



## The Sixth General Review of constituency boundaries: public consultations

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Section PCC

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The *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* made provision for the number of constituencies to be reduced to 600. This note summarises the new statutory public consultation process that the Boundary Commissions in each part of the UK must use as part of the Sixth General Review of UK Parliamentary constituencies.

A general background to the Sixth Review is given in Library Standard Note 5929, [Constituency boundaries: the Sixth General Review](#).

Library Standard Notes 6068, [Initial proposals for new constituency boundaries: England](#), 6098, [Initial proposals for new constituency boundaries: Scotland](#) 6070, [Initial proposals for new constituency boundaries: Northern Ireland](#) and 6095, [Initial proposals for new constituency boundaries: Wales](#) examine how the initial proposals would change the existing map of constituencies in each country. They also examine the extent to which proposed constituencies can be identified with existing seats, including which seats remain unchanged, and which existing constituencies will be most affected by the proposals.

Library Standard Note [Sizes of constituency electorates](#) contains statistics on the electorate of existing constituencies, including regional variations and the deviation in electorate sizes from the UK electoral quota of 76,641.

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## 1 Background

Library Research Paper *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill [Bill 63 of 2010-11]* (September 2010) gives the background to the Coalition Government's decision to reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons from 650 to 600 and gives a brief history of redistribution.

Other Library papers follow the progress of the Bill through Parliament: *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill 2010-11: Commons Stages* (November 2010), *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill: Lords stages* (February 2011) and *The Parliamentary Voting system and Constituencies Bill: summary of amendments* (February 2011)

Under the new Rules for Redistribution in the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* the Boundary Commissions are required to recommend constituency boundaries which ensure that the electorate of each constituency is within 5% of the electoral quota for the UK; there are four island constituencies which are exempt from this parity rule. The electoral quota for the review is 76,641. More general details about the Sixth Review are given in Library Standard Note 5929, *Constituency boundaries: the Sixth General Review*.

The four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions announced the commencement of the Sixth Periodical Review on 4 March 2011. This followed the passing of the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011*, which made provision for the number of constituencies to be reduced to 600.

The *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* revised the statutory provisions for public consultations and inquiries. Section 12 of the 2011 Act amends Section 5 of the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986* on Notices and replaces it with the requirement that "the Commissions shall take such steps as they think fit to inform people in each of the proposed constituencies" of what the initial proposals are, where the proposals can be inspected in each constituency and that written representations may be made.<sup>1</sup> It therefore removes the requirement that Parliamentary boundary reviews should be started with an announcement in the London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes.

Section 12 of the 2011 Act also repeals Section 6 of the 1986 Act relating to public inquiries and inserts a new Schedule into the amended 1986 Act relating to the new statutory public hearings (see section 2.1 below).<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Initial consultation

The initial consultation starts with the publication of the Boundary Commissions' initial proposals and runs for 12 weeks from the publication date. The Boundary Commissions were required to inform people that written representations may be made and that public hearings will be held, but they are free to do this as they think fit.

Each Boundary Commission is required to publish all the representations it has received during the initial consultation and records of the public hearings held. Each Commission can again achieve this "as they think fit".<sup>3</sup> Publication of the representations and transcripts triggers the secondary consultation (see section 3).

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<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* (Chapter 1 2011) Section 12

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* (Chapter 1 2011) Section 12

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Section 12, § (4)

## 2.1 Public hearings

The *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill* originally only made provision for written representations to replace the previous system of representations and local inquiries. During the Second Reading debate on the Bill, Mark Harper, Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, responded to criticism of the abolition of local inquiries by citing academic opinion on the matter:

They have described oral inquiries as ‘very largely an exercise in allowing the political parties to seek influence over the Commission’s recommendations – in which their sole goal is to promote their own electoral interests.’ They also say that ‘it would be a major error to assume that the consultation process largely involves the general public having its say on the recommendation.’<sup>4</sup>

During the extended Lords Committee stage of the Bill the Government announced that it would make concessions on certain points and would bring in number of amendments at Report Stage. One of these related to the demand for a public hearing stage in the consultation process.

The Government still intended to abolish the public inquiry process held in previous reviews but tabled an amendment to allow public hearings in the initial consultation. Lord Falconer, for the Opposition, moved an amendment to retain a modified version of the current public inquiry. This amendment was lost by 266 votes to 262 and the Government amendment accepted.<sup>5</sup>

The new Schedule states that the Boundary Commissions in Scotland, Ireland and Wales have to arrange for at least two and no more than five public hearings to hear oral representations in each country. The Boundary Commission for England has to make arrangements for least 2 and no more than 5 hearings in each region.

Each hearing has to be no longer than two days and had to be held in a 5 week window within the 12 week initial consultation (from the beginning of the fifth week to the end of the tenth week). The Boundary Commissions had to appoint an independent person to chair each hearing. There were procedural restrictions laid out in the Schedule which is given in Appendix A.

The dates and locations of each public hearing are shown in Appendix B.

## 3 Secondary consultation

The secondary consultation is an opportunity for people to comment on the content of the representations received by the Boundary Commissions in the initial consultation. This provision was also introduced as a Government amendment to the Bill in the House of Lords.

When promising government amendments at Report stage, Lord Wallace of Tankerness, the government spokesman in the Lords, stated during the Lords Committee stage:

These two changes - a public hearing stage, aimed at improving public understanding and letting the public have their say in the process, and a counter-representation period-represent substantial changes to the proposals that were initially in the Bill. I hope that the House will agree that the Government have been willing to show

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<sup>4</sup> [HC Deb 6 September 2010, c128](#)

<sup>5</sup> [HL Deb 8 February 2011, c153](#)

considerable flexibility and a willingness to accommodate reasonable concerns, reasonably expressed.<sup>6</sup>

The secondary consultation runs for 4 weeks from the day a Boundary Commission publishes the written representations and transcripts of the public hearings held in the initial consultations.

The Boundary Commissions are required to publicise the fact that the documentation has been published and that further submissions commenting on these representations about the initial consultation are being sought.

In this four week period people can submit written submissions only. There are no public hearings.

At the end of the secondary consultation the Boundary Commissioners, with the support of Assistant Commissioners, have to consider all the representations they have received from both the initial and secondary consultations. Representations have equal weight regardless of how they were submitted or whether they were from the initial or secondary consultation.

#### **4 Amended proposals and final recommendations**

If a Boundary Commission decides to alter its proposals after the end of the secondary consultation the revised recommendations will be published and will then be subject to a further 8 weeks public consultation. Public hearings are not held during this 8 week consultation.

All four Boundary Commissions revised their proposals and published the details in the autumn of 2012.

Once the Boundary Commissions had considered the responses final recommendations were due to be submitted in a report to the relevant Secretary of State by 1 October 2013.

Following the passing of the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* the 2013 review has been cancelled and no further work will be undertaken. The Commissions will be required to conduct a new review after the 2015 general election and submit reports to the relevant Secretary of State in the autumn of 2018.<sup>7</sup>

Ministers are responsible for submitting a draft Order in Council to the UK Parliament giving effect to the recommendations of the 4 reports. This will now occur later in 2018 or early 2019. The draft Order can only modify the recommendations made by a Commission if that Commission specifies the required modifications and notifies the Secretary of State. Once the draft Order in Council has completed its legislative process, it will come into operation at the next general election.

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<sup>6</sup> [HL Deb 31 January 2011, c1223](#)

<sup>7</sup> For more details on the reasons for the delay see Library SN05929 [Constituency boundaries: the Sixth General Review](#)

## 5 2013 review timetable

This table show the stages each Boundary Commission has reached so far.

Stage	England	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Wales
Review commenced	4 March 2011	4 March 2011	4 March 2011	4 March 2011
Initial proposals published	13 September 2011	13 October 2011	13 September 2011	11 January 2012
Initial consultation closed	5 December 2011	4 January 2012	2 December 2011	4 April 2012
Secondary Consultation opens	6 March 2012	1 March 2012	31 January 2012	13 June 2012
Secondary consultation closes	3 April 2012	28 March 2012	27 February 2012	10 July 2012
Revised proposals published	16 October 2012	13 September 2012	16 October 2012	24 October 2012
Revised proposal consultation closes	10 December 2012	7 November 2012	10 December 2012	18 December 2012
Review cancelled	31 January 2013	31 January 2013	31 January 2013	31 January 2013

## 6 Previous public involvement in general boundary reviews

Before the enactment of the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* the Boundary Commissions had to comply with Sections 5 and 6 of the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986*. See Library Research Paper RP10/55 for more detail.

A general review of Parliamentary constituencies was triggered with an announcement in the appropriate Gazette (London, Edinburgh or Belfast). Initial recommendations followed in stages and were generally released in groups of counties in England and Wales. In Scotland all 32 council areas were released on the same day in the Fifth Review but in previous reviews initial proposals were usually released in stages. The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland has usually reviewed all constituencies and published recommendations for all of them at the same time.

On publication of its initial recommendations a Commission was required to publish a notice of the proposals in at least one newspaper circulating in the relevant constituency and invite written submission for one month after the publication.

Section 6 of the 1986 Act stated that if “the Commission receive any representation objecting to the proposed recommendation from an interested authority or from a body of electors numbering one hundred or more” then a local inquiry was required. The Commissions could also, “if they think fit, cause a local inquiry to be held in respect of any constituency or constituencies”.<sup>8</sup>

Local inquiries were advertised six weeks in advance and were conducted by Assistant Commissioners. These were independent lawyers appointed by the Boundary Commissions. There was no statutory procedure for local inquiries and the operation of them was left to the discretion of the Assistant Commissioner.

Following the local inquiry the Assistant Commissioner would produce a report which was submitted to the Boundary Commission along with the transcripts of the hearings. The Boundary Commission could accept in full or in part any of an Assistant Commissioner’s recommendations or reject them. If the Commission revised its recommendations it was required to re-publish the proposals and invite further written representations for a four week period as with the initial proposals. The Commission had the discretion to hold a further local inquiry regardless of the number of representations received although this power was used sparingly.

Once each Boundary Commission had completed the entire process for each country it would then submit its final recommendations in a report to the relevant Secretary of State.

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<sup>8</sup> *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986* (Chapter 56)

## Appendix A

### Section 12 of the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* relating to public consultations

#### 12 Boundary Commission proposals: publicity and consultation

- (1) For section 5 of the 1986 Act (notices) there is substituted—
- “5 Publicity and consultation**
- (1) Once a Boundary Commission have decided what constituencies they propose to recommend in a report under section 3(1)(a) above—
- (a) the Commission shall take such steps as they think fit to inform people in each of the proposed constituencies—
- (i) what the proposals are,
- (ii) that a copy of the proposals is open to inspection at a specified place within the proposed constituency, and
- (iii) that written representations with respect to the proposals may be made to the Commission during a specified period of 12 weeks (“the initial consultation period”);
- (b) the Commission shall cause public hearings to be held during the period beginning with the fifth week of the initial consultation period and ending with the tenth week of it.
- (2) Subsection (1)(a)(ii) above does not apply to a constituency with respect to which no alteration is proposed.
- (3) Schedule 2A to this Act, which makes further provision about public hearings under subsection (1)(b) above, has effect.
- (4) After the end of the initial consultation period the Commission—
- (a) shall publish, in such manner as they think fit, representations made as mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above and records of public hearings held under subsection (1)(b) above;
- (b) shall take such steps as they think fit to inform people in the proposed constituencies that further written representations with respect to the things published under paragraph (a) above may be made to the Commission during a specified period of four weeks (“the secondary consultation period”).
- (5) If after the end of the secondary consultation period the Commission are minded to revise their original proposals so as to recommend different constituencies, they shall take such steps as they see fit to inform people in each of those revised proposed constituencies—
- (a) what the revised proposals are,
- (b) that a copy of the revised proposals is open to inspection at a specified place within the revised proposed constituency, and
- (c) that written representations with respect to the revised proposals may be made to the Commission during a specified period of eight weeks.
- (6) Subsection (5) above does not apply to any proposals to make further revisions.
- (7) Steps taken under subsection (4) or (5) above need not be of the same kind as those taken under subsection (1) above.
- (8) A Boundary Commission shall take into consideration—
- (a) written representations duly made to them as mentioned in subsection (1)(a), (4)(b) or (5)(c) above, and
- (b) representations made at public hearings under subsection (1)(b) above.
- (9) Except as provided by this section and Schedule 2A to this Act, a Boundary Commission shall not cause any public hearing or inquiry to be held for the purposes of a report under this Act.
- (10) Where a Boundary Commission publish—
- (a) general information about how they propose to carry out their functions (including, in the case of the Boundary Commission for England, information about the extent (if any) to which they propose to take into account the boundaries mentioned in rule 5(2) of Schedule 2 to this Act), or
- (b) anything else to which subsection (1), (4) or (5) above does not apply,
- it is for the Commission to determine whether to invite representations and, if they decide to do so, the procedure that is to apply.”
- (2) After Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act there is inserted the Schedule set out in Schedule 11 to this Act.
- (3) Section 6 of the 1986 Act (local inquiries) is repealed.



Schedule 11 of the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011* relating to Public hearings.

SCHEDULE 11

Section 12

PUBLIC HEARINGS ABOUT BOUNDARY COMMISSION PROPOSALS

The Schedule referred to in section 12(2) is as follows—

“SCHEDULE 2A

Section 5

PUBLIC HEARINGS ABOUT BOUNDARY COMMISSION PROPOSALS

*Purpose of hearings*

- 1 The purpose of a public hearing is to enable representations to be made about any of the proposals with which the hearing is concerned.

*Number of hearings*

- 2 (1) In relation to any particular report under section 3(1)(a) of this Act—
  - (a) the Boundary Commission for England shall cause at least two and no more than five public hearings to be held in each English region;
  - (b) the Boundary Commission for Scotland shall cause at least two and no more than five public hearings to be held in Scotland;
  - (c) the Boundary Commission for Wales shall cause at least two and no more than five public hearings to be held in Wales;
  - (d) the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland shall cause at least two and no more than five public hearings to be held in Northern Ireland.
- (2) The public hearings in an English region shall be concerned with proposals for that region, and shall between them cover the whole region.
- (3) The public hearings in Scotland shall be concerned with proposals for Scotland, and shall between them cover the whole of Scotland.
- (4) The public hearings in Wales shall be concerned with proposals for Wales, and shall between them cover the whole of Wales.
- (5) The public hearings in Northern Ireland shall be concerned with proposals for Northern Ireland, and shall between them cover the whole of Northern Ireland.

*Chair of hearing*

- 3 For each public hearing the Boundary Commission concerned shall appoint a person to chair the hearing.

*Length of hearings*

- 4 A public hearing shall be completed within two days.

*Procedure at hearings*

- 5 It is for the chair of each public hearing to determine the procedure that is to govern that hearing.
- 6 The chair shall make arrangements for a public hearing to begin with an explanation of—
  - (a) the proposals with which the hearing is concerned;
  - (b) how written representations about the proposals may be made (as mentioned in section 5(1)(a), (4)(b) or (5)(c) of this Act).

- 7 (1) The chair of a public hearing must allow representations to be made—
- (a) by each qualifying party;
  - (b) by any other persons (whether individuals or organisations) considered by the chair to have an interest in any of the proposals with which the hearing is concerned.
- Paragraph (b) above has effect subject to sub-paragraph (3)(b) below.
- (2) The chair may restrict the amount of time allowed for representations—
- (a) by qualifying parties, and
  - (b) by other persons,
- and need not allow the same amount to each.
- (3) The chair may determine—
- (a) the order in which representations are made, and
  - (b) if necessary because of shortage of time, which of those wishing to make representations are not allowed to do so, in whatever way the chair decides.
- 8 (1) The chair may put questions, or allow questions to be put, to a person present at the hearing.
- (2) If questions are allowed to be put, the chair may regulate the manner of questioning or restrict the number of questions a person may ask.

*Interpretation*

- 9 In this Schedule—
- “the chair” means the person appointed under paragraph 3 above;
  - “English region” means an electoral region specified in Schedule 1 to the European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002 (ignoring paragraph 2(2) of that Schedule and the references to Gibraltar) as it has effect on the day referred to in rule 5(2) of Schedule 2 to this Act;
  - “public hearing” means a hearing under section 5(1)(b) of this Act;
  - “qualifying party” means a party that is registered under Part 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and either—
    - (a) has at least one Member of the House of Commons representing a constituency in the region, or (as the case may be) the part of the United Kingdom, in which the hearing is held, or
    - (b) received at least 10% of the votes cast in that region or part in the most recent parliamentary general election.”

## Appendix B– Public Hearing locations and dates

### Northern Ireland

Initial consultation public hearings dates and locations 2011.

The Commission has organised 3 public hearings into its proposals to give an opportunity for the public to make representations on them. The hearings will be conducted by independent Chairs and, according to the legislation, must be completed within **2 days**. They will be held as follows:

**10/11 October:** Ramada Plaza Hotel, Shaw’s Bridge, BELFAST

**19/20 October:** Silverbirch Hotel, Gortin Road, OMAGH

**24/25 October:** Tullyglass House Hotel, 178 Galgorm Road, BALLYMENA

### Scotland

Boundary Commission for Scotland

Initial consultation public hearings dates and locations 2011.

Hearing	Date	Chair	Focus
Edinburgh, City Chambers	Monday 14 November	Sheriff Principal Mhairi Stephen	City of Edinburgh East Lothian Falkirk Midlothian Scottish Borders West Lothian
New Lanark World Heritage Site	Wednesday 16 November	Sheriff Principal Brian Lockhart	Dumfries and Galloway East Ayrshire East Renfrewshire North Lanarkshire South Ayrshire South Lanarkshire
Glasgow, Teacher Building	Tuesday 22 November	Sheriff Principal Craig Scott	Argyll and Bute Glasgow City East Dunbartonshire Inverclyde North Ayrshire Renfrewshire West Dunbartonshire
Inverness, Town House	Thursday 24 November	Sheriff Principal Sir Stephen Young	Aberdeen City Aberdeenshire Highland Moray
Dundee, City Chambers	Tuesday 29 November	Sheriff Principal Alastair Dunlop	Angus Clackmannanshire Dundee City Fife Perth and Kinross Stirling

## England

Boundary Commission for England  
Initial consultation public hearings dates and locations 2011.

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Town/City/Borough</b>	<b>Venue Address</b>
Tues 11th - Wed 12th Oct	North West	Manchester	Britannia Hotel Manchester, Portland Street, Manchester M1 3LA
Thurs 13th - Fri 14th Oct	Yorks & Humber	Leeds	Ramada Leeds North, Seacroft Ringroad A6120, Millgreen View, Leeds LS14 5QF
	North West	Chester	Brook Mollington Banastre Hotel, Parkgate Road, Chester, Cheshire CH1 6NN
Mon 17th - Tues 18th Oct	London (Central)	Kensington and Chelsea	Holiday Inn Kensington Forum, 97 Cromwell Road, London SW7 4DN
	Yorks & Humber	Sheffield	Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1 2HH
	North West	Carlisle	Civic Centre, Rickergate, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 8QG
Thurs 20th - Fri 21st Oct	South East	Reading	Royal Berkshire Conference Centre, Madejski Stadium, Reading, Berkshire RG2 0FL
	London (North West)	London Borough of Brent	Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 9HD
	Yorks & Humber	Northallerton	The Golden Lion, High Street, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL 8PP
	North West	Liverpool	Radisson Blu Hotel Liverpool, 107 Old Hall Street, Liverpool L3 9BD
Mon 24th - Tues 25th Oct	South East	Milton Keynes	Milton Keynes Council, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ

	London (South East)	London Borough of Lewisham	Lewisham Town Hall, Catford Road, London SE6 4RU
	Yorks & Humber	Hull	Theatre and Halls, Hull City Hall, Queen Victoria Square, Hull, HU1 3RQ
	North West	Preston	Macdonald Tickled Trout Hotel, Preston New Road, Salmesbury, Preston, Lancashire PR5 0UJ
Thurs 27th -Fri 28th Oct	East Midlands	Derby	The Derby Conference Centre, London Road, Derby DE24 8UX
	South East	Portsmouth	Civil Offices, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth, PO1 2AL
	London (North East)	London Borough of Newham	East Ham Town Hall, Barking Road, London E6 2RP
Mon 31st Oct - Tues 1st Nov	Eastern	Colchester	Town Hall, Colchester, CO1 1PJ
	East Midlands	Northampton	The Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton NN1 1DE
	South East	Crawley	Crowne Plaza London Gatwick A, Langley Drive, Crawley, West Sussex RH11 7SX
	London (South West)	London Borough of Wandsworth	Town Hall, Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 2PU
Thurs 3rd - Fri 4th Nov	West Midlands	City of Birmingham	Copthorne Hotel, Paradise Circus, Birmingham B3 3HJ
	Eastern	Norwich	Norwich City Council, City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich NR2 1NH
	East Midlands	Lincoln	Lincoln Hotel, Eastgate, Lincoln LN2 1PN
	South East	Maidstone	Ramada Maidstone, Ashford Road, Hollingbourne, Maidstone, Kent ME17 1RE

Mon 7th - Tues 8th Nov	South West	Bristol	Holiday Inn Bristol City Centre, Bond Street, Bristol BS1 3LE
	West Midlands	Ludlow	Ludlow Conference Centre, Lower Galdeford, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1RZ
	Eastern	Luton	Town Hall, Luton, LU1 2BQ
Thurs 10th - Fri 11th Nov	South West	Truro	Alverton Manor Hotel, Tregolis Road, Truro, Cornwall TR1 1ZQ
	West Midlands	Warwick	Warwickshire County Council, Shire Hall, Warwick, CV34 4SA
	Eastern	Cambridge	BW Gonville Hotel, Gonville Place, Cambridge CB1 1LY
Mon 14th - Tues 15th Nov	North East	Newcastle	The Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8QH
	South West	Bournemouth	De Vere Royal Bath, Bath Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 2EW
	West Midlands	Stafford	Peel Building, St Chads Place, Stafford ST16 2LR
Thurs 17th - Fri 18th Nov	North East	Darlington	St George Hotel Darlington, Durham Tees Valley Airport, Darlington, Co Durham DL2 1RH
	South West	Exeter	Exeter City Council, Paris Street, Exeter, EX1 1JN

## Wales

Boundary Commission for Wales

Initial consultation public hearings dates and locations

Location	Venue	Date
Swansea	The Liberty Stadium	15-16 February 2012
Cardiff	The Millennium Stadium	22-23 February 2012
Wrexham	Wrexham Glyndwr University	29 February - 1 March 2012
Caernarfon	Caernarfon Celtic Royal Hotel	7-8 March 2012
Llandrindod	The Pavilion	20-21 March 2012