Submission to the Boundary Commission for England 2018 Review North West Region The proposed constituencies of Bury, Farnworth, and Prestwich and Middleton

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Abstract

This submission, while supporting in principle the Boundary Commission for England's proposals for new parliamentary constituencies in the borough of Bury, disagrees with the composition of the proposed Farnworth constituency and presents a counter-proposal to improve its composition.

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1 Introduction

This document is my submission to the 2018 Review of Parliamentary constituency boundaries.

I should first introduce myself. I am the editor and webmaster of the Local Elections Archive Project (`http://www.andrewteale.me.uk/leap/`), one of the largest freely available online collections of British local election results. I have been for some years a contributor to election-related web forums, and publish a weekly blog on the subject of upcoming local by-elections. I have lived in Little Lever, presently part of the Bolton South East constituency, since 2014 and previously lived in Ainsworth and Prestwich, which are both presently within the Bury South constituency. I am not a member of any political party but am a member of the quiz league team playing out of Astley Bridge Conservative Club in Bolton.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to contribute to your deliberations and have taken an active interest in the consultation. I was present at the first day of the hearing at the Midland Hotel in Manchester and am aware of the counter-proposals of the three main political parties as they were presented to the Assistant Commissioner on that day.

This submission only deals with the boroughs of Bolton and Bury. I make no submission with regard to the remainder of the North West region.

1.1 The statutory criteria

Since the Boundary Commissions' fifth periodical review the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 (the "2011 Act") has replaced the Rules for Redistribution of Seats. It may be useful to recap the rules as they apply to the North West region:

- Each constituency must have an electorate between 71,031 and 78,507.
- The Commission may take into account:
  1. special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
  2. local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015;
  3. boundaries of existing constituencies; and
  4. any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.

I shall refer to these statutory criteria in developing this submission.

2 Theoretical entitlements

The electorate of each county divided by the electoral quota of 74,749 gives each county's theoretical entitlement to parliamentary constituencies. The entitlement for each county in the North West is shown in Table 1.

If each county's entitlement is rounded to the nearest whole number the total comes out at $5 + 14 + 25 + 13 + 10 = 67$. However, the North West has been allocated 68 seats, so Cheshire and Greater Manchester will need to be paired and 39 seats allocated to the combined area, as has been done in the Boundary Commission's initial proposals.

As stated above the constituencies implemented in 2010 in Greater Manchester are based on a series of review areas comprised of whole boroughs or groups of boroughs. The entitlement of these areas is shown in Table 2.

County	Theoretical entitlement	Current number of constituencies
Cumbria	5·00	6
Lancashire	14·06	15
Greater Manchester	25·37	27
Merseyside	13·09	15
Cheshire	10·34	11

Table 1: Entitlement to parliamentary constituencies: North West

County	Theoretical entitlement	Current number of constituencies
Bolton and Wigan	5·58	6
Bury	1·80	2
Manchester, Salford and Trafford	8·93	9
Oldham, Tameside and Stockport	7·08	8
Rochdale	1·98	2

Table 2: Entitlement to parliamentary constituencies: Greater Manchester

As can be seen, the electorates of the Bolton/Wigan group and Bury are now too small to sustain the present number of constituencies. If two seats were allocated to Bury they would have electorates of 0·90 electoral quotas each; and if six seats were allocated to Bolton and Wigan they would have electorates of 0·93 electoral quotas each. In addition, if the three boroughs are treated as one review area they would have an entitlement of 7·38, and allocating seven constituencies to that area would give electorates of 1·054 electoral quotas each. None of these options are within the statutory criteria which require that all constituencies should be within the range 0·95 to 1·05 electoral quotas.

The Commission's initial proposals allocate seven whole constituencies to Bolton, Wigan and Bury:

- Bolton North East,
- Bolton West,
- Bury,
- Farnworth,
- Leigh,
- Makerfield, and
- Wigan,

with the town of Prestwich and parts of Bury and Whitefield transferred to a constituency (Prestwich and Middleton) partly in another Greater Manchester borough. I support this general pattern of constituencies, and note that Prestwich in particular is physically separated from the rest of Bury by the M 60 motorway, has close community links with the boroughs of Manchester and Salford to the south, and until 1983 was included in a constituency

with Middleton to the east. However, as explained below, I disagree with the composition of the proposed Bury, Farnworth, and Prestwich and Middleton constituences.

3 The proposed Bury, Farnworth, and Prestwich and Middleton constituencies

The areas within Bolton and Bury boroughs covered by these proposed constituencies are presently covered by three parliamentary constituencies:

- *Bolton South East (65,610):* the seven Bolton wards of Farnworth, Great Lever, Harper Green, Hulton, Kearsley, Little Lever and Darcy Lever, and Rumworth.
- *Bury North (64,564):* the eight Bury wards of Church, East, Elton, Moorside, North Manor, Ramsbottom, Redvales and Tottington.
- *Bury South (70,085):* the nine Bury wards of Besses, Holyrood, Pilkington Park, Radcliffe East, Radcliffe North, Radcliffe West, St Mary's, Sedgley and Unsworth.

As can be seen none of these seats has an electorate within the range allowed for in the statutory criteria (71,031–78,507) and thus none of these seats can survive unchanged in their present form. Accordingly some impairment of the statutory criteria relating to existing boundaries and local ties is inevitable.

It is useful here to break this ward list down into some smaller groups according to which wards cover particular towns. Dividing a town between constituencies is likely to break local ties much more substantially than separating a town from its neighbours.

Within Bolton South East, the wards can be characterised as follows:

- The Great Lever and Rumworth wards essentially form part of Bolton proper. In particular, Great Lever ward includes much of Bolton town centre.
- The Hulton ward is partly Bolton proper and partly based on the village of Over Hulton.
- The Farnworth and Harper Green wards predominantly cover the town of Farnworth.
- The Kearsley ward is a town of its own.
- The Little Lever and Darcy Lever wards cover the town of Little Lever together with the rather isolated Bolton suburb of Darcy Lever.

Within Bury North, the wards can be characterised as follows:

- The Ramsbottom, North Manor and Tottington wards cover a series of towns and villages to the north of Bury.
- The Church and Elton wards cover the town of Bury to the west of the River Irwell.

- The East, Moorside and Redvales wards cover the town of Bury to the east of the River Irwell, including the town centre (which is in Redvales ward).

And within Bury South, the wards can be characterised as follows:

- The Radcliffe East, Radcliffe North and Radcliffe West wards cover the town of Radcliffe and the associated villages of Outwood and Ainsworth.
- The Besses and Pilkington Park wards cover most of the town of Whitefield.
- The Unsworth ward is mostly an outlying part of Bury town south of the River Roch but also includes part of Whitefield. This will be discussed further below.
- The Holyrood, St Mary's and Sedgley wards cover the town of Prestwich.

3.1 The initial proposals

The Commission described their initial proposals thus in their *Initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in the North West*:

> "47. ... We propose that the Bolton North East constituency, which required an increase from its current electorate of 63,881, should include the Rumworth and Great Lever wards from the existing Bolton South East constituency.
>
> 48. The Bury North constituency has a low electorate at 64,564. We therefore propose that this be increased by the inclusion of the Radcliffe East ward from the existing Bury South constituency. We also propose that the constituency name should be changed to Bury, as changes elsewhere would mean that there would no longer be a constituency that could appropriately be called Bury South.
>
> 49. As a result of our proposed changes in the boroughs of Bolton and Bury, we propose that a new constituency, to be called Farnworth, be created from five Borough of Bolton wards and three Borough of Bury wards from the existing Bolton South East and Bury South constituencies respectively. Although it was noted that this did result in the division of the town of Radcliffe, in view of the urban density and very close proximity of numerous towns in Greater Manchester, it was considered that some division of communities would be unavoidable.
>
> 50. ... We have proposed a new constituency—Prestwich and Middleton. This is constructed from five wards from the existing Bury South constituency (the Borough of Bury), and five from the existing Heywood and Middleton constituency (the Borough of Rochdale). In pursuit of our aim to try to keep communities together, this new constituency includes the towns of Prestwich and Middleton, and much of the town of Whitefield."

The details of the proposed Farnworth, Bury, and Prestwich and Middleton seats are:

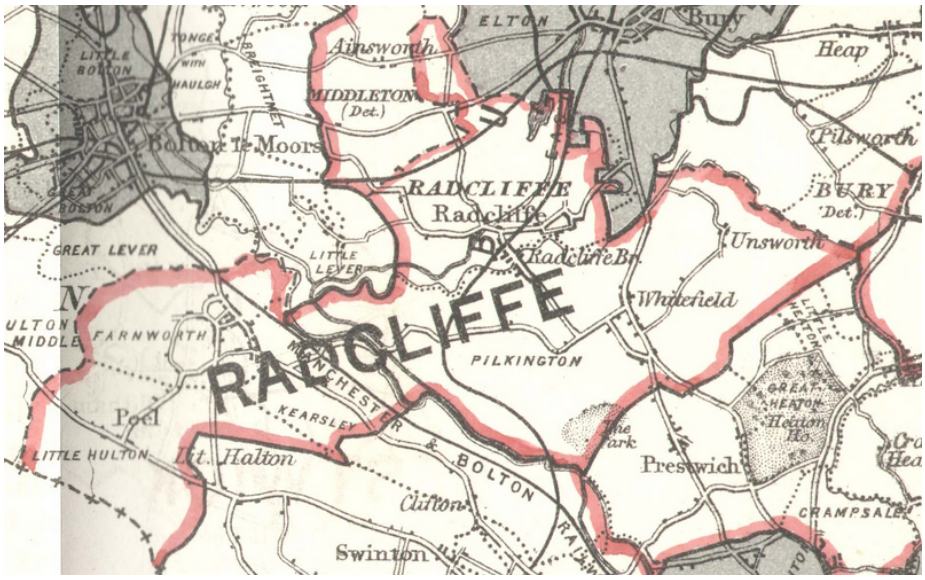

Figure 1: Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth constituency (labelled as "Radcliffe"), 1885–1918.

- *Bury (72,781):* the nine Bury wards of Church, East, Elton, Moorside, North Manor, Ramsbottom, Radcliffe East, Redvales and Tottington.
- *Farnworth (71,142):* the five Bolton wards of Farnworth, Harper Green, Hulton, Kearsley, and Little Lever and Darcy Lever; and the three Bury wards of Pilkington Park, Radcliffe North and Radcliffe West.
- *Prestwich and Middleton (76,824):* the five Bury wards of Besses, Holyrood, St Mary's, Sedgley and Unsworth; and the five Rochdale wards of East Middleton, Hopwood Hall, North Middleton, South Middleton and West Middleton.

3.2 The cross-borough Bolton and Bury seat

As discussed in section 2 above, a seat containing parts of Bury and Bolton boroughs is both necessary and inevitable. Where should it be placed? Let's have a look at previous constituencies which have been drawn crossing what became the Bury–Bolton boundary.

- The redistribution of 1885 created a constituency called "Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth" with similar boundaries to the proposed Farnworth constituency. As shown in Figure 1, Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth consisted of the parishes of Farnworth, Kearsley, Little Hulton and Pilkington and nearly all of Radcliffe parish.
- The 1918 redistribution created a new constituency to cover the Farnworth area, with Radcliffe forming part of a new Heywood and Radcliffe constituency. The 1918–50 Farnworth constituency included the parishes

of Ainsworth and Outwood, which are now included within the borough of Bury.

- The initial proposals from the last Boundary Commission review aborted in 2013 included a proposal to increase the electorate of the Bury North constituency by adding to it the Bradshaw ward of Bolton. This arrangement had several disadvantages: it divided the Turton area north of Bolton (the Bradshaw and Bromley Cross wards) between two constituencies, and there are few local ties between Bury and the Bradshaw ward which are separated by high moorland with poor road links. As will be discussed below this arrangement was rejected by the Assistant Commissioner and did not form part of the revised proposals for the aborted review.

As well as this prior art, community links make constructing a cross-borough seat from the Farnworth and Radcliffe areas the most attractive proposition. Radcliffe is connected to the town of Little Lever—an integral part of the present Bolton South East constituency—by the A 6053 road which has an excellent bus service, the 524 Bolton–Little Lever–Radcliffe–Bury route. This is one of First Manchester's flagship routes with a daytime service of six buses per hour, and as a Little Lever resident I find this service very convenient to travel to Radcliffe: either to shop in the town centre or to pick up the tram onwards to Manchester. Also, as there is presently no high school in Radcliffe some Radcliffe parents send their children to high school in Little Lever. In view of the good local ties between Radcliffe and Little Lever, I proposed a seat with a similar composition to the Commission's Farnworth seat in my submission to the aborted review, and I continue to support the construction of a cross-borough seat from the Farnworth and Radcliffe areas.

3.3 Great Lever and Rumworth wards

The Commission's proposals for the Bolton end of the Farnworth constituency transfer Great Lever and Rumworth wards into the Bolton North East constituency. Bolton North East contains most of the town of Bolton together with the Turton area to the north, and Great Lever and Rumworth wards clearly have a common community of interest with the rest of Bolton town. In addition, this transfer will not affect the coherence of the rest of the Farnworth seat, as Great Lever and Rumworth wards form one unit within the above list. As the transfer of Great Lever and Rumworth wards will improve local ties in the Bolton area and not adversely affect local ties in the Farnworth area, I support this proposal.

4 Counter-proposal

We now come to the major problem with the proposed Farnworth constituency: it does not include Radcliffe East ward and thereby splits the town of Radcliffe. The Commission's report on the initial proposals stated:

> "49. As a result of our proposed changes in the boroughs of Bolton and Bury, we propose that a new constituency, to be called

> Farnworth, be created from five Borough of Bolton wards and three Borough of Bury wards from the existing Bolton South East and Bury South constituencies respectively. Although it was noted that this did result in the division of the town of Radcliffe, in view of the urban density and very close proximity of numerous towns in Greater Manchester, it was considered that some division of communities would be unavoidable."

I would like to demonstrate in this submission that the division of the town of Radcliffe is both undesirable and can be avoided within the Commission's scheme by making the following transfers of wards:

- Transfer Radcliffe East ward (electorate 8,217) from the proposed Bury constituency to the proposed Farnworth constituency.
- Transfer Unsworth ward (7,030) from the proposed Prestwich and Middleton constituency to the proposed Bury constituency.
- Transfer Pilkington Park ward (7,328) from the proposed Farnworth constituency to the proposed Prestwich and Middleton constituency.

This would produce electorates as follows:

- Bury: $72{,}781 + 7{,}030 - 8{,}217 = 71{,}594$
- Farnworth: $71{,}142 + 8{,}217 - 7{,}328 = 72{,}031$
- Prestwich and Middleton: $76{,}824 + 7{,}328 - 7{,}030 = 77{,}122$

As can be seen, all three counter-proposed constituencies are within the statutory electorate range (71,031–78,507).

4.1 Radcliffe East ward

To start with, transferring Radcliffe East ward into the Bury constituency breaks local ties. Radcliffe East ward is presently included with the other two Radcliffe wards within the Bury South constituency. As can be seen from Figure 2, this ward is based east of the Metrolink line along Bury Road and Dumers Lane, together with the town centre and some housing to the east of Black Lane. The ward has a very strong boundary with Bury's Redvales ward (the River Irwell) and is separated from Bury's Church ward by open space with indirect road links. The Commission's initial proposals place this ward within the Bury constituency.

The presence of Radcliffe's town centre and bus and tram stations within Radcliffe East means that placing it in a different constituency to Radcliffe North and Radcliffe West wards will inevitably break local ties. While Radcliffe's major supermarket, located just west of the town centre in a bend of the Irwell, is located within Radcliffe West ward it can only be approached through Radcliffe East ward because of the town centre's road network and the layout of bridges across the Irwell and the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal.

Radcliffe East has been in a different constituency to Bury since the creation of Bury North and Bury South in 1983, and, as noted, the boundary between Bury and Radcliffe here is strong. The statutory criteria make it undesirable to move this ward into Bury because of the disruption to existing constituencies and local ties.

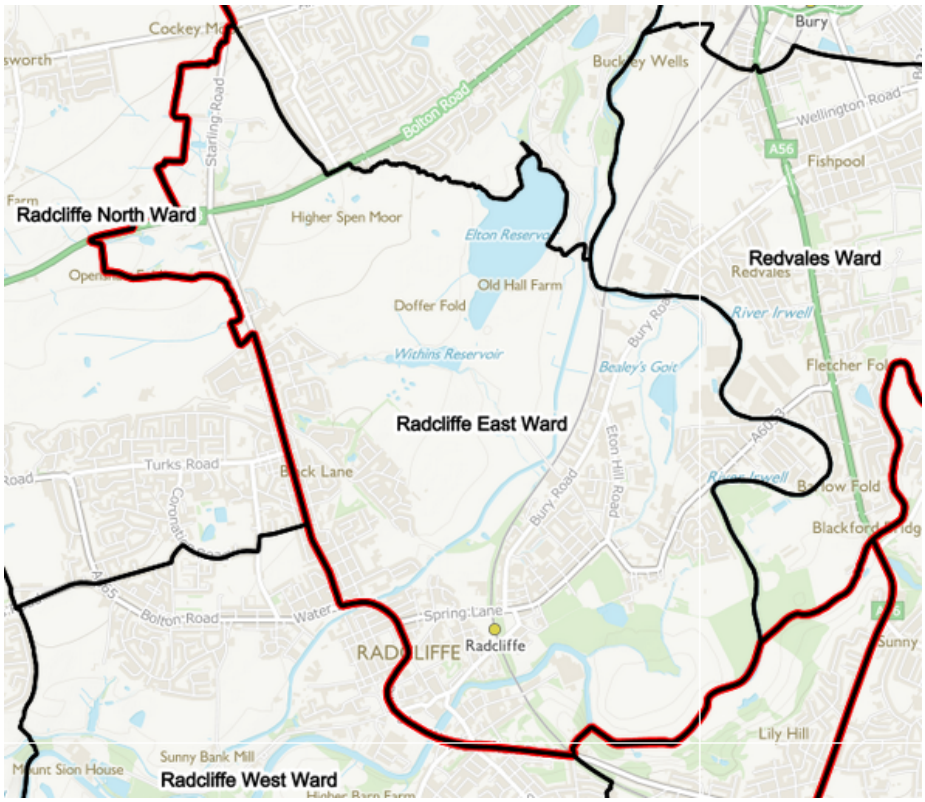

Figure 2: Radcliffe East ward.

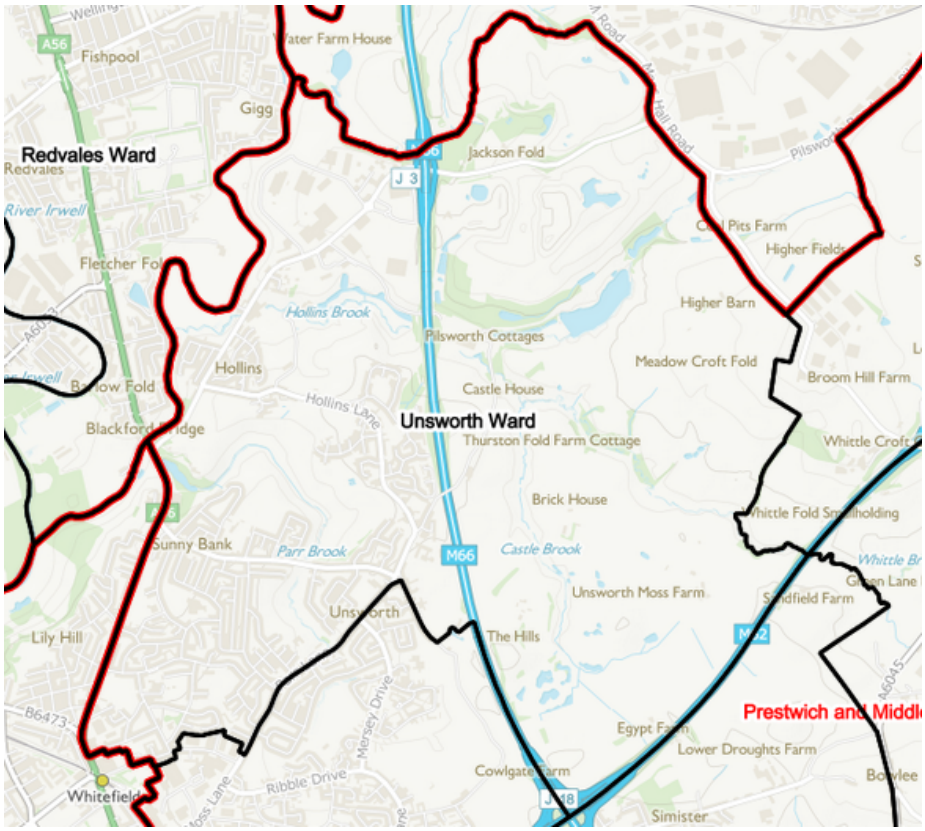

Figure 3: Unsworth ward.

4.2 Unsworth ward

As Bury North's electorate should not be increased by adding Radcliffe East ward to it, I instead propose adding Unsworth ward to Bury North. As can be seen from Figure 3, this ward is based on the Sunny Bank and Hollins areas between the A 56 Manchester Road and the M 66 motorway, together with the Pilsworth industrial area next to M 66 junction 3. Also within the ward is part of Whitefield town centre. The area east of the motorway is undeveloped and much of it is active or former landfill. The Commission's initial proposals place this ward within the Prestwich and Middleton constituency.

As can be seen, Unsworth ward has a complicated history. While it may appear from the map that all of the built-up area forms part of Whitefield, this is not the case at all. The old Unsworth parish (see Figure 4) was incorporated into Bury in the 1930s, and the Sunny Bank area—which forms the largest part of the population—was developed by Bury Corporation. To this day the part of Unsworth which was in Bury before the 1974 reorganisation has Bury (BL9) postcodes, while the part which was formerly in Whitefield—roughly covered by modern polling district JC as shown in Figure 5—has Whitefield (M45) postcodes. The ward has good transport links with Bury, with six buses an hour passing along Manchester Road and further (if less frequent) services

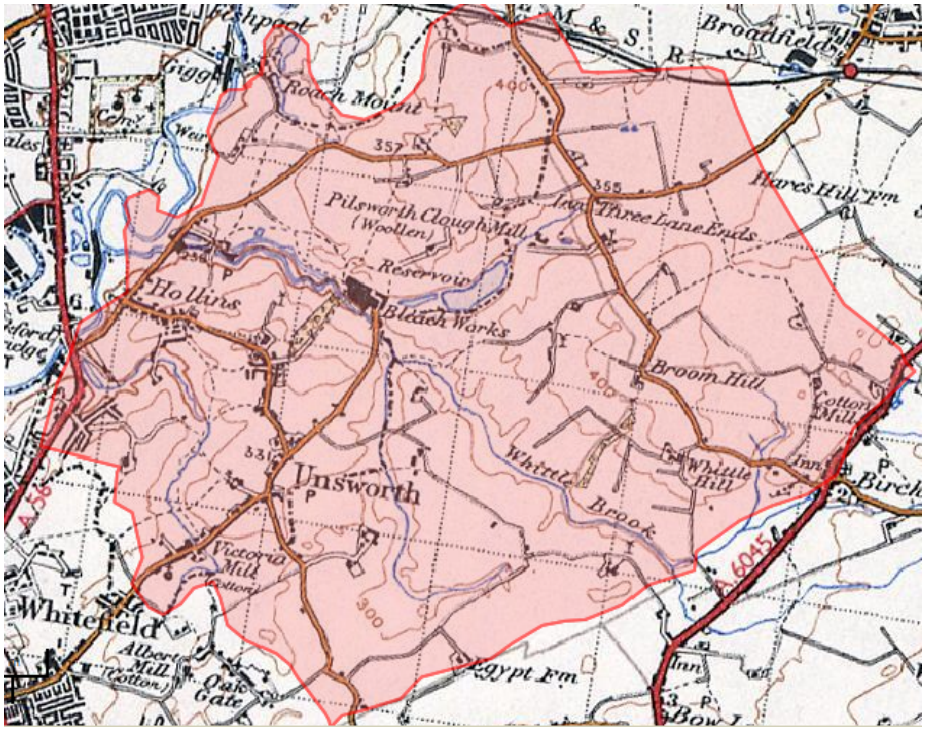

Figure 4: Approximate extent of Unsworth parish, before it was incorporated into Bury.

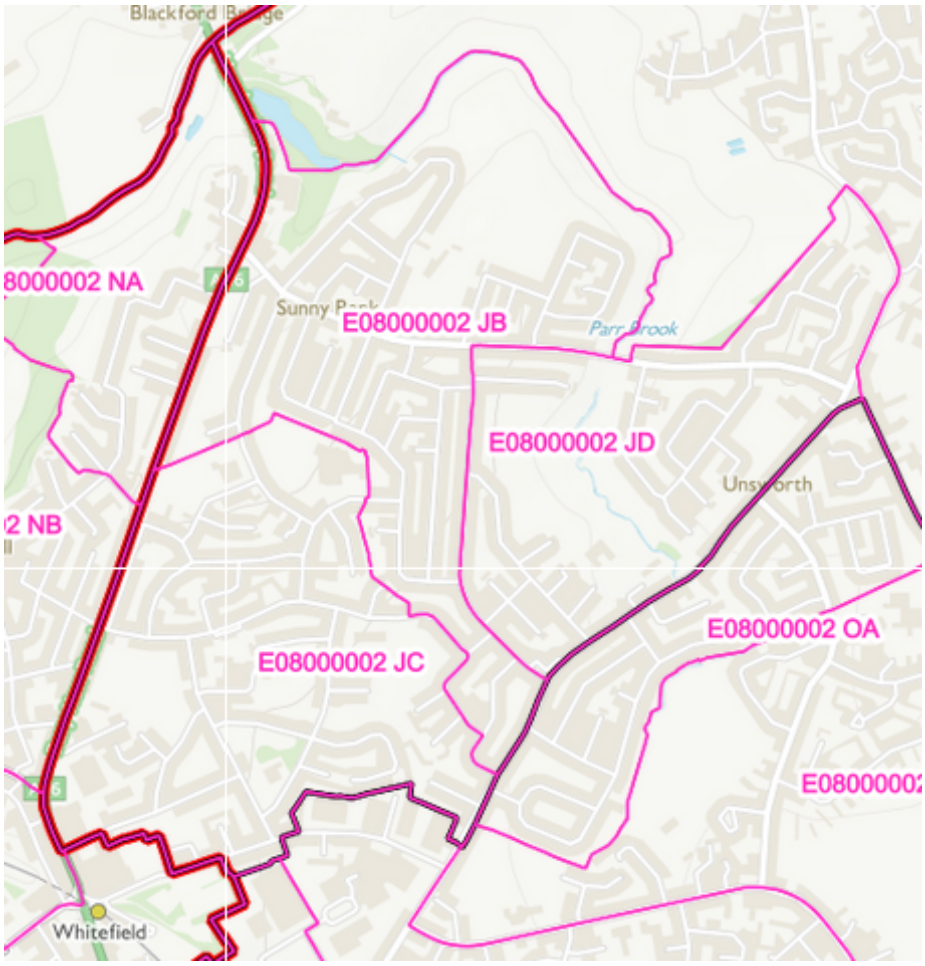

Figure 5: Unsworth ward's polling districts (the unlabelled area is polling district JA).

linking the estate with Bury.

This is not the first time that the Boundary Commission has had to decide which constituency Unsworth should form part of. In the Third Periodical Report, implemented at the 1983 general election, the then Unsworth ward (which was solely the area which was part of Bury before 1974) was included in the Bury North constituency along with the rest of Bury. In the Fifth Periodical Report implemented in 2010, by which time the ward boundaries had changed to include part of Whitefield in Unsworth ward, the Commission wrote:

> "We noted that the majority of the electorate of the divided Unsworth ward is in the existing Bury North BC, but we considered that the whole of the ward should be included in Bury South BC, so as not to divide the town of Whitefield between constituencies." (Cm 7032, vol I, p 117.)

As can be seen from this, transferring Unsworth back into a Bury-based seat

would, for the majority of its electorate, restore local ties which were broken by its transfer in 2010.

Finally, in the revised recommendations for the aborted 2013 review, the Assistant Commissioner recommended that Unsworth be transferred into Bury North:

> "AC228. Our recommended Bury North constituency consists of the wards as recommended by the Commission, but taking out the ward of Bradshaw (added to the existing constituency under the initial proposals) and replacing it with the ward of Unsworth, from Bury South.
>
> AC229. Bradshaw is a Bolton ward. Despite this there was no strong opposition to it being included within a Bury constituency. Indeed the MP for Bury North, David Nuttall, put an attractive case for Bradshaw being included in a crosscounty boundary constituency (IP/021394), even though it would constitute an orphan ward. However, our recommended Bury North constituency consists entirely of Bury wards, which we regard as being preferable."

The Assistant Commissioner's proposals from 2013 remain valid. If the electorate of Bury North is to be increased by adding one ward (which is a good strategy and which I support), Unsworth ward is the one to select.

While the Assistant Commissioner in 2013 recommended retaining the name "Bury North" for this constituency, I support changing the name to Bury for the same reasons as put forward by the Commission in their initial proposals:

> "We also propose that the constituency name should be changed to Bury, as changes elsewhere would mean that there would no longer be a constituency that could appropriately be called Bury South."

4.3 Pilkington Park ward

The final ward I would like to discuss here is Pilkington Park ward. As can be seen from Figure 6, this ward is essentially Whitefield's western ward, covering all of the town west of the A 56 plus much of the town centre, including the tram stop and Morrison's supermarket. The ward is separated from Radcliffe and Farnworth by open space and from Prestwich by the eight-lane M 60 motorway. Despite this, the Commission's initial proposals place this ward within the Farnworth constituency.

It should be obvious from this that Pilkington Park ward is a Whitefield ward, and an integral part of the town. The ward is presently in the Bury South constituency along with Whitefield's other ward (Besses), and the voters of Besses ward rely on services within Pilkington Park ward such as the Morrison's supermarket and the local bank branches. While Pilkington Park has been in the same constituency as the town of Radcliffe since 1983, Radcliffe is separated from the ward by open space and a significant difference in altitude. Clearly it is desirable, and a better fit with the statutory criteria, that Pilkington Park ward should be in the same constituency as Besses ward rather than the same constituency as Radcliffe.

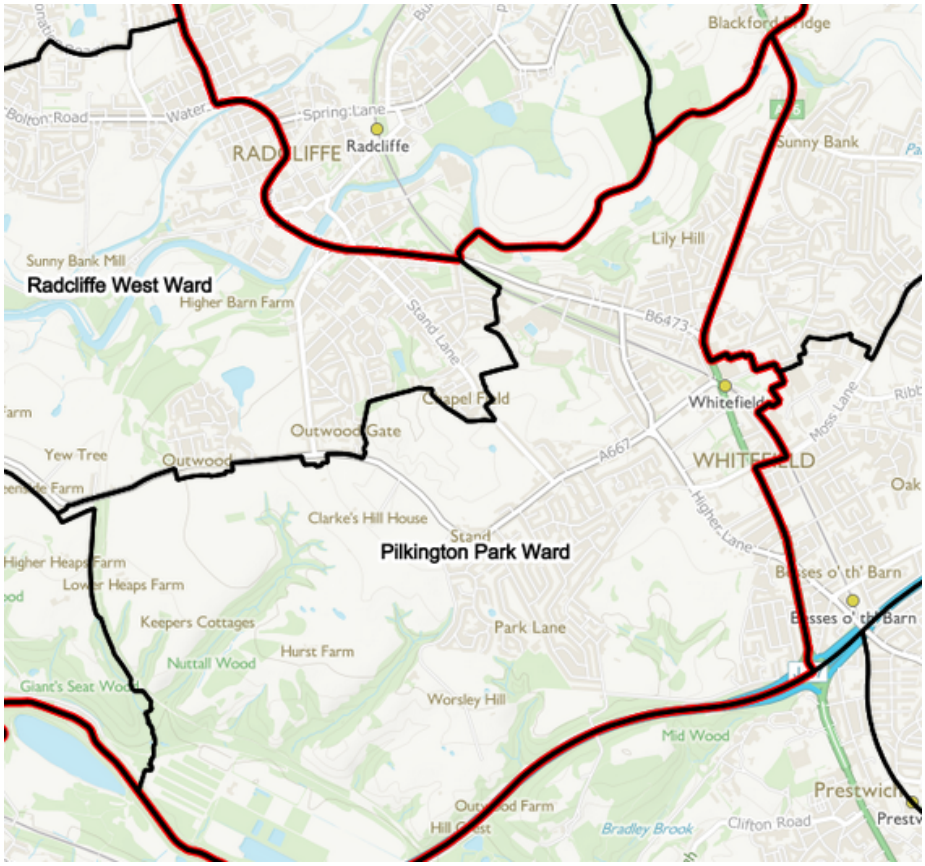

Figure 6: Pilkington Park ward.

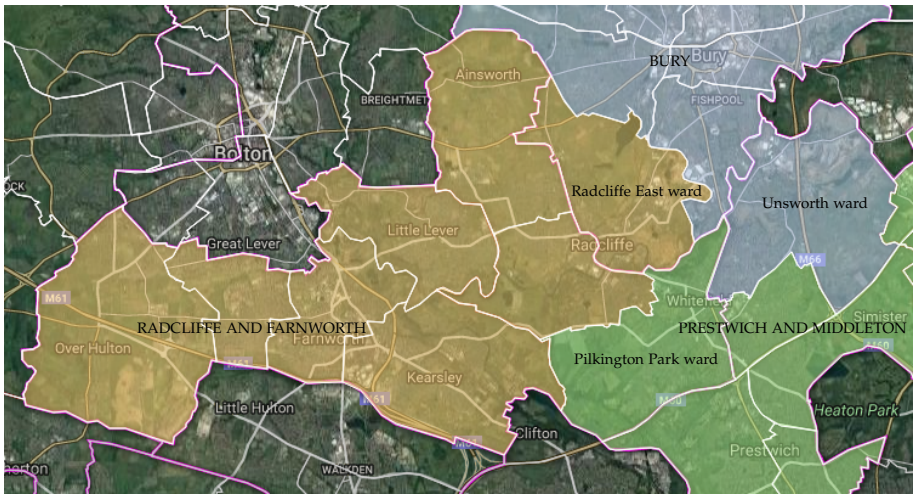

Figure 7: Map of the constituencies counter-proposed (with thanks to Boundary Assistant `http://boundaryassistant.org`).

4.4 Name of the Farnworth constituency

Finally, I would also suggest that the name of the Farnworth constituency is not appropriate to describe the seat fully and should be replaced by "Radcliffe and Farnworth". This would have the following advantages:

- The name "Radcliffe and Farnworth" would reflect that the constituency contains significant parts of two Greater Manchester boroughs. The Commission has previously taken a similar policy with cross-borough seats in Greater Manchester such as Denton and Reddish, Littleborough and Saddleworth, and Wythenshawe and Sale East.
- Placing Radcliffe at the start of the name would reflect that it would be the largest settlement within the constituency by population.
- Placing Radcliffe at the start of the name would also be consistent with the naming of the similar constituency which existed from 1885 to 1918.

5 Closing remarks

In summary I counter-propose that the Boundary Commission's initial proposals for the Bury, Farnworth, and Prestwich and Middleton constituencies should be changed as follows:

- *Bury (71,594):* the nine Bury wards of Church, East, Elton, Moorside, North Manor, Ramsbottom, Redvales, Tottington and Unsworth.
- *Prestwich and Middleton (77,122):* the five Bury wards of Besses, Holyrood, Pilkington Park, St Mary's and Sedgley; and the five Rochdale wards of East Middleton, Hopwood Hall, North Middleton, South Middleton and West Middleton.

- *Radcliffe and Farnworth (72,031):* the five Bolton wards of Farnworth, Harper Green, Hulton, Kearsley, and Little Lever and Darcy Lever; and the three Bury wards of Radcliffe East, Radcliffe North and Radcliffe West.

This has the following advantages over the initial proposals:

- Local ties are preserved by not splitting Radcliffe between constituencies.
- Local ties are restored by transferring Unsworth to a Bury-based constituency.
- Local ties are preserved by minimising the split of Whitefield between contituencies.

I hope that this submission is helpful to you and wish you luck in completing the review.

Andrew Teale
November 27, 2016