

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Fenland in Cambridgeshire

Report to the Electoral Commission

April 2002

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Fenland is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to the Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No 3692). The Order also transferred to the Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Kru Desai
Robin Gray
Joan Jones
Ann M Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Fenland in Cambridgeshire.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Fenland's electoral arrangements on 17 April 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 27 November 2001, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, the Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.**

We found that the existing arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Fenland:

- **in 19 of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 10 wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 the number of electors per councillor is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 14 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 11 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 117-118) are that:

- **Fenland District Council should have 40 councillors, the same number as at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of 25 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all but three of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of two wards;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each district councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In 18 of the proposed 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average while in 23 of the proposed 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 20 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in no ward expected to vary by more than 9 per cent from the average for the district in 2006.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish and town council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of March;**
- **a reduction in the number of councillors serving Wisbech Town Council;**
- **an increase in the number of councillors serving Chatteris and Whittlesey town councils.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 5 June 2002:

**The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Bassenhally	1	The proposed Bassenhally parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2 and the large map
2	Benwick, Coates & Eastrea	2	The parish of Benwick; the proposed Whittlesey South parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2
3	Birch	1	The proposed Birch parish ward of Chatteris parish	Map 2 and Map A2
4	Clarkson	1	The proposed Clarkson parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
5	Delph	1	The proposed Delph parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2 and the large map
6	Doddington	1	The parish of Doddington	Map 2
7	Elm & Christchurch	2	The parishes of Christchurch and Elm	Map 2
8	Hill	2	The proposed Hill parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
9	Kingsmoor	1	The proposed Kingsmoor parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2 and the large map
10	Kirkgate	1	The proposed Kirkgate parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
11	Lattersey	1	The proposed Lattersey parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2 and the large map
12	Manea	1	<i>Unchanged:</i> the parish of Manea	Map 2
13	March East	3	The proposed March East parish ward of March parish	Map 2 and the large map
14	March North	3	The proposed March North parish ward of March parish	Map 2 and the large map
15	March West	3	The proposed March West parish ward of March parish	Map 2 and the large map
16	Medworth	1	The proposed Medworth parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
17	Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary	2	<i>Unchanged:</i> the parishes of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary	Map 2
18	Peckover	1	The proposed Peckover parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
19	Roman Bank	3	The parishes of Gorefield, Leverington, Newton and Tydd St Giles	Map 2
20	Slade Lode	1	The proposed Slade Lode parish ward of Chatteris parish	Map 2 and Map A2
21	Staithe	1	The proposed Staithe parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
22	St Andrews	1	The proposed St Andrews parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2 and the large map
23	St Marys	1	The proposed St Marys parish ward of Whittlesey parish	Map 2 and the large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
24	The Mills	1	The proposed The Mills parish ward of Chatteris parish	Map 2 and Map A2
25	Waterlees	2	The proposed Waterlees parish ward of Wisbech parish	Map 2 and the large map
26	Wenneye	1	The proposed Wenneye parish ward of Chatteris parish	Map 2 and Map A2
27	Wimblington	1	<i>Unchanged:</i> the parish of Wimblington	Map 2

Notes: 1 Map 2 and Appendix A, including the large map in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

2 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Fenland

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bassenhally	1	1,270	1,270	-22	1,790	1,790	4
2	Benwick, Coates & Eastrea	2	3,094	1,547	-5	3,140	1,570	-9
3	Birch	1	1,575	1,575	-4	1,848	1,848	7
4	Clarkson	1	1,568	1,568	-4	1,632	1,632	-5
5	Delph	1	1,456	1,456	-11	1,810	1,810	5
6	Doddington	1	1,621	1,621	-1	1,560	1,560	-9
7	Elm & Christchurch	2	3,281	1,641	0	3,440	1,720	0
8	Hill	2	3,497	1,749	7	3,477	1,739	1
9	Kingsmoor	1	1,280	1,280	-22	1,850	1,850	7
10	Kirkgate	1	1,672	1,672	2	1,614	1,614	-6
11	Lattersey	1	1,913	1,913	17	1,810	1,810	5
12	Manea	1	1,243	1,243	-24	1,600	1,600	-7
13	March East	3	4,989	1,661	2	5,357	1,783	3
14	March North	3	4,721	1,574	-4	4,930	1,643	-5
15	March West	3	5,104	1,704	4	5,193	1,733	1
16	Medworth	1	1,769	1,769	8	1,774	1,774	3
17	Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary	2	3,191	1,596	-2	3,340	1,670	-3
18	Peckover	1	1,654	1,654	1	1,659	1,659	-4
19	Roman Bank	3	4,698	1,566	-4	4,880	1,627	-6
20	Slade Lode	1	1,761	1,761	8	1,782	1,782	3
21	Staithe	1	1,789	1,789	9	1,763	1,763	2
22	St Andrews	1	1,975	1,975	21	1,870	1,870	9
23	St Marys	1	1,867	1,867	14	1,840	1,840	7
24	The Mills	1	1,868	1,868	14	1,780	1,780	3
25	Waterlees	2	3,452	1,726	6	3,701	1,851	7

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
26 Wenneye	1	1,698	1,698	4	1,850	1,850	7
27 Wimblington	1	1,365	1,365	-16	1,620	1,620	-6
Totals	40	65,371	–	–	68,910	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,634	–	–	1,723	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Fenland District Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Fenland in Cambridgeshire. The five districts in Cambridgeshire have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 Fenland's last review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1975 (Report no. 56). The electoral arrangements of Cambridgeshire County Council were last reviewed in March 1988 (Report no. 546). We expect to begin reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements towards the end of the year.

3 In making final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), ie the need to:
 - a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Fenland was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fourth edition, published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

6 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Fenland is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and stated that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 17 April 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Fenland District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern region and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 13 August 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 27 November 2001 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Fenland in Cambridgeshire*, and ended on 28 January 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 The district of Fenland is situated in the north-eastern corner of Cambridgeshire and is bordered by Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Peterborough unitary authority, East Cambridgeshire district and Huntingdonshire district. The district is predominantly rural in character but contains the four significant market towns of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech. The main industries in the area are farming, manufacturing, transport and distribution. The district is the most fertile in the United Kingdom and amongst the most intensely cropped and productive in the world. The district is entirely parished, containing 16 parishes, and Wisbech town comprises almost 24 per cent of the district's total electorate.

11 The electorate of the district is 65,371 (February 2001). The Council presently has 40 members who are elected from 25 wards, 17 of which are relatively urban in Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech, with the remainder being mainly rural. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors, five are each represented by two councillors and 15 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

12 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated, in percentage terms, the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the district average. In the text which follows, this figure may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,634 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,723 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in 19 of the 25 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in 10 wards by more than 20 per cent and in seven wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Whittlesey Bassenhally ward where the councillor represents 95 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Fenland

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Benwick & Doddington	1	2,273	2,273	39	2,320	2,320	35
2	Chatteris East	1	2,743	2,743	68	3,180	3,180	85
3	Chatteris North	1	1,349	1,349	-17	1,280	1,280	-26
4	Chatteris South	1	1,061	1,061	-35	1,140	1,140	-34
5	Chatteris West	1	1,734	1,734	6	1,660	1,660	-4
6	Elm	2	2,716	1,358	-17	2,870	1,435	-17
7	Leverington	2	3,336	1,668	2	3,540	1,770	3
8	Manea	1	1,244	1,244	-24	1,600	1,600	-7
9	March East	3	5,644	1,881	15	5,710	1,903	10
10	March North	3	4,901	1,634	0	5,450	1,817	5
11	March West	3	4,263	1,421	-13	4,320	1,440	-16
12	Newton & Tydd St Giles	1	1,363	1,363	-17	1,340	1,340	-22
13	Outwell & Upwell	1	567	567	-65	570	570	-67
14	Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary	2	3,201	1,601	-2	3,340	1,670	-3
15	Whittlesey Bassenhally	1	3,195	3,195	95	4,020	4,020	133
16	Whittlesey Central	1	1,351	1,351	-17	1,330	1,330	-23
17	Whittlesey East	1	2,181	2,181	33	2,100	2,100	22
18	Whittlesey Kingsmoor	1	1,206	1,206	-26	1,770	1,770	3
19	Whittlesey South	1	2,444	2,444	50	2,380	2,380	38
20	Whittlesey West	1	1,834	1,834	12	1,750	1,750	2
21	Wimblington	1	1,364	1,364	-17	1,620	1,620	-6
22	Wisbech East	2	3,541	1,771	8	3,490	1,745	1
23	Wisbech North	3	4,241	1,414	-13	4,570	1,523	-12

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24	Wisbech North East	2	2,314	1,157	-29	2,240	1,120	-35
25	Wisbech South West	3	5,305	1,768	8	5,320	1,773	3
	Totals	40	65,371	-	-	68,910	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,634	-	-	1,723	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Fenland District Council.*

Note: *The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Outwell & Upwell ward were relatively over-represented by 65 per cent, while electors in Whittlesey Bassenhally ward were significantly under-represented by 95 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received five representations, including a district-wide scheme from Fenland District Council, representations from the Whittlesey Branch Labour Party and Fenland District Labour Party and representations from Chatteris and March town councils. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft Recommendations for the future electoral arrangements for Fenland in Cambridgeshire*.

15 The LGCE's draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals in Chatteris, Whittlesey and most of the rural area. However, in Wisbech, subject to two amendments to improve electoral equality and to provide stronger and more easily identifiable boundaries, it based its scheme on the Labour Party's proposals. The Commission proposed its own scheme for March comprising two three-member wards, one two-member ward and one single-member ward. It proposed that:

- Fenland District Council should be served by 40 councillors, as at present, representing 28 wards, three more than at present;
- the boundaries of all but three of the existing wards should be modified;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech town councils.

Draft Recommendation

Fenland District Council should comprise 40 councillors, serving 28 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the 28 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 9 per cent from the average in 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on its draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 22 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Fenland District Council.

Fenland District Council

18 Fenland District Council supported the draft recommendations for Gorefield, Leverington, Newton, Tydd St Giles, Elm, Christchurch, Doddington, Wimblington, Manea, Whittlesey and Chatteris but opposed the draft recommendations for Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary, March and Wisbech, for which it resubmitted its original proposals. However, the Council stated that if the Commission was unwilling to accept the Council's original submission for Wisbech, it would prefer that the two two-member wards of Hill and Waterlees proposed in the draft recommendations be split into four single-member wards.

Cambridgeshire County Council

19 Cambridgeshire County Council stated that where there is consensus between district and parish or town councils this should be respected. It also said that in future, district and county reviews should take place at the same time. The County Council also attached great importance to coterminosity between district wards and county electoral divisions.

Fenland District Labour Party

20 Fenland District Labour Party supported the draft recommendations for Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary and the town of Wisbech with the exception of the proposed two-member Hill ward, which it proposed should be split into two single-member wards. It supported the March Town Council proposals for March, with the draft recommendations as second choice and the Council's proposals as third choice.

Fenland District Council Conservative Group

21 Fenland District Council Conservative Group generally supported the draft recommendations but wished the Council's proposals for Wisbech to be revisited. The Conservatives pointed out that the Council's scheme for district wards in March should not have been withdrawn and supported the original Council submission. They preferred a pattern of single-member wards in the market towns.

North East Cambridge Conservative Association

22 The North East Cambridge Conservative Association generally supported the draft recommendations but wished the Council's original submissions for March and Wisbech to be reconsidered. It also supported the Council's original proposals for Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary. The Wisbech East Branch of the NE Cambridge Conservative Association stated that it would prefer nine single-member wards in Wisbech, as originally proposed, and felt that the draft recommendations contained inconsistent boundaries.

Malcolm Moss, MP

23 Malcolm Moss, MP, stated that the Council's original submission had cross-party support and the support of the four main towns. He queried why single-member wards had not been adopted in March and Wisbech and stated that the Council did not wish to withdraw its original submission regarding the district wards in March. He also felt that a small group of Labour councillors were having an influence disproportionate to their numbers on the Council.

Town Councils

24 March Town Council opposed the Commission's draft recommendations for March and put forward its own proposal for three three-member wards. Whittlesey Town Council supported the draft recommendations for Whittlesey and considered that the principle of single-member wards should be used throughout the district.

Other Representations

25 A further 13 representations were received in response to the LGCE's draft recommendations from local political groups, councillors and residents.

26 Councillor Wegg and a resident opposed the draft recommendations for Wisbech and supported the original Council submission for this area. Councillors Carlisle, German, Green, Keane and Laws stated that the Council's Stage One submission had cross-party support and expressed surprise that the LGCE had moved away from the principle of single-member wards in March and Wisbech. They also stated that the Council scheme for the district warding of March should not have been withdrawn. Councillor Laws (the current councillor for this ward) supported the proposal to split the existing Whittlesey Bassenhally ward into two wards.

27 Councillor Curtis supported the draft recommendations for Whittlesey. However, he opposed the draft recommendations for March and Wisbech and requested that the Council's original submissions for these areas be reconsidered. He also stated that the Council scheme for the district warding of March should not have been withdrawn.

28 Councillor Wales supported March Town Council's Stage Three proposal. The Leader of the Labour Group on March Town Council also supported the proposals put forward by March Town Council.

29 A resident of March proposed a scheme of nine single-member wards for March at both district and parish level, and contested the projected electorate figures for 2006. The scheme would have two wards with variances of over 10 per cent by 2006.

30 A resident of Wisbech proposed a scheme of seven single-member wards and one two-member ward. The scheme would result in all but one ward having an electoral variance of under 10 per cent by 2006.

31 A resident of Whittlesey put forward a change to the proposed boundary between Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward and St Andrews ward to move the areas of Kings Delph and Kings Dyke, to the west of Whittlesey, from Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward into St Andrews ward. The resident argued that the proposed Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward would be too large geographically.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

32 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Fenland is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

33 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

34 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

35 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

36 Since 1975 there has been an 32 per cent increase in the electorate of Fenland district. At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 65,371 to 68,910 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Whittlesey and March, although a significant amount is also expected in the more rural Manea and Wimblington wards. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

37 At Stage Three a resident of March questioned the Council’s projected electorate figures for March town and considered that the real growth in March was more than that accounted for by the Council. However, the Council was “happy that its projections as submitted originally, are accurate” and we remain satisfied that the original figures represent the best estimates currently available.

Council Size

38 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although it was willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

39 In its draft recommendations report the LGCE adopted the Council's proposal to retain the existing council size of 40 members. The Council considered whether an increase was necessary to account for the growth in the district since the last review but felt that "taking into account the rapid growth in the development of communications technology, and the improvements in transport and infrastructure, it was possible for a councillor to represent a larger number of electors than was possible a quarter of a century ago". The Council also felt that "a larger Council would be unwieldy, more expensive and unnecessary". No other representations were received regarding council size at Stage One and the LGCE concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 40 members.

40 During Stage Three there were no representations relating to council size and we are therefore content to endorse the LGCE's draft recommendation to retain the existing council size of 40 members.

Electoral Arrangements

41 At Stage One the LGCE carefully considered all the representations received. The District Council's proposed scheme was the only district-wide scheme that it received. Fenland District Council proposed a system of largely single-member wards giving a reasonable level of electoral equality, with only one ward having an electoral variance of over 10 per cent by 2006. The council's scheme was based on the principle of single-member wards and it aimed to extend the existing warding pattern to contain as many single-member wards as possible, having taken account of local circumstances.

42 Whittlesey Branch Labour Party proposed a scheme for Whittlesey comprising six single-member wards and one two-member ward. This scheme provided for good levels of electoral equality, with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006.

43 Fenland District Labour Party proposed a scheme for Wisbech comprising nine single-member wards. This scheme provided a good level of electoral equality, with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006.

44 The LGCE based its draft recommendations on the District Council's scheme but, in order to improve electoral equality further and to provide strong and easily identifiable boundaries whilst having regard to local community identities and interests, it decided to move away from the Council's proposals in Wisbech and in Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary where, with two amendments, it adopted the Fenland District Labour Party and Whittlesey Branch Labour Party's proposals. Due to a misunderstanding at Stage One regarding the Council's proposals for March, and the lack of any other detailed schemes, the LGCE proposed its own scheme for March.

45 In response to the LGCE's draft recommendations report, the Council supported many of the proposals but pointed out that it did not wish for its scheme for the district wards in March to be withdrawn. It also resubmitted its original proposals for Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary and Wisbech. After considering all the representations received at Stage Three we are proposing to endorse the draft recommendations in all areas with the exception of March where, with two

amendments which would not affect any electors, we are proposing adopting the scheme put forward by March Town Council. We note the Council's desire for single-member wards but consider that, in certain areas, single-member wards can lead to the splitting of communities and hence do not provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Wisbech East, Wisbech North East, Wisbech North and Wisbech South West wards;
- (b) Whittlesey Bassenhally, Whittlesey Central, Whittlesey East, Whittlesey Kingsmoor, Whittlesey South and Whittlesey West wards;
- (c) March East, March North and March West wards;
- (d) Chatteris East, Chatteris North, Chatteris South and Chatteris West wards;
- (e) Leverington, Newton & Tydd St Giles and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary wards;
- (f) Benwick & Doddington, Elm, Manea, Outwell & Upwell and Wimblington wards.

46 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Wisbech East, Wisbech North East, Wisbech North and Wisbech South West wards

47 These four wards lie in the north-east of the district and together form the parish of Wisbech. The number of electors per councillor in the wards of Wisbech East and Wisbech South West is 8 per cent above the district average (1 per cent and 3 per cent by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the wards of Wisbech North East and Wisbech North is 29 per cent and 13 per cent below the district average respectively (35 per cent and 12 per cent by 2006).

48 At Stage One the District Council proposed a system of nine single-member wards for Wisbech.

49 Fenland District Labour Party proposed an alternative scheme of nine single-member wards for the town of Wisbech. It proposed a Peckover ward following the same boundaries as those proposed by the District Council, but the rest of its wards followed a different pattern.

50 The LGCE carefully considered both of the representations that it received regarding Wisbech. It considered that both the District Council's scheme and the Labour Party's scheme provided good levels of electoral equality but, on balance, considered that the Labour Party's scheme made use of stronger and more easily identifiable boundaries. However, in two areas it was of the opinion that combining four of the Labour Party's proposed single-member wards to create two two-member wards would provide for improved boundaries without any detrimental effect on electoral equality. Therefore it proposed combining the Labour Party's two proposed wards of Young and Waterlees to create a single two-member Waterlees ward. This ward would unite all electors to the north of Brigstock Road, Mount Pleasant Road and Lynn Road in a single ward. It also proposed combining the Labour Party's two proposed wards of Arles and Hill to create a two-member Hill ward. Again, it considered that this arrangement would provide for more easily identifiable boundaries to the north of Norwich Road, to the east of Boyces Road, Money Bank, Quakers Lane and Meadowgate Lane, and to the west of Churchill Road, Victoria Road, Railway Road, Sandall Road, Weasenham Lane and New Drove. The boundary to the south would be the existing boundary with Elm ward.

51 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Hill, Kirkgate, Medworth, Peckover, Staithe and Waterlees wards would be 7 per cent, 2 per cent, 8

per cent, 1 per cent, 9 per cent and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (1 per cent above, 6 per cent below, 3 per cent above, 4 per cent below, 2 per cent above and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Clarkson ward would be 4 per cent below the district average (5 per cent by 2006).

52 At Stage Three the District Council resubmitted its original proposals for a scheme for Wisbech consisting of nine single-member wards. It considered that “the fundamental principle of single-member wards should be pursued” and stated that “the Labour Party proposal, adopted by the Commission, does not group voters in units convenient to polling stations, and that in many cases voters will have to exit the proposed wards in order to enter again by another point, in order to be able to access the polling station”. However, the Council recognised that, after considering all responses, we might wish to uphold the draft recommendations and so put forward proposals to split the two-member Hill and Waterlees wards into single-member wards, to be considered if we did not adopt the Council’s original proposals for Wisbech. It proposed using the boundary of Elm High Road and Ramnoth Road to divide the proposed two-member Hill ward, with all the electors to the west of this boundary forming the single-member Hill ward and all electors to the east of this boundary forming the single-member Westmead ward. It proposed splitting the proposed two-member Waterlees ward to create a single-member Waterlees ward in the east and a single-member Osborne ward in the west.

53 Fenland District Labour Party stated that the Council’s “comment that ‘the Labour Party proposal, adopted by the Commission, does not group voters in units convenient to polling stations, and that in many cases voters will have to exit the proposed wards in order to enter again by another point, in order to be able to access the polling station’ is...absolute nonsense as this happens under existing arrangements and would actually be worse under District Council proposals”. It also stated that it would prefer nine separate wards for Wisbech based on its original proposals but accepted that there was a case for a two-member Waterlees ward as “this would have boundaries exactly the same as the existing North Ward EE Polling District and so would be well established and defined”. However, it did not accept that the Commission’s proposal for a two-member Hill ward would produce better boundaries and stated that the boundary between the existing East and South West wards was “well known, established and easily identifiable”. Labour’s proposals for the single-member Hill and Arles wards would maintain this boundary and “would also mean electors would remain in an area they are familiar with under existing provisions”. The Labour Party stated that “we therefore accept the Commission’s proposals for the Town of Wisbech with the exception of the Commission’s Hill ward” which it wished to be divided into the single-member wards of Hill and Arles contained in its original submission.

54 A resident put forward a new warding arrangement for Wisbech consisting of seven single-member wards and one two-member ward. This scheme would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality with one ward having an electoral variance of 10 per cent by 2006. The resident stated that “one of the key factors in encouraging greater participation by the electorate in local elections and in making councillors more accountable is to have single-member seats”. He also stated that “whilst achieving the objective of single member wards, neither the District Council plan nor the Fenland District Labour Party plan take into account ‘local community identities and interests’ to the extent that they should”.

55 The Fenland District Council Conservative Group wished the Council’s proposals for Wisbech to be revisited and preferred a pattern of single-member wards in the market towns. The North East Cambridge Conservative Association wished the Council’s submission for Wisbech to be reconsidered. The Wisbech East Branch of the NE Cambridge Conservative Association

stated that it would prefer nine single-member wards in Wisbech, as originally proposed, and felt that the draft recommendations contained inconsistent boundaries.

56 Malcolm Moss, MP, stated that the Council's original submission had cross-party support and the support of the four main towns. He asked why the Commission had departed from the principle of single-member wards in March and Wisbech. He also felt that a small group of Labour councillors were having an influence disproportionate to their numbers on the Council.

57 Councillor Wegg and a resident opposed the draft recommendations for Wisbech and supported the original Council submission for Wisbech. Councillors Carlisle, German, Green, Keane and Laws stated that the Council Stage One submission had cross-party support and expressed surprise that the Commission had moved away from the principle of single-member wards in March and Wisbech. Councillor Curtis opposed the draft recommendations for March and Wisbech and requested that the Council's original submission be reconsidered.

58 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided that while there has been some opposition to the draft recommendations, insufficient evidence has been provided to persuade us to move away from the draft recommendations for Wisbech. We do not accept argumentation based on the location of polling stations as these are merely an administrative tool, the locations of which can be amended following completion of the review. We reconsidered the Council's original proposals for nine single-member wards in Wisbech but remain of the opinion that the draft recommendations for Wisbech make use of stronger and more easily identifiable boundaries while providing slightly better electoral equality. We looked at the proposals put forward by both the Council and the Labour Party to split the proposed two-member Hill ward into two single-member wards but considered that neither provided enough argumentation as to why this would be an improvement on the draft recommendations. We looked at the proposal put forward by the Council to split the proposed two-member Waterlees ward into two single-member wards but again considered that insufficient evidence was provided as to why this would constitute an improvement on the draft recommendations. We also received support for our proposed Waterlees ward from the Labour Party and a proposal for a very similar two-member ward from a local resident. We looked at the scheme submitted by a resident for the entire town consisting of seven single-member wards and one two-member ward but considered that there was insufficient evidence for us to move away from the draft recommendations to adopt an entirely new scheme which does not offer evidence of local support. Stage Three is intended to be for comments on our draft recommendations rather than for the submission of entirely new schemes and it would require exceptional circumstances for us to adopt a completely new scheme at Stage Three, especially one which would lead to a slight deterioration in electoral equality.

59 Therefore, having considered all the representations and evidence received, we are content to endorse the LGCE's draft recommendations for the town of Wisbech as final. The electoral variances would be the same as those of the draft recommendations and these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Whittlesey Bassenhally, Whittlesey Central, Whittlesey East, Whittlesey Kingsmoor, Whittlesey South and Whittlesey West wards

60 These six wards comprise the town of Whittlesey and are situated in the extreme west of the district. The number of electors per councillor in Whittlesey Bassenhally, Whittlesey East, Whittlesey South and Whittlesey West wards is 95 per cent, 33 per cent, 50 per cent and 12 per

cent above the district average respectively (133 per cent, 22 per cent, 38 per cent and 2 per cent by 2006).

61 The District Council proposed a scheme of six single-member wards and one two-member ward for the town of Whittlesey.

62 Whittlesey Branch Labour Party proposed a similar scheme to that of the District Council consisting of six single-member wards and one two-member ward.

63 The LGCE looked carefully at both of the schemes that it received for Whittlesey and noted that both provided a reasonable level of electoral equality, with none of the proposed wards having an electoral variance of over 10 per cent. However, despite the similarities between the two schemes, it considered that the District Council's scheme provided slightly stronger and more easily identifiable boundaries and therefore, with only one minor amendment which does not affect any electors, it was content to endorse the District Council's proposals for Whittlesey. The minor amendment was to utilise the path to the west of Whittlesey as the southern boundary of the proposed Delph ward, as it considered that this provided a better boundary than that proposed by the District Council. This change would not affect any electors.

64 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Lattersey, St Andrews and St Marys wards would be 17 per cent, 21 per cent and 14 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent, 9 per cent and 7 per cent by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Bassenhally, Delph and Kingsmoor wards would be 22 per cent, 11 per cent and 22 per cent below the district average respectively (4 per cent, 5 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006).

65 In response to the LGCE's draft recommendations the District Council "was pleased to note that the Commission, subject to three minor alterations to the boundaries of the proposed wards, has adopted the District Council's proposals for wards covering the town of Whittlesey and the parish of Benwick". The Council "considered that these amendments are acceptable, and should be supported".

66 The North East Cambridgeshire Conservative Association stated that the proposed two-member Benwick, Coates and Eastrea ward was "an anomaly with sparsity of population making this a very large ward in area" but added that it was "totally in support of the proposals for this two-member ward".

67 Whittlesey Town Council stated that they "would like to endorse the recommendations for Whittlesey, which were based, wherever practical, on single-member wards for the District Council". It also felt that this same principle should be used throughout Fenland district.

68 Councillor Laws, the councillor for Whittlesey Bassenhally ward, supported the proposal to split the existing ward into two. She stated that this area "has been the fastest growing residential area in Whittlesey" and that she could see "great benefits for the proposals put forward especially for Bassenhally ward, Whittlesey".

69 Councillor Curtis endorsed "the Commission's recommendations for the town [Whittlesey] which were, I believe, based on extremely fair doctrine and included wherever practical, a principle of one district councillor per ward".

70 A resident proposed a change to the boundary between the proposed wards of Benwick, Coates & Eastrea and St Andrews to move electors in the areas of Kings Dyke and Kings Delph from the proposed Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward into the proposed St Andrews ward. The resident considered the proposed Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward to be “too large a geographical area for the ward, especially when the other wards in Whittlesey parish would have fairly compact geographical areas”.

71 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received at Stage Three, and in view of the support for the draft recommendations, are content to endorse them as final. We looked at the proposal by a resident for an amendment to the boundary between the proposed wards of Benwick, Coates & Eastrea and St Andrews but considered that, although this amendment would not affect many electors, it would lead to a worsening of electoral equality. We did not consider that sufficient evidence was provided to persuade us that the proposed amendment would provide an improvement on the draft recommendations and therefore are content to endorse the LGCE’s draft recommendations for this area as final.

72 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would remain the same as at draft and the proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

March East, March North and March West wards

73 These three wards are situated in the centre of the district and comprise both the town and parish of March. The number of electors per councillor in March East and March North wards is 15 per cent above and equal to the district average respectively (10 per cent and 5 per cent above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in March West ward is 13 per cent below the district average (16 per cent below by 2006).

74 The District Council initially provided a scheme for March but later withdrew the part of its scheme relating to the parish wards when it realised that its proposals did not conform to our statutory criteria. It had proposed nine district wards, but only three parish wards covering the same area. When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district

75 Both Fenland District Labour Party and Whittlesey Branch Labour Party considered that an arrangement of three-member wards would provide the best possible solution in March but neither party submitted a detailed proposal. March Town Council proposed an arrangement of three three-member wards, with each ward electing four town councillors, as the best solution for March, but again no detailed submission was received. The LGCE believed that the Council had withdrawn its scheme for district ward arrangements in March, when it had in fact only withdrawn its parish warding arrangements. In the light of this misunderstanding and the fact that no other detailed scheme was submitted for the warding of March, the LGCE formulated its own proposals which, it considered, provided a good balance between electoral equality, the provision of strong, easily identifiable boundaries and the recognition of community identity.

76 The LGCE proposed a scheme for March comprising two three-member wards, one two-member ward and one single-member ward.

77 The LGCE considered that these wards would provide a good level of electoral equality, utilised strong boundaries such as the River Nene and the railway line, and took account of community identity by ensuring that March town centre was entirely contained within a single ward. While it recognised that there was local support for three-member wards, it had received no detailed proposals for any wards and was itself unable to formulate a uniform three-member scheme which provided a satisfactory level of electoral equality while also utilising strong boundaries and taking account of community identity. It considered that the scheme it proposed provided the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria currently available.

78 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors in the proposed Burrowmoor and Town End wards would be 8 per cent and 13 per cent above the district average respectively (7 per cent and 8 per cent by 2006). The number of electors in the proposed Estover and Norwood wards would be 16 per cent and 3 per cent below the district average respectively (7 per cent and 6 per cent by 2006).

79 At Stage Three the Council stated that “it was very concerned that the Commission has misinterpreted the withdrawal of that part of the Council’s submission relating to the scheme for the town of March, and has, accordingly, not even considered the District Council’s submission of a scheme of nine single-member wards for the District Council”. As stated earlier, this error was caused by a misunderstanding between the District Council and the LGCE concerning the withdrawal of the town warding arrangements. The Council stated that this misinterpretation “has resulted in the production by the Commission of a set of Draft Recommendations which completely ignore the District Council’s fundamental principle of single-member wards”. It did not consider that the Commission’s scheme utilised strong and easily identifiable boundaries and failed “to understand how it can be argued that the inclusion of the properties bordering the High Street area south of the River Nene have a community identity with the properties to the north of the River in the Creek Road/Estover Road area”. It therefore recommended that the Council’s original submission of nine single-member wards be reinstated. It also commented on an alternative scheme submitted by March Town Council in response to the draft recommendations consisting of three three-member wards. The Council stated that “this scheme does not meet the fundamental principle of single-member wards, and the District Council is concerned that this scheme appears to have been conceived solely to ensure that the Town Council can retain its present 12 town councillors”.

80 Fenland District Labour Party considered that the District Council’s comments “indicate a total disregard by Fenland of the views of March Town Council”. It also stated that the Council’s comment that the LGCE’s proposals did not utilise strong and easily identifiable boundaries was “quite astonishing when most of their [the Council’s] proposals for all the Fenland towns have little logic and certainly meander about”. It considered that March Town Council’s proposals were perfectly acceptable and it supported these proposals. As a second choice it supported the Commission’s proposals and considered the District Council’s proposals “the least sensible and acceptable”.

81 March Town Council stated that it disagreed with several of Fenland District Council’s submissions and put forward its own scheme consisting of three three-member wards for March. It stated that it believed that its “proposal of multi-member wards better meets the fundamental principle of electoral equality” and that its submission was “based on electoral equality, and natural geographic boundaries wherever possible”. Under the March Town Council scheme, an amended three-member March North ward would contain all the electors to the north of Wisbech Road, Dartford Road and to the west of Station Road. The boundary would then run behind the properties on Thornton Road, New Park, Shaftesbury Avenue and Waterside Gardens to the

River Nene which it would follow west. An amended three-member March East ward would contain all the electors to the south of the railway line and the east of Station Road, Broad Street and the High Street to the junction with St Peter's Road. The boundary would then run to the west of the houses on Chandler's Way and Eastwood Avenue, to the north of the houses on Ireton Way and to the west of the houses on The Greys. The boundary would then run behind the houses on Cavalry Drive to the junction with Hunters Chase where it would run along Cavalry Drive to the junction with Fairfax Way where it would run in an easterly direction to meet the town boundary. Finally an amended three-member March West ward would contain the remainder of the electors in March town. This proposed scheme would give good electoral equality in both 2001 and 2006 and utilises strong and easily identifiable boundaries wherever possible.

82 The North East Cambridgeshire Conservative Association stated that "we are assured that at no time did Fenland District Council withdraw its plan for March, only the plan put forward by March Town Council was withdrawn, and we urge you therefore to please consider Fenland District Council's proposals". It argued that multi-member wards would benefit no one as each councillor "is responsible to all of the electorate and the stated principle of trying to achieve better identification and accountability is lost".

83 Fenland District Council Conservative Group stated that the "proposals for the March boundaries in respect of Fenland District Council should stand as submitted" and considered that "the Commission's proposals appear to us, to fly in the face of the local communities of interest". It concluded that it would "urge the Commission to maintain the principle of single-member wards".

84 Councillors Carlisle, Curtis, German, Green, Keane and Laws stated that the Council's Stage One submission had cross-party support and expressed surprise that the draft recommendations moved away from the principle of single-member wards in March and Wisbech. They also stated that only the part of the Council's scheme "appertaining to the March Town Council" was meant to be withdrawn.

85 Councillor Wales stated that March Town Council had put forward a "coherent submission which meets the Commission's guidelines on electoral equality, based largely on major roads which form natural geographic boundaries and with community cohesion and identity". He considered that March Town Council supported the Commission's view that March should have 12 town councillors and considered that "their proposal [March Town Council] of multi-member wards best meets the fundamental principal within which the Commission works and I ask you to support the views of the vast majority of the elected (all party) representatives of March".

86 The Leader of the Labour Group on March Town Council supported the proposals put forward by March Town Council. She stressed that "the proposals of March Town Council have almost unanimous cross-party support and reflect a consensus".

87 A resident of March proposed a scheme for nine single-member wards at both parish and district level. This scheme was similar to that proposed by the District Council but had two wards that would have electoral variances of more than 10 per cent above the district average by 2006. The resident questioned the electoral projection figures for 2006 claiming that they underestimated the 2006 electorate by 611. This query was raised with the District Council and it stated that it was content that its original figures were the best estimates available at the time.

88 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period for March and in the light of further evidence have decided to move away from the draft recommendations. With two amendments which do not affect any electors, we propose adopting the scheme put forward by March Town Council for three three-member wards, as we consider that this warding arrangement provides a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than either the draft recommendations or any of the alternatives.

89 We looked very carefully at the District Council's proposals for the warding of March but did not consider that they provided the best possible representation of community identity. While we note the Council's desire for single-member wards, in March and elsewhere, we do not consider that this principle is compatible with the attainment of a good level of electoral equality and the reflection of community identity. For example, we do not consider that the proposal to place only some of the electors from the Gaul Road and Ellingham Avenue area in the same ward as electors to the north of the river provides a good reflection of community identity (the Council's proposed West End ward).

90 We consider that March Town Council's scheme offers an improvement on the draft recommendations as it provides for an improved level of electoral equality, utilises strong and easily identifiable boundaries wherever possible, takes account of community identity and has local support. We are, however, proposing two amendments to provide stronger boundaries but these amendments do not affect any electors. We propose moving the boundary between the proposed March East and March North wards to the north to run along the railway line from Elm Road to the River Nene. We are also proposing moving the boundary between the proposed March East and March West wards to run along the railway line rather than along Upwell Road and Coleseed Road, to move Coleseed Business Complex from the proposed March West ward into the proposed March East ward. Subject to these two amendments, however, we are adopting March Town Council's proposals for three three-member wards for March as our final recommendations.

91 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed wards of March East, March North and March West would be 2 per cent above, 4 per cent below and 4 per cent above the district average respectively (3 per cent above, 5 per cent below and 1 per cent above the district average by 2006). These proposed wards are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Chatteris East, Chatteris North, Chatteris South and Chatteris West wards

92 These four wards are located in the extreme south of the district and together comprise the parish of Chatteris. The number of electors per councillor in Chatteris East and Chatteris West wards is 68 per cent and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (85 per cent above and 4 per cent below the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Chatteris North and Chatteris South wards is 17 per cent and 35 per cent below the district average respectively (26 per cent and 34 per cent below by 2006).

93 The District Council proposed a scheme of four single-member wards largely based on the existing ward structure but with amendments to provide improved levels of electoral equality. It proposed retaining the existing Chatteris West ward with two slight amendments. The existing Chatteris South ward would be extended northwards and eastwards, and would be called Wenneye ward. The District Council proposed that the existing Chatteris East ward be renamed Birch ward and should have an amended western boundary to provide a good level of electoral

equality. Finally the District Council proposed an amended Chatteris North ward, to be renamed Slade Lode ward.

94 The only other representation received regarding Chatteris was from Chatteris Town Council who supported the single-member ward plan but had “strong reservations about the proposed growth and future development of Chatteris”. The Town Council felt that “the projected electorate figures for 2006 are far too low, particularly in the Birch and Wenneye wards” and that “electing a fifth councillor for the town, to cover the East ward, would be the better solution”. The District Council commented that while “there was speculation about the possibility of substantial growth in the ‘Greater Cambridge Plan’ this was in addition to the scheduled growth in the development plan” and therefore could not be taken into account as part of this periodic electoral review. The LGCE remained convinced that the electorate figures provided by the Council for 2006 were the best estimate available at the time and, based on these figures, Chatteris is only entitled to four district councillors. Chatteris Town Council also supported the ward names in the District Council’s scheme as these were ideas put forward by the Town Council.

95 The LGCE looked carefully at the scheme put forward by the District Council and concluded that this scheme provided good electoral equality as well as utilising strong, easily identifiable boundaries. Therefore, with one minor amendment which would move all the electors to the west of Doddington Road from Slade Lode ward into Birch ward to better reflect community identity, it endorsed the Council’s proposals for Chatteris in full.

96 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye wards would be 8 per cent, 14 per cent and 4 per cent above the district average respectively (3 per cent, 3 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Birch ward would be 4 per cent below the district average (7 per cent above the district average by 2006).

97 At Stage Three the Council was “pleased to note that the District Council’s proposals for wards covering the town of Chatteris have been adopted by the Commission, subject to a minor alteration of boundaries in the Doddington Road area. The District Council considers that this amendment is acceptable, and should be supported”.

98 We received no other representations regarding this area, and in light of the support from the Council, are content to endorse the LGCE’s draft recommendations for Chatteris as final. The electoral variances for the proposed wards are the same as at draft and these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A.

Leverington, Newton & Tydd St Giles and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary wards

99 These three wards are all situated in the extreme north of the district. Leverington ward (comprising the parishes of Gorefield and Leverington) and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward (comprising the parishes of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary) are represented by two councillors while Newton & Tydd St Giles ward (comprising the parishes of Newton and Tydd St Giles) is represented by one councillor. The number of electors per councillor in Leverington ward is 2 per cent above the district average (3 per cent by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Newton & Tydd St Giles and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary wards is 17 per cent and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (22 per cent and 3 per cent by 2006).

100 The District Council proposed a three-member Roman Bank ward covering the four parishes of Gorefield, Leverington, Newton and Tydd St Giles. It stated a wish to maintain a scheme of single-member wards but realised that a single-member Newton & Tydd St Giles ward would lead to an unacceptable level of electoral inequality. As a result of this the Council proposed an alternative three-member ward and following local consultation “noted that the overwhelming preference expressed in the public consultation exercise is for the creation of a three-member ward to cover all four parishes”. The District Council also proposed splitting the existing two-member Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward to create a single-member Parson Drove & Murrow ward and a single-member Wisbech St Mary ward.

101 The Whittlesey Branch Labour Party stated that “the [District Council’s] proposals for wards 34 (Parsons Drove & Murrow) and 35 (Wisbech St Mary) are a nonsense, since these two wards are currently a two-member ward and combined they give an average electorate close to the norm”. It also stated that “we can see no sensible reason to amend this existing arrangement [which] would produce in 2006 a two-member ward only 3 per cent below the quota”.

102 The LGCE carefully considered the representations received regarding these areas. Due to the public support shown during the consultation process undertaken by the District Council for its proposed Roman Bank ward, and the lack of any apparent opposition to this proposed ward, it was content to endorse the proposed three-member Roman Bank ward. It did not, however, consider that there was a strong case for splitting the existing two-member Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward. Such a split would lead to a single-member Parson Drove & Murrow ward with an electoral variance of 13 per cent below the district average, and it considered that this was an unnecessarily high level of electoral inequality in this particular area, given the good electoral equality in the existing ward. Therefore it supported Whittlesey Branch Labour Party’s proposal to maintain the existing two-member ward.

103 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Roman Bank ward (comprising the parishes of Gorefield, Leverington, Newton and Tydd St Giles) and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward (comprising the parishes of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary) would be 4 per cent and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (6 per cent and 3 per cent by 2006).

104 At Stage Three the Council stated that “with regard to the Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary proposals the District Council remains of the view that the proposed two single-member wards should be pursued, since the Council’s view is that this ensures the ‘fundamental electoral principle of equality of electoral representation’ and creates the ‘desired democratic focus’”. The Council recognised that the creation of two single-member wards in this area would result in electoral variances of more than 10 per cent below the district average but considered that “the level of departure is minimal, and is acceptable having regard to the widespread local support for the proposal”. The Council therefore resubmitted its original proposal for the two single-member wards of Parson Drove & Murrow and Wisbech St Mary in this area. The Council supported the draft recommendations in the remainder of this area.

105 Fenland District Labour Party remained “of the opinion that the existing two-member ward should be retained and fully supported the Commission’s proposals” and stated that this was “a view supported by the independent local sitting councillor”.

106 The North East Cambridgeshire Conservative Association stated that Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary “are two distinctly different villages each with their own identity and once again we reiterate our support for single-member wards wherever possible, and in this case it is

possible”. With regard to the proposed three-member Roman Bank ward, it commented that “whichever way you try to ‘carve up’ Fenland you end up with this anomaly and we support the proposals for this three-member ward”.

107 Having carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three we have decided that, despite some opposition to the retention of the existing two-member ward of Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary, the evidence for moving away from the draft recommendations was insufficient to merit the adoption of two single-member wards with significantly higher levels of electoral variance. The existing two-member ward would provide a good level of electoral equality in 2006 and, as stated in our Guidance, “we will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward”. The Council’s proposals would lead to a single-member Parson Drove & Murrow ward with an electoral variance of 13 per cent below the district average by 2006 and, especially in the light of the good level of electoral equality provided by the existing ward and the support of the Labour Party, we do not consider that there is justification for moving away from the draft recommendations in this area.

108 The only other representation received regarding this area was the North East Cambridgeshire Conservative Association’s support for the proposed three-member Roman Bank ward and we are therefore content to endorse the LGCE’s draft recommendations in this area as final. The electoral variances for the proposed wards are the same as at draft and these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Benwick & Doddington, Elm, Manea, Outwell & Upwell and Wimblington wards

109 These five wards are situated in the centre and east of the district. Benwick & Doddington ward (comprising the parishes of Benwick and Doddington), Manea ward (comprising the parish of Manea), Outwell & Upwell ward (comprising the parish of Christchurch) and Wimblington ward (comprising the parish of Wimblington) are each represented by one councillor while Elm ward (comprising the parish of Elm) is represented by two councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Benwick & Doddington ward is 39 per cent above the district average (35 per cent by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Elm, Manea, Outwell & Upwell and Wimblington wards is 17 per cent, 24 per cent, 65 per cent and 17 per cent below the district average respectively (17 per cent, 7 per cent, 67 per cent, and 6 per cent by 2006).

110 The District Council proposed a two-member Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward comprising the existing Whittlesey South ward and Benwick parish, currently in the existing Benwick & Doddington ward. Initially, the Council, wishing to submit a scheme of mainly single-member wards, proposed a single-member Coates & Eastrea ward and a single-member Benwick & Whittlesey Rural ward, but these wards led to unacceptable levels of electoral inequality. Hence the District Council proposed an alternative two-member ward which gained local support during the consultation exercise. The District Council proposed a new single-member Doddington ward comprising Doddington parish. To provide improved levels of electoral equality, the District Council also proposed a two-member Elm & Christchurch ward comprising the existing single-member Elm ward and the existing single-member Outwell & Upwell ward. It proposed retaining the existing Manea and Wimblington wards.

111 The Whittlesey Branch Labour Party stated that it felt that “the decision to include the parish of Benwick with Whittlesey is perverse”. It felt that “it would make much more sense to create a three-member ward with Doddington, Wimblington and Manea”.

112 The LGCE carefully considered both representations received regarding these areas. It examined the Whittlesey Branch Labour Party's proposal for a three-member ward containing Benwick, Doddington, Wimblington and Manea parishes but considered that this ward would be unnecessarily large and, given the local support for the District Council's proposed two-member Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward, endorsed this proposal in the draft recommendations. It also endorsed the District Council's proposals in the rest of this area as it considered that they provided a good balance between electoral equality and the recognition of community identities.

113 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward (comprising the parish of Benwick and the proposed Whittlesey South parish ward of Whittlesey parish), Doddington ward (comprising the parish of Doddington), Elm & Christchurch ward (comprising the parishes of Elm and Christchurch), Manea ward (comprising the parish of Manea) and Wimblington ward (comprising the parish of Wimblington) would be 5 per cent below, 1 per cent below, equal to the district average, 24 per cent below and 16 per cent below the district average respectively (9 per cent below, 9 per cent below, equal to the district average, 7 per cent below and 6 per cent below the district average by 2006).

114 At Stage Three the Council supported the draft recommendations in this area. With regard to the Elm and Christchurch area, the North East Cambridgeshire Conservative Association stated that "although community wise and geographically Christchurch would probably have more in common with Manea ward the numbers don't add up and therefore we support the two-member ward as proposed".

115 In the light of the support for the draft recommendations in this area and the absence of any further representations, we are content to endorse the LGCE's draft recommendations as final in this area. The electoral variances for the proposed wards are the same as at draft and these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

116 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

117 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse those draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- in March town, with two amendments which do not affect any electors, we are adopting the March Town Council scheme for three three-member wards;

118 We conclude that, in Fenland:

- the existing council size of 40 members should be retained;
- there should be 27 wards, two more than at present;
- the boundaries of all but three of the existing wards should be modified.

119 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	40	40	40	40
Number of wards	25	27	25	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,634	1,634	1,723	1,723
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	19	9	14	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	10	4	11	0

120 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 19 to nine, and a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average from 10 to four. This level of electoral equality would improve further by 2006, with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Fenland District Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 27 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

121 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. In the LGCE's draft recommendations report it proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech to reflect the proposed district wards.

122 The parish of Chatteris is currently served by 10 councillors representing four wards: North and South wards (each represented by two councillors) and East and West wards (each represented by three councillors). In the light of the scheme the LGCE adopted for district warding in this area, and in line with the proposals put forward by the District Council, it proposed amending the existing parish wards to create the four parish wards of Birch, Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye. The LGCE proposed that each parish ward be represented by

three councillors, an overall increase of two, in order to reflect the district wards of Birch, Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye.

123 No further comments were received concerning the parishing arrangements at Stage Three. Therefore, having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of the proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendations for warding Chatteris parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Chatteris Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, two more than at present, representing four wards: Birch, Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye (each returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

124 The parish of March is currently served by 12 councillors representing four wards: East and West wards (each represented by four councillors) and North East and North West wards (each represented by two councillors). At Stage One March Town Council proposed a pattern of three three-member wards, each returning four town councillors, but did not provide any detailed proposals for the area. The Council withdrew its proposals for town council arrangements. The LGCE proposed its own district warding arrangements of two three-member wards (Norwood and Town End wards), one two-member ward (Estover ward) and one single-member ward (Burrowmoor ward), as it considered that these best reflected community identities at a district level. Having adopted its own scheme in this area, the LGCE proposed four new parish wards: Burrowmoor, Estover, Norwood and Town End parish wards, which reflected the district wards of the same names. Norwood and Town End parish wards would each return four parish councillors while Burrowmoor and Estover parish wards would each return two parish councillors.

125 At Stage Three the District Council submitted a scheme for March consisting of nine single-member district wards but did not put forward a detailed scheme for the warding of March Town Council. It stated that its proposals for the district wards would lend itself to either 9 or 18 town councillors and considered that “if March Town Council wishes to retain 12 town councillors, then the District Council suggests that the Commission could devise a scheme of mixed single- and multi-member town wards based upon the District Council’s nine single-member district wards”.

126 March Town Council proposed a scheme of three three-member wards at district level with each ward electing four town councillors. A resident submitted a scheme consisting of nine wards with each ward electing one district councillor and one parish councillor.

127 Having considered all the evidence received and, in the light of the scheme that we have adopted at district level in this area, we are adopting the proposal put forward by March Town Council for three parish wards coterminous with the three district wards, each electing four town councillors as we consider that this scheme has local support and provides a good reflection of community identity.

Final Recommendation

March Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: March East, March North and March West parish wards (each returning four councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

128 The parish of Whittlesey is currently served by 12 councillors representing six parish wards: Bassenhally, Central, East, Kingsmoor, South and West wards (each represented by two councillors). In the light of the scheme the LGCE adopted for district warding in the area, and in line with the proposals put forward by the District Council, the LGCE proposed an amended parishing arrangement with a total of seven parish wards: Bassenhally, Delph, Kingsmoor, Lattersey, St Andrews, St Marys and Whittlesey South parish wards. Each of these proposed parish wards would return two councillors, an increase of two, and the first six wards would be coterminous with the district wards of the same name, while Whittlesey South parish ward would comprise the part of Whittlesey parish that would lie within the proposed district ward of Benwick, Coates & Eastrea.

129 No further comments were received concerning the parishing arrangements at Stage Three. Therefore, having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of the proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendations for warding Whittlesey parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Whittlesey Town Council should comprise 14 town councillors, two more than at present, representing seven parish wards: Bassenhally, Delph, Kingsmoor, Lattersey, St Andrews, St Marys and Whittlesey South (each returning two councillors). With one exception, the parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report. This exception is Whittlesey South parish ward, which should comprise that part of Whittlesey parish in the proposed district ward of Benwick, Coates & Eastrea.

130 The parish of Wisbech is currently served by 20 councillors, representing five parish wards: East, North East and West wards (each represented by four councillors), North ward (represented by six councillors) and South ward (represented by two councillors). In the light of the scheme that the LGCE adopted for district warding in the area, it proposed an amended parishing arrangement which reflected the reduced council size of 18 councillors put forward by the District Council. Two parish wards, Hill and Waterlees wards, would return four councillors each, while the remaining five parish wards of Clarkson, Kirkgate, Medworth, Peckover and Staithe, would each return two councillors, a total of 18 councillors, a decrease of two.

131 No further comments were received concerning the parishing arrangements at Stage Three. Therefore, having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of the proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendations for warding Wisbech parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Wisbech Town Council should comprise 18 town councillors, two fewer than at present, representing seven parish wards: Hill and Waterlees wards (each returning four councillors), Clarkson, Kirkgate, Medworth, Peckover and Staithe wards (each returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

132 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Final Recommendation

Parish and town council elections should continue to take place every four years, at the same time as elections for the district wards of which they are part.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Fenland

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

133 Having completed the review of electoral arrangements in Fenland and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

134 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 5 June 2002.

135 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Fenland: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Fenland area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Map A2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Chatteris parish.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for March, Whittlesey and Wisbech.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Fenland: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Chatteris Parish