

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Ashfield in Nottinghamshire

Report to the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions

May 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Ashfield in Nottinghamshire.

Members of the Commission are:

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



Local Government Commission for England

16 May 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 18 May 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Ashfield under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in December 1999 and undertook a ten-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We are confirming our draft recommendations as final, without modification. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Ashfield.

We recommend that Ashfield District Council should be served by 33 councillors representing 15 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the whole council should continue to be elected together every four years.

The Local Government Bill, containing legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements, is currently being considered by Parliament. However, until such time as new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the District Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Ashfield on 18 May 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 14 December 1999, after which we undertook a ten-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Secretary of State.**

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

- **in seven of the 15 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in nine wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 76-77) are that:

- **Ashfield District Council should have 33 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 15 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all but one of the existing wards should be modified, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

These recommendations seek to ensure that the number of electors represented by each district councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In all of the proposed 15 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for Selston parish.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 26 June 2000:

**The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Local Government Sponsorship Division
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU**

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas |
|----|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Hucknall Central | 2 | Hucknall Central ward (part); Hucknall North ward (part); Hucknall West ward (part) |
| 2 | Hucknall East | 2 | <i>Unchanged</i> |
| 3 | Hucknall North | 2 | Hucknall North ward (part) |
| 4 | Hucknall West | 3 | Hucknall West ward (part); Hucknall Central ward (part); Hucknall North ward (part) |
| 5 | Jacksdale | 1 | Jacksdale ward (part) |
| 6 | Kirkby in Ashfield Central | 2 | Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward; Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (part); Woodhouse ward (part) |
| 7 | Kirkby in Ashfield East | 2 | Kirkby in Ashfield East ward; Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (part) |
| 8 | Kirkby in Ashfield West | 2 | Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield West ward (part) |
| 9 | Selston | 2 | Selston ward (part); Jacksdale ward (part); Woodhouse ward (part) |
| 10 | Sutton in Ashfield Central | 3 | Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield North ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield West ward (part) |
| 11 | Sutton in Ashfield East | 3 | Sutton in Ashfield East ward; Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield West ward (part) |
| 12 | Sutton in Ashfield North | 3 | Sutton in Ashfield North ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (part) |
| 13 | Sutton in Ashfield West | 3 | Sutton in Ashfield West ward (part); Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (part); Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (part) |
| 14 | Underwood | 1 | Underwood ward; Selston ward (part) |
| 15 | Woodhouse | 2 | Woodhouse ward (part) |

Notes: 1 The wards of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood are wholly parished, while Woodhouse ward contains Annesley parish.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Ashfield

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (1999) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Hucknall Central | 2 | 5,039 | 2,520 | -3 | 5,593 | 2,797 | 3 |
| 2 Hucknall East | 2 | 4,904 | 2,452 | -6 | 5,657 | 2,829 | 4 |
| 3 Hucknall North | 2 | 5,274 | 2,637 | 2 | 5,479 | 2,740 | 1 |
| 4 Hucknall West | 3 | 7,936 | 2,645 | 2 | 7,893 | 2,631 | -3 |
| 5 Jacksdale | 1 | 2,534 | 2,534 | -2 | 2,508 | 2,508 | -8 |
| 6 Kirkby in Ashfield Central | 2 | 4,960 | 2,480 | -4 | 5,175 | 2,588 | -5 |
| 7 Kirkby in Ashfield East | 2 | 4,852 | 2,426 | -7 | 5,183 | 2,592 | -5 |
| 8 Kirkby in Ashfield West | 2 | 5,263 | 2,632 | 1 | 5,255 | 2,628 | -3 |
| 9 Selston | 2 | 4,785 | 2,393 | -8 | 4,928 | 2,464 | -9 |
| 10 Sutton in Ashfield Central | 3 | 8,534 | 2,845 | 10 | 8,599 | 2,866 | 5 |
| 11 Sutton in Ashfield East | 3 | 8,136 | 2,712 | 5 | 8,393 | 2,798 | 3 |
| 12 Sutton in Ashfield North | 3 | 8,250 | 2,750 | 6 | 8,426 | 2,809 | 3 |
| 13 Sutton in Ashfield West | 3 | 7,213 | 2,404 | -7 | 8,415 | 2,805 | 3 |
| 14 Underwood | 1 | 2,456 | 2,456 | -5 | 2,459 | 2,459 | -10 |
| 15 Woodhouse | 2 | 5,496 | 2,748 | 6 | 5,809 | 2,905 | 7 |
| Totals | 33 | 85,632 | - | - | 89,772 | - | - |
| Averages | - | - | 2,595 | - | - | 2,720 | - |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Ashfield 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 Ashfield in Nottinghamshire. We have now reviewed the eight districts in Nottinghamshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Ashfield. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1975 (Report No. 81). The electoral arrangements of Nottinghamshire County Council were last reviewed in May 1980 (Report No. 383). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, ie the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish councils in the district.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable, having regard to our statutory criteria. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified: in particular, we do not accept that an increase in a district's electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals are now being taken forward in a Local Government Bill, published in December 1999, and are currently being considered by Parliament.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Nottinghamshire districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 18 May 1999, when we wrote to Ashfield District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottinghamshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Nottinghamshire Local Councils Association, parish councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and the Members of the European Parliament for the East Midlands region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We 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 31 August 1999. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 14 December 1999 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Ashfield in Nottinghamshire*, and ended on 21 February 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The district of Ashfield covers an area of approximately 11,000 hectares and has a population of 109,700. The district is bordered to the south by Broxtowe borough and Nottingham city, to the east by Gedling borough, Newark & Sherwood district and Mansfield district, to the north by South Yorkshire and to the west by Derbyshire. The district comprises three major towns, Hucknall, Kirkby in Ashfield and Sutton in Ashfield, together with a number of rural villages. In the west, the M1 motorway separates the rural villages of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood from the remainder of the district.

14 The district contains three parishes, but the towns of Hucknall, Kirkby in Ashfield and Sutton in Ashfield are unparished. Sutton in Ashfield comprises 37 per cent of the district's total electorate.

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

16 The electorate of the district is 85,632 (February 1999). The Council at present has 33 members who are elected from 15 wards, 12 of which are relatively urban, with the remaining wards of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood being predominantly rural. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors, eight are each represented by two councillors and two are single-member wards. The whole council is elected together every four years.

17 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Ashfield district, with around 11 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments.

18 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,595 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,720 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in seven of the 15 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average and in two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Hucknall West ward where the three councillors represent 41 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Ashfield

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (1999) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Hucknall Central | 2 | 5,007 | 2,504 | -4 | 5,414 | 2,707 | 0 |
| 2 Hucknall East | 2 | 4,904 | 2,452 | -6 | 5,657 | 2,829 | 4 |
| 3 Hucknall North | 2 | 5,931 | 2,966 | 14 | 6,136 | 3,068 | 13 |
| 4 Hucknall West | 2 | 7,311 | 3,656 | 41 | 7,415 | 3,708 | 36 |
| 5 Jacksdale | 1 | 2,583 | 2,583 | 0 | 2,557 | 2,557 | -6 |
| 6 Kirkby in Ashfield Central | 2 | 4,494 | 2,247 | -13 | 4,593 | 2,297 | -16 |
| 7 Kirkby in Ashfield East | 2 | 4,557 | 2,279 | -12 | 4,749 | 2,375 | -13 |
| 8 Kirkby in Ashfield West | 2 | 5,832 | 2,916 | 12 | 6,084 | 3,042 | 12 |
| 9 Selston | 2 | 4,694 | 2,347 | -10 | 4,837 | 2,419 | -11 |
| 10 Sutton in Ashfield Central | 3 | 8,224 | 2,741 | 6 | 8,289 | 2,763 | 2 |
| 11 Sutton in Ashfield East | 3 | 7,474 | 2,491 | -4 | 7,731 | 2,577 | -5 |
| 12 Sutton in Ashfield North | 3 | 8,228 | 2,743 | 6 | 8,404 | 2,801 | 3 |
| 13 Sutton in Ashfield West | 3 | 8,146 | 2,715 | 5 | 9,348 | 3,116 | 15 |
| 14 Underwood | 1 | 2,304 | 2,304 | -11 | 2,307 | 2,307 | -15 |
| 15 Woodhouse | 3 | 5,943 | 1,981 | -24 | 6,251 | 2,084 | -23 |
| Totals | 33 | 85,632 | - | - | 89,772 | - | - |
| Averages | - | - | 2,595 | - | - | 2,720 | - |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Ashfield 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 1999, electors in Woodhouse ward were relatively over-represented by 24 per cent, while electors in Hucknall West ward were significantly under-represented by 41 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

19 During Stage One we received three representations, including a district-wide scheme from Ashfield District Council, and representations from Selston Parish Council and Councillor Shaw, member for Sutton in Ashfield Central division. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Ashfield in Nottinghamshire*.

20 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved substantial improvements in electoral equality, and provided a mix of single-, two- and three-member wards across the district. We modified the District Council's scheme to transfer electors in one area, affecting the wards of Selston and Underwood, to provide further improvements to electoral equality. We also proposed a modification to the boundary between Jacksdale and Selston wards to follow ground detail in an area of land reclaimed from opencast mine workings, together with a small number of other minor modifications to ensure that ward boundaries followed identifiable ground detail. Our main draft recommendations were that:

- Ashfield District Council should be served by 33 councillors, the same as at present, representing 15 wards, the same as at present;
- the boundaries of all but one of the existing wards should be modified, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- there should be revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for Selston parish.

Final Recommendation

Ashfield District Council should comprise 33 councillors, serving 15 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

21 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all of the 15 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to continue, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

22 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, five representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Ashfield District Council and the Commission.

Ashfield District Council

23 The District Council stated its support for the Commission's draft recommendations in all areas except Selston, Jacksdale and Underwood wards. The Council opposed the draft recommendation to modify the boundary between Jacksdale ward and Selston ward as this would remove the reclaimed opencast mine site from Jacksdale ward. It proposed an alternative boundary for these two wards which would retain much of this site in Jacksdale ward. The Council also opposed the draft recommendation to modify the boundary between Selston ward and Underwood ward and re-affirmed its original submission for these wards.

Nottinghamshire County Council

24 The County Council expressed its concern regarding the proposals to reduce the number of councillors representing other districts in the County, arguing that "the United Kingdom already has one of the lowest ratios of elected councillors per head of the population in Europe".

25 The County Council welcomed our recommendation that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of the district, stating that members of the County Council are "satisfied with existing arrangements".

Other Representations

26 A further three representations from local councillors were received in response to our draft recommendations.

27 Councillor Shaw, member for Sutton in Ashfield Central division, objected to the draft recommendation to modify the boundary between Sutton in Ashfield Central ward and Sutton in Ashfield North ward, and proposed an alternative modification, which he considered would provide a more clearly defined boundary.

28 Councillor Holmes, member for Jacksdale ward, objected to the draft recommendation to modify the boundary between Jacksdale ward and Selston ward, thereby removing the Smotherfly opencast mine site from Jacksdale ward. Councillor Holmes did, however, support the draft recommendation to include properties situated on the Jacksdale side of Alfretton Road in Selston ward.

29 Councillor Mrs Taylor, member for Selston division, supported the draft recommendation to make the M1 motorway the boundary between Selston and Woodhouse wards. She expressed concern, however, that the division of the Annesley Farm Estate had not been rectified, and

considered that this boundary should continue along the M1 to the motorway bridge on Annesley Lane. Councillor Mrs Taylor also objected to the inclusion of properties at the lower end of Annesley Lane on Melbourne Street, Recreation Street and Nottingham Road in Underwood ward, rather than in Selston ward. Councillor Mrs Taylor felt that residents of this area had no affinity with Underwood ward.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

30 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Ashfield 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 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

31 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

32 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which provides for 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.

33 Our *Guidance* states that 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 kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

34 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 5 per cent from 85,632 to 89,772 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expected the growth to be relatively evenly distributed, with the most notable increases in Sutton in Ashfield West ward (1,202 electors) and Hucknall East ward (753 electors). 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. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

35 We received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates available at present.

Council Size

36 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

37 Ashfield District Council is at present served by 33 councillors. At Stage One the District Council proposed that the present council size should be retained. We received no other views regarding council size during Stage One.

38 In our draft recommendations report we stated that, having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we had concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 33 members.

39 During Stage Three we received no further proposals or evidence regarding council size. Therefore, we are content to confirm our draft recommendation for council size as final.

Electoral Arrangements

40 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the district-wide scheme from the District Council which provided substantial improvements to electoral equality while generally commanding local support. We also received two other representations from Selston Parish Council and Councillor Shaw, member for Sutton in Ashfield Central division, commenting on specific areas of the district, which we evaluated against the statutory criteria for the district as a whole. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

41 We recognised the significant improvements to electoral equality which would result from the District Council's proposals and we concluded that it should be used as the basis for our draft recommendations. We considered that this scheme would significantly improve electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. However, we recommended a modification to the District Council's proposed boundary between Selston and Underwood wards, in order to put forward electoral arrangements which would achieve even better electoral equality, without having a detrimental impact on the other statutory criteria. We also proposed an amendment to the Council's proposed boundary between Jacksdale and Selston wards, to link the boundary to strong ground features, together with a small number of other minor boundary amendments to ensure that boundaries followed ground features.

42 In response to our draft recommendations we received four representations. The District Council supported our draft recommendations for all areas with the exception of the modifications to the boundaries of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood wards. The Council reaffirmed its Stage One submission for the boundary between Selston and Underwood wards, and proposed an alternative boundary between Jacksdale and Selston wards, which allowed for the retention of the majority of the reclaimed opencast mine site in Jacksdale ward.

43 We also received submissions from three local councillors who proposed amendments to the boundaries of a number of the wards put forward in our draft recommendations.

44 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Hucknall (four wards);
- (b) Kirkby in Ashfield and Woodhouse (four wards);
- (c) Sutton in Ashfield (four wards);
- (d) Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood wards.

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

Hucknall (four wards)

46 The town of Hucknall lies in the south-east corner of the district. The town is currently covered by four two-member wards and, as a whole, is relatively under-represented. At present, the average number of electors per councillor is 4 per cent below the district average in Hucknall Central ward (equal to the average in 2004), 6 per cent below in Hucknall East ward (4 per cent above in 2004), 14 per cent above in Hucknall North ward (13 per cent above in 2004) and 41 per cent above in Hucknall West ward (36 per cent above in 2004).

47 At Stage One Ashfield District Council calculated that, under a council of 33, Hucknall warranted an additional district councillor to provide the appropriate level of representation for the town. The Council therefore proposed increasing the number of councillors in Hucknall West ward from two to three, thereby increasing the total number of district councillors representing the town from eight to nine. It proposed modifying the boundaries of the wards of Hucknall Central, Hucknall North and Hucknall West to improve electoral equality, utilising the A611 bypass as a boundary where possible. Consequently, it proposed that the part of Hucknall Central ward lying to the south-west of the bypass should be transferred to Hucknall West ward, and that the area of the existing Hucknall West ward which lies both to the east of the A611 bypass and to the south of Wood Lane should form part of Hucknall Central ward. Furthermore, it proposed that Grasmere Close, Kendal Close and part of Coniston Road should be transferred from Hucknall North ward to Hucknall Central ward, while the remaining part of the existing Hucknall North ward, lying to the west of Annesley Road, would be transferred from Hucknall North ward to Hucknall West ward. The District Council stated that its proposals for Hucknall would secure improvements to electoral equality while utilising clear boundaries.

48 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent below the district average in Hucknall Central ward (3 per cent above in 2004), 6 per cent below in Hucknall East ward (4 per cent above in 2004), 2 per cent above in Hucknall North

ward (1 per cent above in 2004) and 2 per cent above in Hucknall West ward (3 per cent below in 2004). We received no other proposals relating to Hucknall during Stage One.

49 We carefully considered the District Council's proposals for Hucknall town, noting in particular the good levels of electoral equality achieved, together with the clearly identifiable boundaries which were utilised. In the absence of alternative proposals, or other evidence, we judged that the District Council's scheme for the four Hucknall wards represented a good balance of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore put forward the District Council's proposals for these wards as part of our draft recommendations without modification

50 At Stage Three the District Council stated that it supported the draft recommendations for the Hucknall area. We received no further representations relating to Hucknall and we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for the four wards in this area as final. Our final recommendations are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

Kirkby in Ashfield and Woodhouse (four wards)

51 The four wards of Kirkby in Ashfield Central, Kirkby in Ashfield East, Kirkby in Ashfield West and Woodhouse are situated in the centre of the district. The three wards in Kirkby town are each represented by two councillors. Woodhouse ward (which comprises Annesley parish together with an unparished area in the north of the ward) is represented by three councillors. The area as a whole is over-represented: the number of electors per councillor is 13 per cent below the district average in Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward (16 per cent in 2004), 12 per cent below in Kirkby in Ashfield East ward (13 per cent in 2004), 12 per cent above in Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (the same in 2004) and 24 per cent below in Woodhouse ward (23 per cent in 2004).

52 In considering proposals for the area, the District Council particularly noted that Woodhouse ward is significantly over-represented. The Council therefore proposed reducing the number of councillors representing the ward from three to two. In order to further improve electoral equality in the four wards concerned, it also proposed modifications to their boundaries. Under its proposals the unparished area of Woodhouse ward lying to the west of the M1 would form part of Selston ward, while the area to the north of Park Lane and the M1 would form part of Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward. It also proposed that an area in the vicinity of Mutton Hill should be transferred from Woodhouse ward to Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward, and that 334 electors in the Chapel Street area should be transferred from Kirkby in Ashfield West ward to Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward. It proposed that Kirkby in Ashfield West ward should be further modified, so that its eastern boundary would run along "the railway line at its junction with Urban Road/Victoria Road moving northwards to Southwell Lane and along Lindrick Road to Sutton Middle Lane to its boundary with the A38". It also proposed that the northern boundary of Kirkby in Ashfield West ward should follow the centre of the A38 west to the district boundary, thereby transferring Oakfield Avenue and Garth Avenue to Sutton in Ashfield East ward.

53 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below the district average in Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward (5 per cent in 2004), 7 per cent below in Kirkby in Ashfield East ward (5 per cent in 2004), 1 per cent above in Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (3 per cent below in 2004) and 6 per cent above in Woodhouse ward (7 per

cent above in 2004). No further views were received during Stage One regarding the warding of this area.

54 In our draft recommendations report we noted that the District Council's proposals for the wards in this area would result in substantial improvements to electoral equality and judged that the proposed boundary modifications would appear to be more readily identifiable than those currently existing. We considered that any further improvements in electoral equality could only be secured at the expense of local community identities. We therefore put forward the District Council's proposals for the wards of Kirkby in Ashfield Central, Kirkby in Ashfield East, Kirkby in Ashfield West and Woodhouse as part of our draft recommendations. No further views were received during Stage One regarding the warding of this area.

55 At Stage Three the District Council stated that it supported our draft recommendations. Councillor Mrs Taylor, member for Selston division, supported the draft recommendation which proposed that the M1 motorway should be the boundary between Selston and Woodhouse wards. She expressed disappointment, however, that the division of the Annesley Farm Estate between these two wards had not been rectified as part of the review. Specifically, she stated that the residents of the estate relate to Selston rather than Woodhouse, from which they are separated by open countryside. We received no further representations regarding Kirkby in Ashfield and Woodhouse at Stage Three.

56 We have given careful consideration to the views which have been received in this area. We note in particular the concerns of Councillor Mrs Taylor that the Annesley Farm Estate would continue to be divided between two district wards under our draft recommendations, but have found that the configuration of parishes in this area does not lend itself to the proposal to include the estate wholly in Selston ward. Therefore in the absence of any further proposals relating to this area, we are confirming as final our draft recommendations for the wards in Kirkby in Ashfield and Woodhouse, which are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

57 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below the district average in Kirkby in Ashfield Central ward (5 per cent in 2004), 7 per cent below in Kirkby in Ashfield East ward (5 per cent in 2004), 1 per cent above in Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (3 per cent below in 2004) and 6 per cent above in Woodhouse ward (7 per cent above in 2004).

Sutton in Ashfield (four wards)

58 The four district wards of Sutton in Ashfield Central, Sutton in Ashfield East, Sutton in Ashfield North and Sutton in Ashfield West are situated in the north of the district, and each is represented by three members. Currently, the number of electors per councillor is 6 per cent above the district average in Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (2 per cent in 2004), 4 per cent below in Sutton in Ashfield East ward (5 per cent in 2004), 6 per cent above in Sutton in Ashfield North ward (3 per cent in 2004) and 5 per cent above in Sutton in Ashfield West ward (15 per cent in 2004).

59 In its Stage One submission the District Council identified that, due to proposed housing developments, the worst electoral inequality in this area was forecast to be in Sutton in Ashfield

West ward. Consequently, it proposed a redistribution of the electors between these four wards which it stated would improve electoral equality while better reflecting local community identities. In addition to the modifications to the boundary between Sutton in Ashfield East and Sutton in Ashfield West wards, and the proposed Kirkby in Ashfield West ward (described earlier), the Council proposed a boundary modification transferring the area around Hilsborough Avenue from Sutton in Ashfield West ward to Sutton in Ashfield East ward. It also proposed that the area of Sutton in Ashfield Central ward generally to the south and east of Brook Street, Low Street and Spring Road should be transferred to Sutton in Ashfield East ward. The Council further proposed that Sutton in Ashfield Central ward should be further modified to include an area bounded by Gill Street, Huthwaite Road and Alfreton Road (currently in Sutton in Ashfield West ward), the area around Willow Crescent (currently in Sutton in Ashfield West ward) and an area in the vicinity of Quarrydale School (currently in Sutton in Ashfield North ward), which it stated would provide well-defined boundaries while reflecting local community identities and interests. Finally, in this area, it also proposed that that part of Forest Road currently in Sutton in Ashfield Central ward, together with Ashfield Street, Leyton Avenue and part of Loundhouse Road, should be included in Sutton in Ashfield North ward, as “these properties ... have a community affinity to the other properties on Forest Road”.

60 Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 10 per cent above the district average in Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (5 per cent above in 2004), 5 per cent above in Sutton in Ashfield East ward (3 per cent above in 2004), 6 per cent above in Sutton in Ashfield North ward (3 per cent above in 2004) and 7 per cent below in Sutton in Ashfield West ward (3 per cent above in 2004).

61 Councillor Shaw, member for Sutton in Ashfield Central division, opposed the proposal to modify the boundary of Sutton in Ashfield ward. He considered that if the boundaries of other wards needed to be adjusted then they could be modified without affecting Sutton in Ashfield Central ward.

62 In considering the proposals for this area, we noted Councillor Shaw’s opposition to any proposed modification to Sutton in Ashfield Central ward, but we also noted that he did not provide detailed proposals for alternative electoral arrangements in this area. We considered that the District Council’s scheme in this area would secure substantial improvements to electoral equality in the four wards concerned while in our opinion reflecting local community ties and interests. We therefore put forward the District Council’s proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two minor amendments. Following advice from Ordnance Survey we proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between Sutton in Ashfield Central ward and Sutton in Ashfield West wards in the area to the north of Ashland Road West to follow recognisable ground features. We also proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Sutton in Ashfield Central and Sutton in Ashfield North wards for the same reason. Neither of these amendments would effect any electors.

63 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations. Councillor Shaw, member for Sutton in Ashfield Central division, objected to the proposed boundary between Sutton in Ashfield Central ward and Sutton in Ashfield North ward. He considered that the existing boundary was more clearly identifiable; however, he proposed that, if the boundary had to be changed for reasons of electoral equality, it would be better to keep the boundary following

Forest Road, leaving the Ashfield Street and Leighton Avenue area in Sutton in Ashfield Central ward, but to make it run south along Dalestorth Street, transferring the area west of this street from Sutton in Ashfield Central ward to Sutton in Ashfield North ward. Under Councillor Shaw's alternative proposal the number of electors per councillor would be 10 per cent above the district average in Sutton in Ashfield Central ward (6 per cent in 2004) and 5 per cent above in Sutton in Ashfield North ward (3 per cent in 2004).

64 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We note the alternative boundary which Councillor Shaw has proposed between Sutton in Ashfield Central and Sutton in Ashfield North wards, which would achieve the same levels of electoral equality in the two wards concerned as under our draft recommendations. However, in the absence of further evidence concerning our draft recommendations in this area, we remain of the view that our draft recommendations represent the most satisfactory balance of the need to improve electoral equality while having regard to the other statutory criteria. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for the wards of Sutton in Ashfield Central, Sutton in Ashfield East, Sutton in Ashfield North and Sutton in Ashfield West as final. Our final recommendations are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood wards

65 The three district wards of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood are situated in the west of the district and are largely separated from the remainder of the district by the M1 motorway. The three wards are wholly parished, with Jacksdale and Selston wards covering parts of Selston parish alone, while Underwood ward contains part of Selston parish and the whole of Felley parish. At present, the number of electors per councillor is equal to the district average in Jacksdale ward (6 per cent below in 2004), 10 per cent below the average in Selston ward (11 per cent below in 2004) and 11 per cent below in Underwood ward (15 per cent below in 2004).

66 In its Stage One submission, the District Council stated that "the Underwood area together with Jacksdale and Selston are three distinct communities situated at the western edge of the district boundary and each is separated from the remaining parts of Ashfield by the M1 motorway and open countryside". Consequently, it stated that it was not proposing any substantial changes to the area. However, in addition to the modification to the boundary between Woodhouse and Selston wards, detailed earlier, the District Council proposed one further amendment in this area: transferring the Pye Hill area, currently in Jacksdale ward, to Selston ward, including both sides of Alfreton Road in the same ward. This proposal was supported by Selston Parish Council.

67 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below the district average in Jacksdale ward (8 per cent in 2004), 5 per cent below in Selston ward (7 per cent in 2004) and 11 per cent below in Underwood ward (15 per cent in 2004). While the Council recognised the electoral imbalance which would continue in this area under its proposals, it considered that such inequality was unavoidable because of the geography and community identity of the area concerned.

68 In arriving at our draft recommendations we considered that the District Council's proposals to amend the boundaries of Jacksdale and Selston wards represented a satisfactory balance of the statutory criteria but we remained concerned at the levels of electoral inequality which would

persist, particularly in Underwood ward, under its proposals. We accepted the District Council's argument that these three wards constitute a distinct area of the district and did not consider that there was any merit in looking beyond the external boundaries of the three proposed wards for alternative warding arrangements. However, we considered that improvements to electoral equality in this area could be secured while continuing to have regard to the statutory criteria. Consequently, we proposed modifying the boundary between Selston and Underwood wards to follow the centre of Annesley Lane, turning south to the west of Nottingham Road until it meets the existing boundary, thus transferring an area from Selston ward to Underwood ward.

69 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent below the average in Selston ward (9 per cent in 2004) and 5 per cent below the average in Underwood ward (10 per cent in 2004). Following advice from Ordnance Survey we also proposed that the boundary between Jacksdale and Selston wards should be modified so that it followed recognisable existing ground features; this modification would not involve any further transfer of electors. Subject to these amendments we adopted the District Council's proposals for the wards of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood as part of our draft recommendations.

70 At Stage Three the District Council stated that it did not support our draft recommendation to modify the boundary between Jacksdale and Selston wards. The Council stated that this modification would remove from Jacksdale ward a large area of land "which has a long standing affinity with the community of Jacksdale" and proposed instead an alternative boundary which it felt would provide an identifiable and permanent boundary and would facilitate the transfer of the electors in the Pye Hill area to Selston while retaining the majority of the reclaimed site in Jacksdale ward. The District Council also opposed the proposed modification to the boundary between Selston and Underwood wards contained in our draft recommendations. The Council argued that "the distinct communities of Selston and Underwood as shown by the existing ward boundaries should remain intact". The Council carried out a public consultation exercise in this area, sending a letter to each of the 86 properties affected asking whether or not they opposed our draft recommendation to modify the boundary between Selston and Underwood wards. In response to this consultation exercise 48 responses were received, and of those 37 properties opposed the Commission's draft recommendations, nine properties did not oppose the modification and two properties were returned as unoccupied. The District Council therefore reaffirmed its original submission and, subject to the above objections, stated its support for the remainder of the draft recommendations for the wards of Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood.

71 We also received representations from two local councillors in response to our draft recommendations. Councillor Holmes, member for Jacksdale ward and parish councillor for Selston parish, supported the modification of the boundary between Jacksdale and Selston wards to include properties in the Pye Hill area on both sides of Alfreton Road in Selston ward. However, Councillor Holmes objected to the removal of the Smotherfly opencast site from Jacksdale ward. Noting that the site is now being reclaimed, Councillor Holmes considered that "for the village to have worked and suffered with this site since living memory, and then to lose it just when it is a visual asset is just not acceptable". He stated that if it were not possible to ensure that the opencast site remained in Jacksdale ward, the existing boundary should not be changed. In addition to her concerns regarding the boundary between Selston and Woodhouse ward, detailed earlier, Councillor Mrs Taylor objected to the proposal to place properties at the lower end of Annesley Lane (on Melbourne Street, Recreation Street and part of Nottingham

Road) in Underwood ward. Councillor Mrs Taylor felt that the residents of these properties considered themselves to be part of Selston ward.

72 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in response to our draft recommendations for the Selston area. With regard to our proposed amendment to the boundary between Selston and Underwood wards, we note that there is some opposition to this proposal. However, we also note that to retain the existing boundary between these wards would mean that substantial electoral inequality would remain in Underwood ward (projected to vary by 15 per cent from the average in 2004). We did not receive any other comments or suggestions for amendments to the boundary in this area during Stage Three. Consequently we are proposing to confirm our draft recommendation for Underwood ward as final, as we judge that to retain the existing ward without amendment would result in an unacceptable level of electoral inequality in the ward concerned. Elsewhere, we note the proposal that the area of former opencast mine workings in the west of the borough should be retained in Jacksdale ward and in particular the alternative boundary put forward by the District Council intended to facilitate such a change. However, we are concerned that the boundary put forward by the District Council would not be sufficiently identifiable. Moreover, having conducted a site visit, we have been advised by Ordnance Survey, which is statutorily responsible for the recording of local authority ward and administrative boundaries, that the revised boundary put to us by the District Council would not follow recognisable ground features. We are therefore not adopting this amendment as part of our final recommendations. Consequently, in the absence of alternative features in the area which would provide a similar boundary, we are confirming our draft recommendations for the wards of Jacksdale and Selston as final. Our final recommendations are shown on the large map at the back of this report.

73 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below the district average in Jacksdale ward (8 per cent in 2004), 8 per cent below the average in Selston ward (9 per cent in 2004) and 5 per cent below the average in Underwood ward (10 per cent in 2004).

Electoral Cycle

74 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole council elections every four years.

75 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

76 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations, without modification.

77 We conclude that, in Ashfield:

- the present council size of 33 should be retained;
- there should be 15 wards, the same as at present;
- the boundaries of all but one of the existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

78 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

| | 1999 electorate | | 2004 forecast electorate | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Current arrangements | Final recommendations | Current arrangements | Final recommendations |
| Number of councillors | 33 | 33 | 33 | 33 |
| Number of wards | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Average number of electors per councillor | 2,595 | 2,720 | 2,595 | 2,720 |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average | 7 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |

79 As Figure 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from seven to none with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with no wards forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Ashfield District Council should comprise 33 councillors serving 15 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover. Elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

80 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential warding arrangements for Selston parish to reflect the proposed district wards.

81 The parish of Selston is currently served by 21 councillors representing three wards, Jacksdale, Selston and Underwood, which are represented by seven, nine and five councillors respectively. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding in Selston parish, which generally reflected the District Council’s proposal, although modified to follow ground features, and subject to our additional amendment to the boundary between Selston and Underwood wards, we proposed modifying the parish ward boundaries to correspond with those of the district within the parish. Selston Parish Council also requested that the number of councillors representing Selston parish ward should be increased by one, and that the number of parish councillors representing Jacksdale parish ward should be reduced by one, which they stated would offer a fairer level of representation than the current arrangements. We calculated that this is the case and therefore adopted the Parish Council’s proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

82 No further comments were received from the District Council or the Parish Council in response to our consultation report.

83 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for warding Selston parish as final.

Final Recommendation
Selston Parish Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Jacksdale (returning six councillors), Selston (10) and Underwood (five). 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 this report.

84 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district, and are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation
For parish councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the District Council.

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Ashfield

6 NEXT STEPS

85 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Ashfield and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

86 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 26 June 2000.

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

The Secretary of State
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Local Government Sponsorship Division
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Ashfield: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Ashfield 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 the large map at the back of this report.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Hucknall, Kirkby in Ashfield, Selston parish, Sutton in Ashfield and Woodhouse.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Ashfield: Key Map