Karen Hoey: Welcome to the Ross Park Hotel. First of all, we're just going to commence with some housekeeping announcements. Please can you make sure that all mobile phones are switched to silent? Should the fire alarm ring, we're not expecting anything today, but please evacuate by the nearest exit, which is just at the front of the room here. And the muster point is at the top of the car park. Thank you.

Patrick Good: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is now shortly after 10am and I formally open this public inquiry into the proposed district electoral areas for the local government district of Mid and East Antrim. My name is Patrick Good and I've 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 twofold; to listen to and to consider the evidence put forward at this inquiry and to report my findings and recommendations to the Commissioner.

My recommendations are to be made within four weeks of the close of the inquiry. I intend to break for lunch between 12.30pm and 1.30pm and finish this evening at 5pm. We do not intend to have any breaks but will stop for necessary adjournment. Copies of the Commissioner's Provisional Recommendations are available for inspection on the table to my left; there are 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 the wards into electoral areas.

The purpose of this public inquiry is to consider representations concerning the Provisional Recommendations of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner for the Local Government District of Mid and East Antrim. 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, as I say, closed on 27th June last.
New objections unrelated to those already submitted cannot be considered. 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 the inquiry has concluded. Some of you may already have made written representations. I have studied those carefully and as part of my preparation for this inquiry and I will take them into account in my report to the Commissioner.

Those of you who have already made written representations will and may wish to elaborate on those representations today. However, I will not be assisted by the repetition of written submissions. If you've 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 written representations, regardless of whether or not they are referred to during the course of the 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, and that you bear in mind that in making these recommendations the Commissioner was constrained by the rules set out in the relevant legislation which are found to be replicated in his report.

I wish to emphasise there are certain issues which are outside the scope of the inquiry. They are those issues, namely really three in number; the first is the boundaries and names of the local government districts and their constituent wards since these have already been settled under the terms of the Local Government Boundaries Order 2012.

The second aspect outside the inquiry is the impact of the provisional recommendations on political representation, and the third matter outside the inquiry are any issues that do not relate to the Commissioner’s proposals for the grouping of wards within this particular local government district. I would therefore ask that you do not raise these issues within your representations.

In terms of the programme of speakers, I believe we have identified, and everybody who wishes to speak has so registered, and therefore if anybody who has not registered does desire to speak, could they perhaps ensure that they do register immediately? As to the order of speakers, I would ask everybody to be as flexible as they can. I will certainly try to accommodate people so far as is reasonably practical.
There may be people who, due to other commitments, require a particular speaking slot and I think we've identified certainly one, and we will seek to give them priority. If anyone has difficulty being present at a particular time, again please let my staff know so that they 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 to the table in front of me to speak into the microphone provided. In making your submission could you please start by stating your name, 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 difficulty in the eventual transcribing of the inquiry. Would you also 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, in supporting an objection and counterproposal to the Commissioner's recommendation, in supporting the Commissioner's original recommendation or in proposing an alternative to both. When you've finished your submission other people may wish to put questions to you from the floor and I may also have some questions for you on points of clarification.

I would like to emphasise that I intend the 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.

I wish to touch briefly on the question of site visits. After the inquiry is over I may 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 will be assisted in the running of the 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'd be pleased to help you or draw the matter to my attention.

Therefore speakers having registered, I intend to go straight into the first speaker, who is Mr Eugene Reid. Mr Reid, would you care to come up to the table?

Eugene Reid: Thank you. Good morning.
Patrick Good:  Good morning, Mr Reid.

Eugene Reid:  Thank you.  My name is Eugene Reid and I am Chair of the Social Democratic & Labour Party, Ballymena branch and I'm here today speaking on their behalf.  I wish to comment only on that part of the provisional recommendations that relate to Ballymena.  In broad terms I want to support the opinion already expressed to the Commissioner by Mr Michael Moriarty and as a slight alternative I am also, in general, supportive of the approach suggested by the Alliance Party.

The Commissioner had a problem in that there are already eight wards which cover the urban area of Ballymena and not all of them could be accommodated into one DEA.  However, I am not convinced that his solution is the best one and I will try to explain why.  Academy Ward is the problem.  It very clearly penetrates far into the urban area.  It goes right into the Pentagon in Ballymena, which is very much in the town centre.  Academy ward includes Ballymena Academy, for which it is named, and includes the bus and train stations and the PSNI Station.  It also includes the offices of Ballymena Borough Council and in no way can be viewed as a rural ward.  But Academy has been placed in Bannside, which is a rural DEA.  It doesn't fit there.

Galgorm has also been moved from the old Ballymena North DEA into Bannside, but I wouldn't see that as so much of an issue as the Academy Ward.  Galgorm reads strongly with Ahoghill, which is clearly rural and part of Bannside.  The better answer as proposed by Mr Michael Moriarty's written proposal to the Commission is to move Ballee and Harryville ward into the Braid DEA and put Academy into Ballymena DEA.

It's not ideal as Ballymena Council has made efforts to integrate these parts of Ballymena, which are "over the bridge", into the town, or at any rate treat them equally.  Nonetheless, Harryville and the estates attached to it have a distinctive character and we would contend that Harryville has something of a character of a village in its own right.  Therefore it is much more at home in Braid DEA, which also contains Kells, than Academy is in Bannside.

So the Alliance Party solution to adjust the proposed Ballymena by bringing in Academy and Galgorm and putting Ballee and Harryville and Ballykeel into Braid is possible.  It requires the movement of Kirkinriola from Braid to Bannside to keep Braid within the seven ward limit, which in itself would be satisfactory.  However, I think it is an overcomplicated solution because, as stated before, Galgorm does not present the same problem in Bannside as does Academy.  That's the end of my presentation.
Patrick Good: Thank you very much. Are there any questions that people would wish to put to Mr Reid through myself? Eugene, can I just gain some idea of clarification? In terms of Galgorm, do you see it as a separate or as a contiguous part of Ballymena in itself?

Eugene Reid: Our contention currently, as you can see on the map here, is that Galgorm sits much more readily with Ahoghill and therefore can be seen to be part of that rural Bannside DEA. Whereas, the one that we mentioned, the one that takes in Academy is very much part of Ballymena town itself and therefore urban.

Patrick Good: There is an argument that Galgorm, while it's touching on Ballymena, has a separate structure as such. Is that your contention?

Eugene Reid: Yes. The contention is that Galgorm village is basically a rural village in itself and therefore fits much more readily in the rural setting of the Bannside one.

Patrick Good: Has it changed? Has it grown as the years have gone on?

Eugene Reid: There's no doubt about it. I'm Ballymena born and bred. The housing estates and the new developments that sit at Galgorm Castle, for instance, and opposite the golf course, have grown over the years and therefore Galgorm is seen as part of Ballymena. But Galgorm itself, I think people in Galgorm will very much hold their own identity.

Patrick Good: Yes. What is your name?

Keith Turner: My name is Mr Turner.

Patrick Good: We'll get you a microphone, Mr Turner.

Keith Turner: Thank you very much, Mr Assistant Commissioner. Is Mr Reid saying that Ballee and Harryville have more of an affinity with Kells than they do with Ballymena?

Eugene Reid: In terms of our suggestion we're contending that when we used the phrase "over the bridge" and we did put forward that Ballymena Council has very much tried to integrate Harryville. But for the purposes of this, our proposals would be that it would be more acceptable for Ballykeel and Ballee and Harryville to be within the, the ward alongside Kells.

Keith Turner: Ok.

Patrick Good: Thank you very much, Mr Reid; that's the only questions I have on this, unless anybody else have any points to raise through me with Mr Reid? Thank you, Mr Reid. The next speaker on our list is Mr Burnside.
Philip Burnside: Good morning, Mr Chairman. My name is Phillip Burnside; I'm Chairman of the Alliance North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency and I'm here just to endorse the written submission made about particularly Mid Antrim. Our views are very similar to the previous speaker and we feel that the traditional ward boundaries do not need to be substantially changed. And, as I say, our summary would be that Galgorm would come into the Academy area.

Patrick Good: You're endorsing that Harryville and Ballee and Ballykeel would then move, is that right?

Phillip Burnside: Move to the Kells, yes.

Patrick Good: I think that's because in the Alliance submission they refer to those two wards having links with Kells, is that right?

Phillip Burnside: Yes.

Patrick Good: I was just trying to elucidate what those links are. Are they links with Kells and generally with Glenwhirry as well?

Phillip Burnside: Yes.

Patrick Good: I'm trying to understand, so that I do appreciate what the links are that are referred to in the Alliance submission in that regard.

Phillip Burnside: We feel that the river creates a natural divide from Ballymena, and that Harryville and Ballee would, when you add up the numbers, fit better with Kells. That's been the traditional ward boundary.

Patrick Good: You're saying from the Alliance perspective that the river is a critical factor in terms of the division of the wards?

Phillip Burnside: Yes.

Patrick Good: It's a geographical feature that's relevant to you rather than any other factor?

Phillip Burnside: Yes.

Patrick Good: And then I think Mr Reid pointed out the, the importance of Academy in terms of some of the buildings, some of the institutions which would be found in Academy. Is that a feature that Alliance have identified?

Phillip Burnside: Not substantially, no.

Patrick Good: So it's the river when one looks to the south that you're looking at in terms of structure.
Phillip Burnside: Correct.

Patrick Good: Thank you very much, Mr Burnside. Any questions for Mr Burnside from those here present? Mr Turner?

Keith Turner: Mr Turner. If you’re taking the river as a natural boundary marker, then the Kells Water runs into Glenwhirry and the Braid runs through the middle of the town of Ballymena. The Maine also runs through Ahoghill and Cullybackey. Are you taking that as a natural boundary marker also?

Phillip Burnside: I think those are villages that are much smaller and the significance of the river is not apparent. Ahoghill is very much a village, as is Kells, and the river in Kells I don’t think has any great geographical significant impact on the village topography, though it occasionally floods.

Keith Turner: If you are saying that the river has no natural geographical, topographical boundary in this, then why is it such an important aspect now when it comes to Ballee and Harryville in the separation of it from the town and to put it with Kells?

Phillip Burnside: This is a historic issue that the river has traditionally separated Harryville particularly rather than Ballee from the town. The bridge at Ballee is really a dual carriageway and in fact you almost would not know you were passing over the Braid at that point at Sainsbury’s, whereas definitely at Harryville it’s very apparent.

Patrick Good: Would you draw a distinction between the two then in that regard?

Phillip Burnside: Yes, a river through a small village like Kells, which has no effect apart from the flooding issue, I don’t think that’s significant.

Patrick Good: I see. There has been reference to Ahoghill and Kells as being distinct villages; when we looked at Galgorm does it, in your view, enjoy the same qualities of distinction? And by that I mean separation or a life of its own.

Phillip Burnside: It has a very strong community group and yes, I would recognise that, though there is no green space between Galgorm and Ballymena, whereas there are green fields from Galgorm and Ahoghill and Cullybackey and Ahoghill. So Galgorm is contiguous with development between Ballymena and has been traditionally associated with Ballymena.

Patrick Good: In that regard, how do you see it as being distinguished from Ballymena, albeit it is contiguous? Are there features of it which mean that Galgorm is distinct in terms of its village ethos?
Phillip Burnside: The new development has been over the last ten to fifteen years so originally there were green fields between Ballymena and Galgorm and quite substantial areas have been redeveloped over the last ten or fifteen years. So it did develop and it's linked, to some extent, with Gracehill. There is a strong community group that promotes the village exceptionally well. I can only say that Galgorm is one of the few villages, a bit like Broughshane, that has strong impact in the local community.

Patrick Good: Thank you, Mr Burnside.

Phillip Burnside: Thank you.

Patrick Good: Our next speaker is Councillor McClean.

James McClean: I'd like to reply to some of the comments made.

Patrick Good: Well, since you're the next speaker perhaps the best thing is to do that from the table.

James McClean: My name is James McClean, Ulster Unionist Party representative, Councillor in Ballymena Borough Council. From the outset I wish to reiterate the Ulster Unionist Party's opposition to the eleven council model as proposed by the Northern Ireland Executive. I want to state that clearly before I continue on.

Patrick Good: But you do appreciate, I'm sure, that that is not a matter within my inquiry.

James McClean: It may not be but I am still reiterating the opposition to it, to place it on record. It's not my intention to repeat arguments in the submission that have been well rehearsed previously, but to place on record that the Ulster Unionist Party opposition to the eleven council model remains unchanged. Having said this, my party at a local level in the Ballymena area - I wish to speak about Ballymena DEAs - feel that the proposals are the best solution as proposed by the Commissioner who has made a fairly good job of a bad hand dealt to him.

However, in reply to previous submissions, the Ballymena and Harryville wards are an integral part of Ballymena, they're a built up urban area and Ballymena Council throughout the past years have integrated these into the urban area as such. They don't lend themselves to Kells and Connor at all; they're a rural area and Ballymena and Harryville is an urban area.

Also the river I think is a red herring because that river meanders all over the place. It goes way up through the Braid; it divides areas up there, but there's no mention of that happening between Slemish and Broughshane or between Kells and Glenwhirry. The bridge has gone, lost its significance somewhat with the new dual carriageway and also the M2,
the river goes across there which divides up wards and geographical areas.

The other thing is the Alliance proposal to move Kirkinriola into Bannside; it's a definite no-no. It would not lend itself at all to the Bannside area. The Kirkinriola has been historically for years part of the Braid area and lends itself well to fall into the area which both Broughshane village and Clough village integrate into Kirkinriola. So that is generally our submission for the Ballymena DEA. We think it should remain as was, as is.

Patrick Good: You mentioned in the course of your submission that the council had tried to integrate Ballee and Harryville into Ballymena over the years.

James McClean: They always were in Ballymena but they've made great efforts through the Harryville Partnership and other organisations.

Patrick Good: What steps are you referring to in respect of the Harryville Partnership?

James McClean: The Harryville Partnership is a partnership that was formed within Harryville which covers a larger part of the Harryville and Ballee area and they're integrated and they're working very closely with the council to develop the area through an urban structure and also a new community centre in Harryville.

Patrick Good: And in respect of Kirkinriola?

James McClean: That's one of the things. There are numerous other things like playing fields and other local facilities.

Patrick Good: And in terms of Kirkinriola, you mentioned that as being part of the Braid area.

James McClean: Yes.

Patrick Good: What particular features of Kirkinriola lend it to be part of the Braid area, in your view?

James McClean: Because it's integrated, close to Broughshane. It identifies with Broughshane and also with Clough as well, the village up the road which is on the main Cushendall Road as it goes out and it also lies towards Broughshane much than Bannside, which is the Bannside DEA as proposed.

Patrick Good: Are you looking at it from links or from geographical factors?
James McClean: Both, links and geographical area. If there's an overspill in Broughshane such as the primary school they go to Kirkinriola, and the same from Clough, if there's an overspill in Clough.

Patrick Good: Has that changed over the years, Councillor?

James McClean: No, that's much the same position as it always has been.

Patrick Good: Now, I'm going to ask Mr Burnside if he wishes to come back to you on any of the points you've raised or you've heard the councillor mention and I think his points were directed towards Mr Burnside's submission. Is that right, Councillor?

James McClean: Yes, that's right, and the SDLP.

Patrick Good: Very well, I think Mr Reid, if you have any points you'd wish to raise in response to the councillor's observations upon your evidence?

Eugene Reid: I can accept Councillor McClean's presentation and the arguments on both sides. Our argument, the reason for Ballee and Harryville was to try and even up things as we saw it because we felt it more acceptable that Academy should have been included in the urban area of Ballymena. As I say, I accept his presentation as I hope he accepts mine and therefore you make a decision based on what you think is appropriate.

Patrick Good: Thank you. Councillor, are there any other points you'd wish to raise with me?

James McClean: Not at this moment in time but maybe at some point later.

Patrick Good: That opportunity will be there, so if you're happy enough with leaving it until such time as you see fit to reintroduce further points, we're more than happy to receive them.

James McClean: Thank you.

Patrick Good: Thank you. Mr Turner.

Keith Turner: Good morning. My name is Keith James Turner and I represent the Kells and Connor Community Improvements Association of which I am the Chair. As a community association we would like to express that we fully support the present, that is to say the proposed boundary changes that would put Kells into the Braid Ward. For many years Kells and Connor, which are two distinct villages, have been termed the forgotten villages, and we truly believe this is because we have been in the electoral area of Ballymena South with Ballee and Harryville, to name but two.
To this end, we feel that we have not been given our rural village determination. We are farther away from the main town of Ballymena, than is Broughshane, Galgorm or any other areas that have been designated as rural village. We have a population of some three thousand people and just recently have undertaken a great deal of work to produce a Heritage Trail for the villages. That Heritage Trail clearly defines that Connor is and was a major ecclesiastical area. We wish to expand on this and are doing so through many avenues and to enable us to do this we feel that being in the Braid ward gives us the best opportunity possible of identifying ourselves as a rural village, rather than as being part of the Ballymena town area.

The local angling club has always been known as the Kells, Connor and Glenwherry Angling Club and we have a greater affinity with Glenwherry and Slemish than we do with the main town. We feel that we've lost funding in the past, perhaps haven't been given a fair crack of the whip. If we look at some of the funding that's been given to other rural villages and then we look at what we have had ourselves over the last 25 years, there seems to be a large disparity and we believe that this was probably down to the fact that we were in Ballymena South rather than being recognised as a rural area. So therefore we would wholeheartedly support the fact that Kells and Connor, or the Kells ward, has been placed into the Braid DEA.

Patrick Good: In short, you see Kells very much as a rural ward enjoying its position as recommended in a rural DEA?

Keith Turner: Very much so.

Patrick Good: And that's the position in respect of your associations and clubs.

Keith Turner: That is so, yes.

Patrick Good: Thank you very much, Mr Turner.

Keith Turner: Thank you.

Patrick Good: That presently completes those people who have identified and registered themselves as wishing to speak and make presentations. But I realise there are others who are here, who have not registered, but are there any points that they would wish to raise? Because I want to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to make such points as they desire while the inquiry is still available and we will be available for the rest of the day to receive any submissions. So if there's anybody else who would like to make points to us, please do so.

Roy McCune: Thank you. Roy McCune, Chairman of East Antrim UUP. As my colleague said, we remain implacably opposed to the eleven council
model – I accept it's outside the scope but I want to put it on record, and I take that opportunity. I don't want to make any comment with regard to the wards, only the naming in terms of Carrick where it’s suggested Castle and Knockagh. There's great concern in Carrick that the name Carrick is missing and that's my point.

Patrick Good: And that's your point in terms of ward names, is that right?

Roy McCune: Yes.

Patrick Good: I think, as I mentioned earlier, ward names are a matter which have already been determined and fall outside my inquiry.

Roy McCune: Yes.

Patrick Good: But I note the point but I think equally note that unfortunately my position does not allow me to make any recommendations in respect of ward names. But I fully appreciate your point being made.

Roy McCune: Thank you.

Patrick Good: Thank you. Any further submissions at this stage? That being the case, what I intend to do is adjourn for a period until such time as other people who wish to make submissions attend, and we will be here during the day in order to receive those submissions, and otherwise we will allow the inquiry to adjourn for a period awaiting further attendances. Thank you.

**CLOSING COMMENTS**

Patrick Good: It is now the end of the day and I'm bringing the public inquiry for Mid and East Antrim to a close. Since we adjourned the inquiry at 10.35am nobody else has presented themselves and indicated that they wish to speak. 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 they've 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've 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 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.