breige has talked about Beechview Park, which is a clear indication of why these boundaries are to be welcomed, in terms of the street being cut in half currently. But we're working daily there to address antisocial behaviour and indeed target and increase social cohesion.
The Corpus Christi School is at the top end of that site, which borders Beechmount and Whiterock, West Rock and indeed probably edges into the Springhill areas; that vacant site. The redevelopment of that site will further cement community relations between obviously both communities. As a further example of how those communities are linked, we have the Falls Park Master Plan, which is a huge sprawling green space that borders on the edge of St James's and indeed the Whiterock Road and obviously across to the city cemetery and the Ballymurphy areas.

There's close work going on there; the Falls Park Master Plan Group is made up of representatives from all of those communities that I've spoken about and indeed the sporting connection which has been spoken about today by a number of speakers in different parts of the city.

But again if you're looking for a clear example of how sport brings communities together, look no further than the work of O'Donnell's GAA Club and indeed John's GAA Club too. I mentioned earlier on the work of my own club in terms of St John's and members there, which I can testify to, are from St James's, Beechmount, Ballymurphy, Springhill and right across the Black Mountain DEA area.

If I could just make a number of other short points regarding the makeup and proposed makeup of the Black Mountain DEA. People have argued and people have made their points that it's not a good boundary. Certainly the Upper Springfield Federation of Residents Associations feels that it is a good boundary and a clear boundary and obviously those points have been made today.

It is clearly identifiable, it does make sense; residents, community groups, the voluntary sector, all of the organisations I've been involved with and spoken to agree that it makes clear sense. It will further foster community cohesion and we would like to certainly commend the Electoral Commission on what is a difficult job.

And while it is perhaps impossible to satisfy all political parties, residents are very clear that it is a consistent piece of work and we'd like to commend you for that.
Eileen Brady: Very well, thank you. Does that complete your presentation? In light of that we'll ask anybody present if they want to make a comment in relation to what's been raised. And don't forget to mention your name and capacity.

Colin Keenan: Colin Keenan, SDLP Councillor. Just to refute, I was here today speaking on behalf of those residents who signed the petition. Fra referred to me talking about a Blackwater River. At no point did I make reference to a Blackwater River. That does feature within the SDLPs central submission and it was, as I understood when I read it, a mistake. It was meant to say Blackie River, but that's not who I am here speaking for today. I am here speaking for those residents who signed that petition and at no point did I make that reference.

Speaking in a general sense again, undeniably there are links between all wards and the case could be made that many of the people of Beechmount get up each day and go to Queen's University and that would be considered a link. The question isn't whether there is a link or there isn't; the question is are the stronger links more apparent and pronounced.

And I accept the point that Breige makes and indeed Harry makes as well, that there are these links between the Ballymurphy area and the Beechmount ward and also between the Beechmount ward and the Falls Park ward to the left. You do have these sporting connections but the question for me essentially is where the stronger connections are.

The vast majority of the Beechmount housing estate lies geographically closer to the Clonard housing estate and yes, there are the Rock Streets and there are St James's area at the upper end but they are divided even from the main Beechmount housing development by the old Beechmount Leisure Centre site and by the Park Centre Shopping Centre and also by the Willowbank Park.

So there is a boundary there that even takes that part of Beechmount away from the main Beechmount housing development and there could be arguably a case that they do have closer links to the Whiterock area. But as a ward, the closer links are most definitely between Clonard and Beechmount and the Falls and Beechmount.
Breige Brownlee: Breige Brownlee, St James's Forum. I think Colin is being a bit facetious there when he says about strong links with people who go from Beechmount to Queen's. I think the stronger links are proven by the area itself.

The Whiterock, Mid Falls area which I work in and represent are amongst the most highly deprived areas in Europe, so the stronger links are made up by the people who are unemployed, the people who work and live within that community. And I think that is stronger than any link about where people go to university or whatever. It is a very strong, tight community and they have very distinct ideas on where they want to vote and where they want to be registered in.

Harry Connolly: Harry Connolly, Upper Springfield Federation of Residents Associations. It's just one point in terms of the number of times it's been mentioned today in different people's submissions around the term 'vacant site'. When we talk about the Beechmount Leisure Centre site it's a vacant site, although it is earmarked for a multimillion pound development and investment has already been agreed by the Department of Education to turn that so called 'vacant site' into a multimillion pound development, the first of its kind in Ireland.

The Irish Language Medium Secondary School enjoys links with all of the communities right across West Belfast and beyond but it's important just to point that there will be multimillion pound developments starting there within the next year or so that are due to be completed within the next two years.

So it's certainly a greenfield site ready for work to begin. So when we are talking about a vacant site we aren't talking about a concrete wasteland that's going to lie there for years and be a barrier between communities, it's actually going to do the opposite and bring communities further together.

Fra Hamilton: Fra Hamilton, Beechmount Association. I'm conscious of making the points about what we've got in common with the Clonard area; he fails to mention that we had a Beechmount Residents Association meeting and I was explaining what the Black Mountain DEA is, I was also proposing that we would join with the Ballygomartin, Woodvale and Shankill.

Maybe Colin should go to one of those meetings because people would think his head's cut that we have something in common
there rather than with Ballymurphy; it's just a ridiculous argument. And to say that he had 400 people, maybe the Beechmount Residents Association at their meetings is more truely reflective of the feeling of the area.

Eileen Brady: Are there any more comments?

Ciaran Beattie: Ciaran Beattie, Beechmount Residents Association. Just a point that Colin made in relation to the name of the river, it's neither the Blackwater nor the Blackie River; it's called the Clowney River, just for the record.

Eileen Brady: Any further remarks or issues to be raised in relation to the submission that was made? In light of that, thank you very much for that. Next on the programme to speak this morning is Terry Quinn and Claire Canavan.

Claire Canavan: My name is Claire Canavan; I am here on behalf of the Clonard Residents Association. We've been meeting as an association with the local residents about the proposals and in particular the DUP submission that Clonard should be taken out of the Court DEA. We have taken the views of local residents and I would like to say that we support and endorse the proposals for the Clonard and the Falls to become part of the Court DEA.

The Residents Association has always been an integral part of the community; we've been involved in a bridge building process in relation to our Loyalist, Unionist and Protestant counterparts in the Shankill, Woodvale and Ballygomartin. We have a strong cross-community infrastructure; we work on a daily basis to improve these relations and that work is ongoing. We also have a strong sporting infrastructure.

For example, we have boxing; we have two local boxing teams that would regularly travel to the Shankill and vice versa. And there are also major employers for the wards of Forthriver, Ballygomartin, Shankill and Woodvale that are based in the wards of Clonard and Falls. For example, you have the Royal Victoria Hospital, you have FG Wilson's, Farset, Twin Spires; so there's strong links between people in the proposed DEA.

And there's also strong links between the Clonard ward and the Falls ward so I don't think the Clonard should be taken out. They share schools, parks and leisure facilities and places of
employment and there’s also increasing links with these two wards and the Shankill and the Woodvale wards.

We totally disagree with the DUP’s assertion that Clonard should be taken out of the new Court DEA. In fact, we see it as a distraction and some residents from within our community view it as an opportunity to reduce nationalist representation and some have voiced their concerns that it’s a form of gerrymandering, that the proposal is just merely politically motivated.

I’ll just hand over then to Terry.

**Terry Quinn:**

Terry Quinn, Falls Residents Association. I’m the development worker for the association. The purpose of the Residents Association is to increase participation in local government structures and improve confidence as well. Just around some of the proposals that the DUP have made; the Falls and Clonard area is a distinct area, even different from other parts of West Belfast; they are always known as the Lower Falls area.

They are linked socially and economically by the proposed boundary which the DUP have put in, of the Falls Road; that’s the business hub of the area and it shares shops, cafes, local GAA clubs which is the *Davis* GAA and McDermott’s which serve the Falls and Clonard areas with children entering into teams.

We also have the boxing clubs and football teams. The Immaculata boxing and football teams would service the Clonard and Falls area and we also have St Peter’s Cathedral which serves both the communities within the Clonard and Falls area.

We’ve also a sharing of schools, of resources. We in the Falls Residents Association work alongside the Clonard residents in the Townsend Street Festival which is a cross-community festival which is being organised within the next two weeks to better participation between residents in the Shankill, the Falls and Clonard areas and better understanding and to build mutual respect.

So, we have multiagency forums which we sit alongside, one of which being the Falls Intervention which takes in the Clonard and Falls area, which is a scheme that was designated to look at deprivation in those areas which, as I say, both areas suffer from.
In both communities, there's family ties. People from the Falls have families within the Clonard and vice versa. I'm actually from the Falls area myself and my family are from the Falls area originally but I work within the Falls area now; there is no difference between those two communities; there's no social, economic differences between those communities and, as I say, they have a very shared experience between the two.

When this was brought to our attention it created a lot of confusion among residents. As you probably know, the Falls area would be an area that has a low participation in the democratic process and we believe this is designed to further that low level of participation and also, we believe, that it is basically party political. It has got nothing to do with enriching or enhancing the participation of residents in that area; it is designed basically to decrease nationalist representation within that DEA.

So, as I say, we have a lot of different community groups that share those things. We have a historical link between the two areas and the community see themselves as the Lower Falls area and the proposed boundary is actually the economic hub of that area, which is shared by both the Clonard and the Falls area. That is my presentation.

Claire Canavan: Can I just refer you to some of the DUP submissions? The DUP submit that there are more access points along the Peace Line between the Falls and Shankill than there are between Woodvale and Clonard. In fact there are three access points between the Falls and the Shankill; Townsend Street, Northumberland Street and North Harwood Street.

And the Clonard ward has two access points to the Woodvale ward, of Lanark Way and Workman Avenue. However, they forget about the five access points from the Clonard ward to the Ballygomartin ward; you've Springdale Gardens, Springfield Parade, Isadore Avenue, West Circular Road and Highcairn Drive.

Also the DUP submits that both the Shankill and the Falls wards take in sections of the City Centre in order to advance their argument. While that is correct, we don't see it as a logical reason to exclude Clonard from the Court DEA because none of the other wards, the Forth River, Ballygomartin and Woodvale, take in any section of the City Centre. I have nothing further.
Eileen Brady: Thank you very much. Is there anybody wishing to make any comments or raise any points in regard to that submission? That seems to be complete so thank you very much for that. In line with the programme I'll call Gerry McConville please.

Gerry McConville: Gerry McConville, Director of Falls Community Council. Can I just say Falls Community Council is a large umbrella community organisation in West Belfast, but we work across the city on various projects, both intra-community and intercommunity and we would do a lot of work with residents associations across the West Belfast area.

We did a written submission for you.

Eileen Brady: Yes, I have read that.

Gerry McConville: And perhaps if I could just read a few extracts from that?

Eileen Brady: Highlight some points.

Gerry McConville: And then I will make a few general points. So I'd just like to say that we would welcome the changes that have been made here. Your proposals on west and north DEAs in particular have helped to lower the deviations from the ward average and, if implemented, would result in a fairer electoral system. But perhaps some work could be carried out to broaden this out and make it more of a Belfast initiative in terms of equity.

It must be noted that under the new boundaries the Ormiston and Lisnasharragh DEAs will elect the same number of councillors as the Black Mountain and Collin DEAs. The electorate in Ormiston and Lisnasharragh, at 44,591 compared with 48,230 in Black Mountain and Collin, is 3,639 people fewer. The average electorate required for a council seat across the ten DEAs of Belfast under the new Boundary Commissioner's recommendation is 3,572 and therefore that's a difference of one councillor, according to the electorate.

And it only gets worse if you look into the projected Census figures, that over the next ten years Ormiston and Lisnasharragh's DEA will be electing the same number of councillors as Black Mountain and Collin, despite having a potential electorate of 7,500 fewer, equates to 2.1 council seats difference.
The population of West Belfast is higher in every age bracket up to twenty five to thirty compared with East Belfast, while in all age brackets over-thirty East Belfast has a higher population according to the 2011 Census. Further, when we look at those aged over-seventy in East Belfast, according to the 2011 Census there are 11,737 people compared with 8,286, again a difference of almost 3,500. Thus over the next ten years there will be a disproportionally higher number of deaths among this age group in East Belfast that again could correspond to almost a council seat.

Thus, in these four DEAs in Belfast, with the current boundaries and a look at the demographic changes that can be forecast over the next ten years, there will be a discrepancy of three full council seats built into Belfast City Council between West and East Belfast, all of which will be in favour of unionism.

One possible proposal is that the Rosetta ward is included in the Botanic DEA making it a six seat DEA, taking into account the community, sporting and ecclesiastical connections between Rosetta and Ormeau; that the Ravenhill ward is including the Titanic DEA, taking into account the projected population growth around Titanic and Lagan area developments; and that the Shandon Ward goes into the Lisnasharragh DEA from the Ormiston DEA making them a five seat DEA and a six seat DEA respectively. And I think that would address the deviations in a more positive form and create a more equitable system for everybody.

Again, just in general in terms of West Belfast, we broadly welcome the work and the proposals being put into place. Regarding the Clonard, from our work with the Residents Association, the Residents Association have presented themselves here today, there's quite a suspicion about the motives of the DUP for moving the Clonard from the Falls and the knock on implications that that would have.

There is also a lot of scepticism about the DUP proposal to move Collin Glen from the Black Mountain. It sits quite naturally within that area and I'm from that area myself and actually the name of the area is Glen Collin, which derives from the Collin Mountain. So it doesn't sit naturally to move it; it sits quite naturally where it is.
And on the proposal about Beechmount moving into Court, the commonality as expressed by the residents here today with the Whiterock and St James's is there for all to see. There are very, very strong links between the areas in terms of schools, play, facilities, cultural activities and the GAA in particular. So it doesn't really make any sense.

And for example, some of the projects Falls Council would be involved in - we're doing a project in the Falls area, St Comgall's, and we'll be consulting with the residents of that area. But we wouldn't consider doing any consultation with the residents of Beechmount because it doesn't really sit naturally with that area and it would be like that with other projects.

In terms of McDonald's, the projected consultation will take place with residents from Whiterock, Beechmount and the surrounding areas but probably won't take in the Falls. So there's really quite natural divisions there. That's me, thank you very much.

Eileen Brady: Thank you. Has anybody any comments they wish to raise in regard to that? No. Thank you very much.

In line with the programme I'll call forward James Irwin.

James Irwin: I'm James Irwin; I'm here on behalf of the Markets Development Association, community group representative of the Markets area. After studying these boundary changes we believe that there's a clear covert attempt, sorry, gerrymandering in the Ormiston and Lisnasharragh DEAs. We believe that these boundary changes are designed to decrease nationalist representation in the ward and this is blatantly sectarian.

I agree with the points that Gerry McConville made before me. Our submission is based on the deviations and imbalance which we believe will be caused by these boundary changes but, given the wealth of experience in the room, I'm open to suggestions from others as to how this imbalance can be addressed. But as far as I can see, the only detailed proposals we have heard have been from Alex Maskey.

We believe that these DEAs of Ormiston and Lisnasharragh will in fact have the same amount of councillors as the Black Mountain and Collin DEAs, even though there is a significant difference in population. According to the Commissioner's own figures, the average electorate required for a council seat across
the ten DEAs of Belfast is 3,500, and using the 2011 Census figures, it is clear to see that projected population changes translates to an extra councillor in these DEAs for a less than average electorate, increasing to an extra 2.1 councillors over the next ten years.

We believe that the correction of this negative effect is simple. The Rosetta ward, as Gerry McConville has said, should be included in the Botanic DEA making this is six seat DEA. Taking into account the communities, sporting and the ecclesiastical connections which Alex Maskey alluded to, the Ravenhill ward should be included within the Titanic DEA, taking into account a projected population growth around the Titanic Quarter and Lagan developments.

And the Shandon ward goes into Lisnasharragh DEA from the Ormiston DEA, making it a five seat and a six seat DEA respectively. That is our submission from the Markets Development Association.

Eileen Brady: Thank you very much for that. Has anybody any comments they wish to raise concerning that presentation? Thank you very much. Next person listed is Sean Lennon registered to speak today.

Sean Lennon: I'm Sean Lennon; I am the Chairperson of the Lenadoon Neighbourhood Partnership which embraces Lenadoon, Glen Collin and Suffolk areas. I'm also the chairperson of the Glen Collin Residents Association and have been for the last ten, twelve years or so. I also work with Glen Collin or Lenadoon Community Forum which embraces twenty seven local community groups within that catchment. I've been a member of that for the last eight or nine years.

And what I'm here today for, the DUPs proposal to move the Glen Collin ward, which was to become part of the Black Mountain DEA, into Collin, is totally confusing. We have spoken about it within our community, within the community groups, within the neighbourhood renewal, and people are confused as to why this is being done.

Lenadoon and Glen Collin, they've more in common with the Andersonstown area; the whole community ethos of that area is interlinked through social, sports, community infrastructure. For example, the Lenadoon Neighbourhood Renewal and
Andersonstown Neighbourhood Renewal both interlink with each other because of the close proximity of both areas.

The whole proposal to us is totally confusing; people in the area are confused as to why it is being done. The natural boundary of the area has always been the Collin Glen River; the Black Mountain, which the ward will become part of is basically overshadowed by the Black Mountain. The Collin Mountain is further on up overshadowing the Collin area where the proposed ward has to go into Collin. So we’re confused by the whole proposal.

The boundaries for policing have always been the Collin Glen River to this very day. Police use the Collin Glen River as a natural boundary between Collin and Lenadoon. One side of the river is Woodburn Police and on the other side of the river is Lisburn Police.

The funders use it as a natural boundary for funding, the Collin Glen River is a natural boundary on the Lenadoon side within the Belfast area, and Lisburn funders use Collin Glen for the boundary for their funding. So it has been used geographically as long as I can remember. I’m 62 years of age, I have lived in the area all my days and Collin Glen River has always been a natural boundary.

Lenadoon has never had any real affiliation with the Collin area. The Collin area was not built on until years later but Twinbrook, Collin and those areas are natural areas. Lenadoon is more affiliated with Andersonstown; they’re more integrated within Andersonstown, the whole make up of both areas within the community sector, and I represent and work on the ground on a regular basis with the community.

And as I say, most of our work would embrace Andersonstown, Lenadoon area. We would have those working ties with the Collin area and we would see it as sort of causing total confusion with Lenadoon if it was moved into that area; it would be a case of people feeling displaced going into another boundary area.

I think basically that’s all I would have to say on it.

Eileen Brady: Thank you very much. Has anybody got any comments they want to raise concerning that submission? Thank you. Well, in line with that it appears that we have completed this morning’s list
of people to make a representation and we'll adjourn the proceedings until 1.30pm today. Thank you.

Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome back to the afternoon session of the inquiry into the District Electoral Areas for Belfast. According to the programme there has been a registration by Peter Lynch to make a submission this afternoon. Please remember to state your name and the capacity in which you're speaking for the record. Thank you.

Peter Lynch: My name is Peter Lynch. I am here on behalf of Tar Annall; it's a community group in West Belfast. We work with all the neighbourhood renewal areas across the west of the city. I was here this morning and I just want to make a few points on some of the presentations and some of the submissions. Can this map zoom in? Could you zoom into the Beechmount Ward?

My points are in reference to the DUP submission and the SDLP submission. It's about the borders, the actual boundaries themselves. The Beechmount ward and Clonard ward use main arterial routes, natural boundaries, and the boundary is clearly identifiable; it separates different housing estates. Colin commented on it earlier on, so it separates Mica Drive, which is in Beechmount, from Cluain Mor, which is now in Clonard.

There's no doubt that some of the wards aren't ideal because when we were doing all the wards it wasn't possible to separate areas totally the way people would have liked but the wards are the building blocks that we have to use and there's no way around that. But it also uses schools, if you see the top right hand side there, it's using the school there as a clearly identifiable boundary.

Eileen Brady: Is that St Dominic's?

Peter Lynch: Yes, it's St Rose's and St Dominic's and St Mary's as well down round there. It also, at the top end, uses industrial estates which go up from beside Ballymurphy. So I would argue that they are fairly clearly identifiable; there's no doubt they're not ideal when you go to the bottom end which is between the Falls. It takes in that wee street, I think it's NansenStreet, it goes up Broadway and then just takes a slight left and that's where Colin was making the point that people on each side of that street will be voting for different councillors, which is a fair point.
But I would contend that all of the councillors are in the same council, while it may be a different councillor on your ballot paper, which isn't ideal but these are the wards we're given to work with. All of the councillors are working in Belfast City Council and can then do your constituency work, whereas the way the boundaries are at the minute, people in the Collin are actually in Lisburn Council. People in West Belfast would also be able to vote for the same MLAs and the same MPs, so I don't really see any problem. I don't really see the point that Colin's making; I think it'll be dead on.

The other points are in terms of the DUP proposals. Just before that, if you remove the Clonard ward from that DEA, which is the DUP suggestion, just in terms of the deviation, it makes it worse. It would make it -2.2% rather than where it's sitting at 0.9, so the deviation would be worse if you went with the DUP's suggestion to remove Clonard. It's still within the framework but it would be worse, it would be not better.

On the DUP points with regard to Black Mountain, we'll go to Black Mountain which would be the Collin Glen ward. The DUP in their submission made the point that the Collin DEA takes its name from the river. Well that's not actually the case; the Collin DEA takes its name from the mountain which sits directly above the Collin which would be to the left of the Collin. So the Collin DEA derives its name actually from the mountain and not the river.

The DUP suggests taking Collin Glen from Black Mountain and placing it in the Collin DEA and if you look at it, do you see the Collin Glen ward there; it goes right over to Black Mountain, see it on your map? So they are actually arguing to take the Black Mountain out of the Black Mountain DEA so we don't see that as a very logical thing to do.

We would argue that the Commissioner has done a fairly good job in terms of West Belfast and the boundaries and that they are clearly identifiable and clearly understood and we would concur with most of the residents points today about community ties. That's it.

Eileen Brady: Thank you very much for that. Is there anybody wishing to raise any points concerning that submission? In light of the fact that there don't appear to be any further registrations for submissions this afternoon, we'll adjourn proceedings until we have any
further registrations. So we will return once we have some people turn up to speak. Thank you.

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

Eileen Brady: It is now 5pm and I have just confirmed that there is no one else who has indicated that they wish to speak. May I remind everyone that once I have closed the inquiry I cannot receive any further evidence. Is everyone content that they have had a full opportunity to air their views and present their submissions? In that case, I propose to bring the hearing to a close.

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, Land & Property Services, Morrow Communications and the transcribers and audio engineers for the help they have given me in preparing for and conducting this hearing. I would also like to thank the management and staff of 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.