

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
South Norfolk

March 2002

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations on whether there should be changes to local authorities' electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Peter Brokenshire
Kru Desai
Pamela Gordon
Robin Gray
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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, ward names and the frequency of elections. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

With effect from 1 April 2002, the Electoral Commission has assumed the functions of the Local Government Commission for England and taken over responsibility for making Orders putting in place the new arrangements resulting from periodic electoral reviews (powers which currently reside with the Secretary of State). As part of this transfer the Electoral Commission has set up a Boundary Committee which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission. The Boundary Committee will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission for England. Its final recommendations on future electoral arrangements will then be presented to the Electoral Commission which will be able to accept, modify or reject the Boundary Committee's findings. Under these new arrangements there will remain a further opportunity to make representations directly to the Electoral Commission after the publication of the final recommendations. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to send comments to the Electoral Commission.

SUMMARY

We began a review of South Norfolk's electoral arrangements on 31 July 2001.

- **This report summarises the submissions we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in South Norfolk:

- **in 25 of the 41 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 16 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 32 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 23 wards.**

Our main proposals for South Norfolk's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 156-157) are that:

- **South Norfolk District Council should have 46 councillors, one less than at present;**
- **there should be 34 wards, instead of 41 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 37 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of seven, and four wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **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 26 of the proposed 34 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in 33 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 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 town of Diss and the parishes of Costessey and Roydon;**
- **revised warding arrangements for the town of Wymondham;**
- **an increase in the number of councillors serving Cringleford and Hethersett parish councils.**

This report sets out our draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 26 March 2002. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission which, with effect from 1 April 2002, will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 20 May 2002:

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Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Abbey & Northfields (in Wymondham)	2	Part of Wymondham parish (the proposed Abbey and Northfields town wards)	Large map
2	Bressingham & Burston	1	The parishes of Bressingham, Burston & Shimpling, Gissing, Shelfanger and Winfarthing; part of Diss parish (the proposed Heywood town ward), part of Roydon ward (the proposed West parish ward)	Maps 3, A3 and A4
3	Brooke	1	The parishes of Aslacton, Bergh Apton, Brooke, Howe, Kirstead, Mundham and Seething	Map 4
4	Bunwell	1	The parishes of Aslacton, Bunwell, Carleton Rode and Tibenham	Map 3
5	Chedgrave	1	The parishes of Ashby St Mary, Carleton St Peter, Chedgrave, Claxton, Langley with Hardley and Thurton	Map 4
6	Cringleford	2	The parishes of Bawburgh, Colney, Cringleford, Keswick and Little Melton	Map 3
7	Cromwells (in Wymondham)	1	Part of Wymondham parish (the proposed Cromwells town ward)	Map 3 and large map
8	Dickleburgh	1	The parishes of Dickleburgh & Rushall, Great Moulton, Tivetshall St Margaret and Tivetshall St Mary	Map 3
9	Diss	3	Part of Diss parish (the proposed Diss Town town ward)	Maps 3 and A3
10	Ditchingham & Broome	1	The parishes of Broome, Ditchingham, Hedenham and Thwaite	Map 4
11	Earsham	1	The parishes of Alburgh, Denton, Earsham, Topcroft and Wortwell	Map 4
12	Easton	1	The parishes of Barford, Easton, Great Melton, Marlingford and Wrampingham	Map 3
13	Forncett	1	The parishes of Ashwellthorpe, Forncett and Tacolneston	Map 3
14	Gillingham	1	The parishes of Ellingham, Geldeston, Gillingham, Hales, Heckingham, Kirby Cane, Raveningham and Stockton	Map 4
15	Harleston	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – The parish of Redenhall with Harleston	Map 3
16	Hempnall	1	The parishes of Bedingham, Hempnall, Morningthorpe, Shelton and Woodton	Map 4
17	Hetherset	2	The parish of Hetherset	Map 3
18	Hingham & Deopham	1	The parishes of Deopham and Hingham	Map 3
19	Loddon	1	The parishes of Loddon and Sisland	Map 4
20	Mulbarton	2	The parishes of Bracon Ash, East Carleton, Ketteringham, Mulbarton and Swardeston	Map 3

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
21	New Costessey	2	Part of the parish of Costessey (the proposed New Costessey parish ward)	Maps 3 and A2
22	Newton Flotman	1	The parishes of Flordon, Newton Flotman, Swainsthorpe and Wreningham	Map 3
23	Old Costessey	2	Part of the parish of Costessey (the proposed Old Costessey parish ward)	Maps 3 and A2
24	Poringland	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – The parishes of Framingham Earl, Framingham Pigot and Poringland	Map 3
25	Pulhams	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – The parishes of Pulham Market, Pulham St Mary and Starston	Map 3
26	Rockland	1	The parishes of Alpington, Bramerton, Hellington, Holverston, Kirby Bedon, Rockland St Mary, Surlingham and Yelverton	Map 4
27	Roydon	1	Part of Roydon parish (the proposed East parish ward)	Maps 3 and A4
28	Rustens & Town (in Wymondham)	2	Part of Wymondham parish (the proposed Rustens and Town town wards)	Large map
29	Scole	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – The parishes of Brockdish, Needham and Scole	Map 3
30	Stoke Holy Cross	1	The parishes of Bixley, Caistor St Edmund, Stoke Holy Cross and Trowse with Newton	Map 3
31	Stratton	2	The parishes of Long Stratton, Tharston & Hapton and Wacton	Map 3
32	Tasburgh	1	The parishes of Saxlingham Nethergate, Shotesham and Tasburgh	Map 3
33	Thurlton	1	The parishes of Aldeby, Burgh St Peter, Haddiscoe, Norton Subcourse, Thurlton, Toft Monks and Wheatacre.	Map 4
34	Wicklewood	1	The parishes of Barnham Broom, Kimberley, Morley, Runhall and Wicklewood	Map 3

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Maps 3 and 4 and Maps A1–A4 in Appendix A.

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: Draft Recommendations for South Norfolk

	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	Abbey & Northfields (in Wymondham)	2	4,345	2,173	12	4,376	2,188	7
2	Bressingham & Burston	1	2,044	2,044	5	2,041	2,041	0
3	Brooke	1	2,104	2,104	8	2,058	2,058	1
4	Bunwell	1	1,993	1,993	3	1,972	1,972	-4
5	Chedgrave	1	2,081	2,081	7	2,086	2,086	2
6	Cringleford	2	3,273	1,637	-16	4,006	2,003	-2
7	Cromwells (in Wymondham)	1	2,040	2,040	5	2,056	2,056	1
8	Dickleburgh	1	2,141	2,141	10	2,124	2,124	4
9	Diss	3	5,460	1,820	-6	5,647	1,882	-8
10	Ditchingham & Broome	1	1,897	1,897	-2	1,850	1,850	-9
11	Earsham	1	1,960	1,960	1	1,910	1,910	-7
12	Easton	1	1,789	1,789	-8	2,037	2,037	0
13	Fornsett	1	1,998	1,998	3	1,969	1,969	-4
14	Gillingham	1	2,287	2,287	18	2,246	2,246	10
15	Harleston	2	3,372	1,686	-13	3,593	1,797	-12
16	Hempnall	1	2,035	2,035	5	2,050	2,050	0
17	Hetherset	2	4,410	2,205	14	4,375	2,188	7
18	Hingham & Deopham	1	2,129	2,129	10	2,170	2,170	6
19	Loddon	1	2,045	2,045	5	2,080	2,080	2
20	Mulbarton	2	3,484	1,742	-10	3,895	1,948	-5
21	New Costessey	2	4,358	2,179	12	4,303	2,152	5
22	Newton Flotman	1	1,848	1,848	-5	2,026	2,026	-1
23	Old Costessey	2	3,681	1,841	-5	4,294	2,147	5
24	Poringland	2	3,494	1,747	-10	4,301	2,151	5
25	Pulhams	1	1,787	1,787	-8	1,834	1,834	-10
26	Rockland	1	2,258	2,258	16	2,243	2,243	10
27	Roydon	1	1,820	1,820	-6	1,837	1,837	-10

	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 %
28	Rustens & Town (in Wymondham)	2	3,580	1,790	-8	4,390	2,195	7
29	Scole	1	1,834	1,834	-5	1,834	1,834	-10
30	Stoke Holy Cross	1	2,008	2,008	4	2,147	2,147	5
31	Stratton	2	3,563	1,782	-8	4,098	2,049	0
32	Tasburgh	1	1,845	1,845	-5	1,903	1,903	-7
33	Thurlton	1	2,201	2,201	13	2,176	2,176	6
34	Wicklewood	1	2,055	2,055	6	2,092	2,092	2
	Totals	46	89,219	-	-	94,019	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,940	-	-	2,044	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by South Norfolk 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 proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of South Norfolk in Norfolk, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the seven districts in Norfolk 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 expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of South Norfolk District Council. South Norfolk's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1976 (Report no. 172). The electoral arrangements of Norfolk County Council were last reviewed in June 1984 (Report no. 472). We expect to begin reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements towards the end of the year.

3 In carrying out these reviews, we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, i.e. 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 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fifth edition published in October 2001). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as 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.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, 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 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.

9 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to us
Two	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Electoral Commission

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper called *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 of 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 wards in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, states that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 Stage One began on 31 July 2001, when we wrote to South Norfolk District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Police Authority, the local authority associations, Norfolk County Association of Parish and Town 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, the headquarters of the main political parties, and residents and community groups in the district. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited South Norfolk District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 22 October 2001.

12 At Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 26 March 2002 and will end on 20 May 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

14 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order and decide when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 The district of South Norfolk is located to the south of Norwich, bordered by the districts of Breckland, Broadland, Great Yarmouth and Norwich in Norfolk and the districts of Mid Suffolk and Waveney in Suffolk. The district covers an area of around 90,600 hectares and has a population of 106,600. It is predominantly rural in character, but contains a number of towns, of which Costessey, Diss, Harleston, Hethersett, Long Stratton, Poringland and Wymondham are the largest.

16 The district contains 118 civil parishes, and is wholly parished. Wymondham town comprises 11 per cent of the district's total electorate.

17 The electorate of the district is 89,219 (February 2001). The Council presently has 47 members who are elected from 41 wards, 13 of which are relatively urban in Beckhithe, Costessey, Cringleford & Colney, Diss, Harleston, Long Stratton, Poringland and Wymondham, with the remainder being wholly or partly rural. One ward is represented by three councillors, four are each represented by two councillors and 36 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

18 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'.

19 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,898 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,000 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 25 of the 41 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 16 wards by more than 20 per cent and 10 wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Harleston ward where the councillor represents 78 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in South Norfolk (West)

Map 2: Existing Wards in South Norfolk (East)

Table 4: 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	Abbey (in Wymondham)	1	1,881	1,881	-1	1,941	1,941	-3
2	Abbeyfield	1	1,378	1,378	-27	1,381	1,381	-31
3	Beauchamp	1	1,607	1,607	-15	1,590	1,590	-21
4	Beck Vale	1	1,787	1,787	-6	1,834	1,834	-8
5	Beckhithe	2	5,080	2,540	34	5,075	2,538	27
6	Berners	1	1,902	1,902	0	2,064	2,064	3
7	Boyland	1	2,488	2,488	31	2,504	2,504	25
8	Broads	1	1,576	1,576	-17	1,571	1,571	-21
9	Brookwood	1	1,699	1,699	-10	1,671	1,671	-16
10	Chet	1	2,456	2,456	29	2,485	2,485	24
11	Clavering	1	1,829	1,829	-4	1,789	1,789	-11
12	Cringleford & Colney	1	1,875	1,875	-1	2,583	2,583	29
13	Cromwells (in Wymondham)	1	1,509	1,509	-21	1,605	1,605	-20
14	Crown Point	1	880	880	-54	1,039	1,039	-48
15	Depwade	1	1,834	1,834	-3	1,834	1,834	-8
16	Dickleburgh	1	1,562	1,562	-18	1,548	1,548	-23
17	Diss Town	3	5,590	1,863	-2	5,777	1,926	-4
18	Ditchingham	1	1,881	1,881	-1	1,852	1,852	-7
19	Forehoe	1	1,611	1,611	-15	1,621	1,621	-19
20	Harleston	1	3,372	3,372	78	3,593	3,593	80
21	Hempnall	1	1,473	1,473	-22	1,471	1,471	-26
22	Hingham	1	1,711	1,711	-10	1,763	1,763	-12
23	Humbleyard	1	1,254	1,254	-34	1,250	1,250	-38
24	Kidner	1	1,691	1,691	-11	1,911	1,911	-4
25	Long Row	1	1,589	1,589	-16	1,583	1,583	-21
26	Marshland	1	1,541	1,541	-19	1,543	1,543	-23
27	Mergate	1	2,982	2,982	57	3,380	3,380	69
28	New Costessey	2	3,564	1,782	-6	3,518	1,759	-12
29	Northfields (in Wymondham)	1	1,813	1,813	-4	1,759	1,759	-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 %
30 Old Costessey	2	4,475	2,238	18	5,079	2,540	27
31 Rosebery	2	3,494	1,747	-8	4,301	2,151	8
32 Rustens (in Wymondham)	1	2,271	2,271	20	2,753	2,753	38
33 Smockmill	1	2,013	2,013	6	2,201	2,201	10
34 Springfields	1	1,298	1,298	-32	1,287	1,287	-36
35 Stratton	1	2,842	2,842	50	3,253	3,253	63
36 Tasvale	1	1,712	1,712	-10	1,694	1,694	-15
37 Town (in Wymondham)	1	2,491	2,491	31	2,764	2,764	38
38 Valley	1	1,767	1,767	-7	1,725	1,725	-14
39 Waveney	1	1,506	1,506	-21	1,470	1,470	-27
40 Westwood	1	2,586	2,586	36	2,557	2,557	28
41 Wodehouse	1	1,349	1,349	-29	1,400	1,400	-30
Totals	47	89,219	-	-	94,019	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,898	-	-	2,000	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by South Norfolk 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 Crown Point ward were relatively over-represented by 54 per cent, while electors in Harleston ward were relatively under-represented by 78 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

20 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for South Norfolk District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

21 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 17 submissions during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council, South Norfolk Conservative Association, and South Norfolk District Council Independent Group, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council.

South Norfolk District Council

22 The District Council proposed a council of 46 members, one fewer than at present, serving 44 single-member wards and one two-member ward. It considered a pattern of single-member wards to be generally more democratic and accountable. The District Council proposed amendments to all but two existing wards. It also put forward proposals for new parishing arrangements in Costessey, Diss, Harleston, Hethersett, Long Stratton, Mulbarton, Poringland and Wymondham to reflect the proposed division of the urban areas of the district into single-member wards, and proposed an increase in councillors for Cringleford and Hethersett parish councils. Under the District Council's proposals, electoral equality would significantly improve, with only six wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average by 2006.

South Norfolk Conservative Association

23 South Norfolk Conservative Association ('the Conservatives') also proposed a council of 46 members, serving a mixed pattern of 38 single- two- and three-member wards. Of their proposed wards 32 were identical to those put forward by the District Council, and four wards would remain unchanged from existing arrangements. However, unlike the District Council, the Conservatives proposed that the urban areas of Costessey, Harleston, Hethersett, Long Stratton, Mulbarton and Poringland be represented by two- and three-member wards. They argued that multiple single-member wards might not reflect the identities and interests of urban communities. The Conservatives also put forward alternative ward names for 12 of the District Council's proposed wards. Under their proposals, only three wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average by 2006.

South Norfolk District Council Independent Group

24 South Norfolk District Council Independent Group ('the Independents') also proposed a council of 46, but serving a mixed pattern of 34 single- two- and three-member wards. Of their proposed wards 22 were identical to wards put forward by the District Council, and three wards would remain unchanged from existing arrangements. They proposed that the urban areas of Diss, Costessey, Harleston, Hethersett, Long Stratton, Poringland and Wymondham be represented by two- or three-member wards, rather than single-member wards as proposed by the District Council. The Independents considered that this warding pattern would better reflect local preferences. They also proposed the retention of 19 existing ward names and amendments to the District Council's proposed wards of Bressingham, Harleston, Pulhams,

Roydon and Stratton. Under their proposals, no wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average by 2006.

Parish and Town Councils

25 We received responses from 13 parish and town councils. Wymondham Town Council supported the retention of the existing district warding pattern of five single-member wards for the town. Hethersett Parish Council supported the District Council's proposed division of the parish into two single-member district wards, but put forward its own preferred ward names. Diss Town Council, Long Stratton Parish Council and Redenhall with Harleston Town Council all expressed a preference for the multi-member district wards proposed by the Conservatives and the Independents. They considered that such an arrangement would better meet the statutory criteria.

26 Alington with Yelverton Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposed Brooke and Rockland wards, considering that the two parishes should be included in the same ward as Bergh Apton parish, on community identity grounds. Bawburgh and Cringleford parish councils opposed the District Council's proposed Yare ward, arguing that Bawburgh parish had little in common with the rest of the ward. Bawburgh Parish Council proposed the retention of the existing Kidner ward, while Cringleford Parish Council proposed a single-member ward coterminous with the parish and put forward proposals regarding its own arrangements. Earsham and Wortwell parish councils stated that they would oppose any potential combination of Wortwell parish with the neighbouring town of Harleston. Wortwell Parish Council also put forward an alternative scheme for the District Council's proposed Ditchingham & Broome, Earsham and Hempnall wards. Great Moulton Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposed Dickleburgh and Bunwell wards, as they divided Great Moulton from the village of Aslacton, with which it is contiguous. Pulham Market and Pulham St Mary parish councils both supported the retention of the existing Beck Vale ward.

Other Submissions

27 We received one further submission from a district councillor. Councillor Smith (Stratton ward) stated that he was in general agreement with the District Council's proposals. However, he supported the combination of the District Council's proposed single-member Stratton wards into a two-member ward as proposed by the Conservatives and the Independents. He considered that such an arrangement would better meet the statutory criteria.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

28 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Norfolk and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

29 As described earlier, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for South Norfolk is 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 of 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”.

30 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 must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and maintaining local ties.

31 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.

32 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an 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

33 Since 1975 there has been a 35 per cent increase in the electorate of South Norfolk district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 89,219 to 94,019 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Rosebery ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Cringleford & Colney, Old Costessey, Rustens and Stratton 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.

34 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having looked at the District Council’s figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

35 As explained earlier, we start by assuming 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. South Norfolk District Council presently has 47 members. The District Council proposed a reduction in council size of one, from 47 to 46, serving 45 wards, four more than at present. Both the Conservatives and the Independents supported a 46-member council, while Councillor Smith (Stratton ward) stated that he was in general agreement with the District Council's proposals, except in the Long Stratton area.

36 Examining the District Council's submission, we note that it was supported by a significant majority of councillors voting, and that the Council had undertaken a consultation exercise on its proposals involving parish and town councils. While responses to its consultation tended to focus on issues specific to a single part of the district, there was evidence of some support for its scheme.

37 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 46 members.

Electoral Arrangements

38 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, including the district-wide schemes put forward by the District Council, the Conservatives and the Independents. We note that there are considerable similarities between the three schemes, with the main areas of disagreement being the most appropriate warding pattern for the urban areas of the district and preferred ward names.

39 We consider that the District Council's proposals for the rural parts of the district would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements, providing the correct allocation of councillors for these areas. We note that these proposals were supported in full by the Conservatives and (subject to minor amendments) by the Independents. Further, we are content that the District Council had sought where possible to reflect the views expressed by interested parties during the Council's local consultation exercise. Several rural parish councils have expressed their dissatisfaction with these proposals. While we note their comments, in each case we have received no details of alternative configurations that would meet our objectives. We have therefore decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for the rural area as part of our draft recommendations.

40 Examining the District Council's proposals for the urban areas of the district, we note that they would lead to improvements in electoral equality while providing the correct allocation of councillors. However, we also note that there is substantial disagreement as to whether the urban areas of the district should be represented by single-member or multi-member wards. The District Council stated that it had sought to reduce the number of existing multi-member wards in the district, considering that the increased use of single-member wards would be "fundamentally more democratic" and would significantly improve the accountability of councillors. It also argued that multi-member wards "did not fit so easily" in largely rural districts such as South Norfolk, which hold elections every four years rather than electing their council by thirds. Finally, the District Council suggested that the warding of parish and town councils in urban areas to achieve single-member district wards would facilitate effective and convenient local government. It considered the practice in large, unwarded

parish and town councils of electing councillors from a single list of candidates to be confusing and undemocratic. We also received submissions in support of single-member urban district wards from Wymondham Town Council and Hethersett Parish Council.

41 The Conservatives and the Independents considered that there did not need to be a uniform single-member warding pattern in South Norfolk, although neither proposed that all urban areas in the district be represented by multi-member wards. The Conservatives commented, "The division of parishes solely to facilitate single member wards ... is undesirable as this places bureaucratic neatness above community needs. Such division may well lead to electoral confusion." The Independents considered that multi-member wards would better reflect local preferences in a number of urban areas. We also received submissions in support of multi-member urban wards from Diss Town Council, Long Stratton Parish Council, Councillor Smith (Stratton ward) and Redenhall with Harleston Town Council.

42 Our *Guidance* states that we are not prescriptive when making recommendations for single-member or multi-member wards. Rather, we seek to recommend wards which in our view provide the best balance between achieving electoral equality, reflecting community identities and interests and providing effective and convenient local government. On the basis of the evidence so far received, we are not convinced that the single-member warding pattern proposed by the District Council would best achieve this balance in the urban areas of the district. We note that proposed wards comprising parts of Diss, Costessey, Harleston, Hethersett and Wymondham are forecast by 2006 to have a variance higher than we would normally seek to recommend. We are also concerned that the boundaries proposed would artificially divide the urban communities of the district, particularly in Long Stratton and Mulbarton, where each half of the town would be placed with one or more rural parishes.

43 To improve electoral equality further and bearing in mind local community identities and interests and the need to secure effective and convenient local government, we are therefore moving away from the District Council's scheme. In the towns of Diss, Harleston, Hethersett, Mulbarton and Poringland, we propose that the District Council's proposed single-member wards be combined to form two- or three-member wards. In Costessey, which is entitled to four councillors, we also propose amending the boundary between the existing two-member wards of New Costessey and Old Costessey to improve electoral equality. In Wymondham, we propose that, subject to minor boundary amendments, four of the District Council's proposed single-member wards form a pair of two-member wards, leaving a single-member ward to represent the rural part of the parish. We welcome further evidence at Stage Three on the issue of single-member or multi-member warding, indicating how either option would better meet our objectives as detailed in the above paragraph.

44 The District Council stated that it had sought to improve the recognition value of district ward names by mostly naming its proposed wards after the parish with the largest electorate. We are generally content on the basis of the evidence received that that these proposed ward names better reflect community identities than the existing ward names, although we note the preference of the Independents for their retention, particularly where wards have remained unchanged or no parish is dominant. We have also not put forward any of the Conservatives' proposed ward names based on former rural Hundreds or former Rural District Councils, as we have received no evidence that they possess significant recognition value. We also do not consider it necessary to distinguish proposed district ward names from existing county divisions, as we expect to begin reviewing Norfolk County Council's electoral arrangements towards the end of 2002. However, in order to better reflect community identities and interests, we have decided to adopt the Conservatives' alternative ward names for the

proposed wards of Bressingham, Rosebery and Yare. We welcome further evidence from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three regarding the most appropriate district ward names for South Norfolk.

45 For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

The North-west

- (a) Forehoe, Hingham and Wodehouse wards;
- (b) Cringleford & Colney and Kidner wards;
- (c) Costessey (two wards);
- (d) Wymondham (five wards);
- (e) Beckhithe, Humbleyard and Mergate wards.

The South-west

- (f) Berners, Springfields, Stratton and Westwood wards;
- (g) Boyland, Diss Town and Long Row wards;
- (h) Beck Vale, Depwade, Dickleburgh and Harleston wards.

The East

- (i) Crown Point, Rosebery, Smockmill and Tasvale wards;
- (j) Abbeyfield, Beauchamp, Broads, Brookwood and Chet wards;
- (k) Ditchingham, Hempnall and Valley wards;
- (l) Clavering, Marshland and Waveney wards.

46 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Maps 3 and 4, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

The North-west

Forehoe, Hingham and Wodehouse wards

47 The wards of Forehoe, Hingham and Wodehouse lie in the north-west of the district, and are each represented by a single councillor. Forehoe ward contains the parishes of Deopham, Morley and Wicklewood, while Hingham ward is coterminous with the parish of the same name. Wodehouse ward comprises the parishes of Barford, Barnham Broom, Kimberley, Runhall and Wrampingham. Under existing arrangements, Forehoe and Hingham wards have 15 and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (19 and 12 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Wodehouse ward currently has 29 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (30 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

48 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the parishes of Morley and Wicklewood, from the existing Forehoe ward, be combined with the parishes of Barnham Broom, Kimberley and Runhall, from Wodehouse ward, to form a new single-member Wicklewood ward. The remainder of Forehoe ward, the parish of Deopham, would be combined with Hingham parish in a new single-member Hingham & Deopham ward. The District Council considered that this revised ward name was intended to emphasise the change in warding arrangements. The District Council also proposed that the remainder of the existing Wodehouse ward, the parishes of Barford and Wrampingham, be combined with Easton,

Great Melton and Marlingford parishes from Kidner ward to form a new single-member Easton ward, as detailed in the following section.

49 Under the District Council's proposals, Hingham & Deopham and Wicklewood wards would have 10 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6 per cent and 2 per cent more than the average by 2006).

50 The Conservatives supported the District Council's scheme in this area, but argued that the proposed Wicklewood ward should retain the existing ward name of 'Forehoe'. They argued that Wicklewood parish constituted less than half of the combined ward electorate, and that all the parishes formerly belonged to the Forehoe rural Hundred and Forehoe & Henstead Rural District Council. The Independents also supported the District Council's proposals, but stated that the proposed wards of Hingham & Deopham and Wicklewood should retain the existing ward names of 'Hingham' and 'Wodehouse'.

51 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received at Stage One. We note that the District Council's proposals, which were supported by the Conservatives and the Independents, would resolve the over-representation of the existing Forehoe, Hingham and Wodehouse wards. Examining the proposed wards, we consider that they both possess satisfactory road connections, and appear to reflect community identities and interests in the area reasonably well, given the limited number of available options using whole parishes in this part of the district. We recognise that the alternative ward names put forward by the Conservatives and the Independents for the proposed Hingham & Deopham and Wicklewood wards may be feasible. However, as stated in paragraph 44, we consider on the basis of the evidence received that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives. However, we would welcome further views on this issue from all respondents, as well as local residents and other interested parties, at Stage Three. We are therefore content to put forward both wards for consultation as part of our draft recommendations.

52 Under our draft recommendations, Hingham & Deopham and Wicklewood wards would have 10 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6 per cent and 2 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 3.

Cringleford & Colney and Kidner wards

53 The single-member wards of Cringleford & Colney and Kidner are broadly situated between the city of Norwich to the north and east, and the town of Wymondham to the south and south-west. Cringleford & Colney ward is coterminous with the parishes of the same names, while Kidner ward comprises the parishes of Bawburgh, Easton, Great Melton and Marlingford. Under existing arrangements, Cringleford & Colney ward has 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. However, electoral equality is set to deteriorate over the next five years, and the ward is forecast to have 29 per cent more electors per councillor than the average by 2006. Kidner ward has 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

54 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the existing Cringleford & Colney ward be combined with the parishes of Bawburgh (from the existing Kidner ward), Keswick (from Humbleyard ward) and Little Melton (from Beckhithe ward), to form a new two-member Yare ward. It stated, "The Council considered two one-member wards for this area but the boundary of the two wards would have to have been through the middle of Cringleford in an area where the properties are not yet built." The District Council also proposed that the

remainder of the existing Kidner ward, the parishes of Easton, Great Melton and Marlingford, be combined with Barford and Wrampingham parishes from Wodehouse ward to form a single-member Easton ward. It noted that, in response to consultation it had undertaken locally, there had been opposition from some parishes, particularly Bawburgh, but it considered its proposed warding pattern to be the best option.

55 Under the District Council's proposals, Easton and Yare wards would have 8 per cent and 16 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 2 per cent fewer by 2006).

56 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals in this area, but proposed that Yare ward be renamed 'Cringleford' ward. They argued that this parish constitutes the majority of the combined ward electorate, and that the River Yare forms the northern boundary of four other proposed wards. The Independents also supported the District Council's proposals, but noted the opposition of Bawburgh Parish Council to the proposed Yare ward. They proposed that the existing ward names of 'Kidner' and 'Cringleford & Colney' be retained.

57 We received two further submissions in relation to this area. Bawburgh Parish Council opposed the proposed Yare ward, considering that Colney, Cringleford and Keswick parishes were geographically and socially more closely linked with Norwich. It also noted that they were separated from Bawburgh by the A47. The Parish Council supported the retention of the existing Kidner ward, arguing that it is forecast to have good electoral equality by 2006, and that its constituent rural communities have common interests including church ties and work well together. Cringleford Parish Council proposed a single-member ward coterminous with the parish of Cringleford, stating that it opposed the division of the parish between district wards. It considered that Bawburgh and Cringleford are linked neither geographically or parochially.

58 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One. We note the representations made by Bawburgh and Cringleford parish councils, arguing that the proposed Yare ward would not reflect community identities and interests, and are sympathetic to the nature of the concerns expressed. We also recognise that, on a council size of 47 or 46, the existing Kidner ward is forecast to have good electoral equality by 2006. However, we must bear in mind the requirement to achieve the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria across the district as a whole. In this case, we are seeking to put forward proposals that reduce electoral variance both in the existing Cringleford & Colney ward and in the existing wards of Forehoe, Hingham and Wodehouse further to the west. We have not received any alternative schemes for this part of the district that would address these difficulties and accommodate the preferences of Bawburgh Parish Council, although we would welcome further views on this issue from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three. Further, while we also note the preference of Cringleford Parish Council for a single-member ward coterminous with Cringleford parish, such a ward would have a greater under-representation by 2006 than we would normally seek to recommend.

59 Examining the proposed Yare ward, we note that the District Council's proposals, which were supported by the Conservatives and the Independents, would resolve the under-representation forecast for the existing Cringleford & Colney ward by 2006. Further, we note that it possesses satisfactory road connections, although its parishes are situated on opposite sides of the A47. We are content that both Yare ward and the proposed Easton ward, consisting of well-connected small and medium-sized villages to the west of Yare ward, would achieve the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria,

and are therefore proposing to put both proposed wards forward as part of our draft recommendations. However, on the basis of the evidence received we have decided to adopt the Conservatives' suggested ward name of 'Cringleford', agreeing that 'Yare' appears somewhat ambiguous, and that 'Cringleford & Colney' does not accurately reflect the composition of the proposed ward. We recognise that the Independents' proposal to retain the name 'Kidner' may be feasible but, as stated in paragraph 44, consider on the basis of the evidence received that the District Council's proposed ward names generally best meet our objectives.

60 Under our draft recommendations, Easton and Cringleford wards would have 8 per cent and 16 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 2 per cent fewer by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 3.

Costessey (two wards)

61 The urban parish of Costessey, bordering Norwich, is currently divided between the two-member district wards of New Costessey and Old Costessey. Both district wards are coterminous with parish wards bearing the same names. Under existing arrangements, New Costessey district ward has 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (12 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Old Costessey ward has 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (27 per cent more than the average by 2006).

62 At Stage One the District Council proposed dividing the parish of Costessey into four single-member wards: Costessey (East), Costessey (North), Costessey (South) and Costessey (West). It stated that, "the District Council believe for reasons of democracy and accountability all wards where possible should be one member wards." The proposed Costessey (East) ward would broadly comprise all of the parish to the south of the River Tud, to the east of Norwich Road, south of Ruskin Road and Smithdale Road, east of Wood View Court (including all of Gurney Road to the north of Grove Avenue), Grove Avenue and Jerningham Road, and to the north of the A1074 Dereham Road. The proposed Costessey (North) ward would comprise all of the parish to the north of the River Tud, apart from an area bounded by and including Lime Tree Avenue, Town House Road and part of Folgate Lane to the south of Carrs Hill Close and The Glade. This area would instead form part of the proposed Costessey (West) ward. The proposed Costessey (South) ward would comprise the entire parish to the south of the River Tud and west of Farmland Road and the centre of Three Mile Lane. The proposed Costessey (West) ward would comprise the remaining part of the parish to the west of Costessey (East) ward and east of Costessey (South) ward, together with the area to the north of the River Tud detailed above.

63 Under the District Council's proposals, Costessey (East) and Costessey (North) wards would have 3 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent fewer and 14 per cent more than the average by 2006). Costessey (South) and Costessey (West) wards would both have 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the average respectively (4 per cent and 5 per cent more than the average by 2006).

64 The Conservatives and the Independents both proposed that Costessey should continue to be divided into two two-member wards. The Conservatives stated, "no case is made by the [District] Council for the application of single-member wards to the suburb of Costessey." The Independents argued that multi-member wards were preferred locally. Neither group put forward detailed proposals, but accepted the need for boundary amendments to improve electoral equality.

65 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One, noting the lack of consensus as to whether Costessey should be represented by single- or two-member wards. As previously stated, we are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas and consider each case upon its merits. However, we note that, under the District Council's proposals, the variance in the proposed Costessey (North) ward would exceed that which we would normally seek to recommend. We also consider that we have not received any specific evidence that the division of the relatively compact urban area of New Costessey between Costessey (East) and Costessey (West) wards would reflect community identities and interests in this area, or provide effective and convenient local government. We note that, under the District Council's proposals in this area, Wood View Court is separated from Gurney Road, at whose western end the only access to Wood View Court is located. Having visited the area, we also consider that the Town House Road area relates more clearly to other parts of Old Costessey directly to its north and west, rather than estates to the south of the Tud, and that the river itself constitutes the most appropriate ward boundary in this part of the parish.

66 We have therefore decided to revise the existing two-member wards of New Costessey and Old Costessey, as supported by the Conservatives and the Independents, in part adapting the District Council's proposed boundaries. The revised New Costessey ward would comprise that part of the parish to the east of (and including) Grays Fair, Huntingfield Close, Upper Stafford Avenue, Grove Avenue, Farmland Road, West Close, West Road and Meadow Road. It would be bounded in the north-west, north and east by the River Tud, apart from a slight northward diversion to include Rogers Farm, accessed from Norwich Road, in the proposed New Costessey ward. The remainder of the parish to the west and north of this boundary would comprise the revised Old Costessey ward. These wards would provide for improved electoral equality while, we consider, better meeting our statutory criteria than either the existing arrangements or the District Council's proposals. We are therefore putting them forward as part of our draft recommendations, although we welcome further views from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three.

67 Under our draft recommendations, New Costessey and Old Costessey wards would have 12 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (both would have 5 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 3 and Map A2 in Appendix A.

Wymondham (five wards)

68 The single-member wards of Abbey, Cromwells, Northfields, Rustens and Town cover the town of Wymondham in the west of the district and are coterminous with the town council wards of the same names. Currently, Abbey, Cromwells and Northfields have 1 per cent, 21 per cent and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent, 20 per cent, and 12 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Rustens and Town wards have 20 and 31 per cent more electors per councillor than the average respectively (both 38 per cent more than the average by 2006).

69 At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the five existing single-member wards subject to a number of boundary amendments. It commented that it had sought to retain whole estates, and where possible, whole streets, in a single ward. The District Council also stated that Wymondham Town Council had been involved in discussions and were "not opposed" to their proposals.

70 The revised Abbey ward would comprise the western part of the town to the east of the Wymondham to Dereham railway line (though including properties on Chapel Lane) and north of the B1172 London Road. Its eastern boundary would run through the town broadly to the east of Avenue Road, to the west of Browick Road and Choseley Court, to the south of Orchard Way, along Back Lane, to the north of Cock Street, the west of Melton Road and Poynt Close, and east of Barnham Broom Road. It would then run east along Tuttles Lane West, before heading north-east along field boundaries south of Melton Road to reach the parish boundary. The existing Cromwells ward would be retained subject to the following additions: all of the existing Abbey ward to the west of the Wymondham-Dereham railway line and south of Chapel Lane; part of the existing Town ward to the south of (and including) Browick Road and Gunton Road and to the east of Avenue Road. It would thus comprise the southern part of the town, together with a rural area of Wymondham parish further to the south, including the villages of Silfield, Spooner Row and Sutton.

71 The revised Northfields ward would comprise an area in the north of the town to the south and east of the proposed Abbey ward. Its remaining boundary would run east on Tuttles Lane East, before running south to the east of Maple Close, Beech Close, and west to the south of Lime Tree Avenue, Abbot Close and Sheffield Road. It would then run south, to the east of Hewitts Lane, Pople Street, Albansfield and Rattle Row, to meet the boundary with Abbey ward at the junction with Back Lane, Cock Street and Town Green. The revised Rustens ward would comprise an area in the north-east of the town, bordered in the west by Abbey ward and Northfields ward. Its southern boundary would run broadly to the east of Rustens Manor Road, Folly Lane and Vimy Ridge, and to the north of Vimy Drive, before proceeding to the parish boundary along the B1172 Harts Farm Road and A11. Finally, the revised Town ward would comprise an area in the centre and east of the town, bordered in the north by Northfields and Rustens ward, in the east by the parish boundary, in the south by Cromwells ward and in the west by Abbey ward.

72 Under the District Council's proposals, Abbey, Cromwells and Northfields wards would have 9 per cent, 6 per cent and 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent, 1 per cent and 11 per cent more than the average by 2006). Rustens and Town wards would have 13 per cent and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (8 per cent and 6 per cent more than the average by 2006).

73 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals in Wymondham. The Independents proposed that the District Council's proposed wards of Abbey, Northfields and Rustens be combined to form a three-member Wymondham North ward, and the proposed wards of Town and Cromwells be combined to form a two-member Wymondham South ward. They commented that, "as a fairly compact market town, it would seem sensible" to ward Wymondham in this fashion. Under the Independents' proposals, Wymondham North and Wymondham South wards would have 4 per cent and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the average by 2006).

74 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Wymondham Town Council supported the retention of five single-member wards and accepted the principle of amendments to improve electoral equality. It requested that South Norfolk District Council re-draw the boundaries to avoid any accusation of political bias. The Town Council stated that no road be divided between more than two wards to avoid confusion for residents, and that proposed boundaries follow the middle of rivers, railway lines or main roads wherever possible.

75 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One. We note that in Wymondham the majority view appears to be that the existing warding pattern of five single-member wards be retained. We are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas, and consider each case upon its merits. Examining the District Council's proposals, we note that they secure considerable improvements in electoral equality. We also consider that they better reflect the statutory criteria than the existing wards, by consolidating the rural north and south of the parish into Abbey and Cromwells wards respectively, and by placing the whole of the Norwich Common residential spur in the north-east of the town into a single ward.

76 However, we also note that under the District Council's proposals, the variance in the proposed Northfields ward would exceed that which we would normally recommend both now and in 2006. We also consider that this revised single-member warding pattern for Wymondham would give rise to a number of boundary anomalies. Having visited the area, we note that Folly Road would be placed in Town ward, while Bellrope Close, Bellrope Lane and Ringers Close, accessible only from Folly Road, would be placed in Rustens ward. Further, we note the lack of direct access between the Harts Farm estate in the east of the revised Town ward and the remainder of the ward to the west of Harts Farm Road, except through Cromwells or Rustens wards. We are not convinced on the basis of the evidence received that this constitutes an effective and coherent warding arrangement.

77 We considered further amending the five revised single-member wards to resolve these difficulties, but decided that this would lead to considerable departure from the locally generated scheme. Furthermore, we are not convinced on the basis of the evidence received that the best means of reflecting community identities and interests in Wymondham, and of providing effective and convenient local government, is through a uniform pattern of single-member wards. On this basis, we have decided to depart from the District Council's proposals for Wymondham by recommending a warding pattern of one single-member ward and two two-member wards, using the District Council's proposed single-member wards as building blocks.

78 We considered the Independents' proposal to combine the District Council's revised Cromwells and Town wards. However, we considered that the District Council's revised single-member Cromwells ward would provide good electoral equality while reflecting the difference in character between the town and the more rural areas in the south of the parish. We therefore propose that this ward be adopted as part of our draft recommendations subject to one minor amendment. We propose that the northern boundary of Cromwells ward, run from Harts Farm Road to Gunton Road, rather than including that part of Browick Road to the west of the B1172 Harts Farm Road, as proposed by the District Council. Having visited the area, we consider that the B1172 forms the clearest boundary in this part of the town.

79 We also propose that the District Council's revised Abbey and Northfields wards be combined to form a two-member Abbey & Northfields ward. We consider that this ward, broadly comprising the west of Wymondham town, would resolve the under-representation of the District Council's Northfields ward, possess strong internal road communications, and make use of effective external boundaries such as the railway line, the B1172, Hewitts Lane, Pople Street, and Lime Tree Avenue. Finally, we propose that the District Council's revised Rustens and Town wards be combined to form a two-member Rustens & Town ward. We consider that this proposal would provide stronger road links between the Harts Farm estate and the majority of properties in the ward to the west of Harts Farm Road, while placing Bellrope Lane and Folly Road within the same ward. We are therefore content to put our two-member Abbey & Northfields and Rustens & Town wards forward for consultation as part of

our draft recommendations, considering that they provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, subject to one minor amendment. We propose including all properties on Smithson Close in Rustens & Town ward to reflect road access via Rothbury Road, rather than being divided between the District Council's proposed Town and Northfields wards.

80 Under our draft recommendations, Abbey & Northfields, Cromwells and Rustens & Town wards would have 12 per cent more, 5 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 1 per cent and 7 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 3 and the large map at the back of the report.

Beckhithe, Humbleyard and Mergate wards

81 The two-member Beckhithe ward and the single-member wards of Humbleyard and Mergate are situated to the south of Norwich and west of Wymondham. Beckhithe ward comprises the parishes of Hethersett and Little Melton. Humbleyard ward contains the parishes of East Carleton, Keswick, Ketteringham and Swardeston, while Mergate ward comprises the parishes of Bracon Ash, Mulbarton and Wreningham. Beckhithe and Mergate ward are currently under-represented, with 34 and 57 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (27 and 69 per cent more than the average by 2006). Humbleyard ward is currently over-represented and has 34 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (38 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

82 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the parishes of Keswick, from the existing Humbleyard ward, and Little Melton, from Beckhithe ward, be included in a two-member Yare ward with the parishes of Bawburgh, Colney and Cringleford. It proposed that the remainder of Beckhithe ward, the parish of Hethersett, be divided into two single-member Hethersett (North) and Hethersett (South) wards. As previously stated, the District Council considered that single-member wards would better provide effective and convenient local government, adding that Hethersett Parish Council had been involved in discussions regarding the proposed boundaries. Hethersett (North) ward would comprise that part of the parish to the east of New Road, to the north of Mill Road, Great Melton Road, Queens Road, Admirals Way, Norwich Road and to the west of Colney Lane. Hethersett (South) ward would comprise the remaining part of the parish.

83 At Stage One, the District Council also proposed single-member Mulbarton (North) and Mulbarton (South) wards. The proposed Mulbarton (North) ward would comprise part of the parish of Mulbarton, together with the parishes of East Carleton, Ketteringham and Swardeston, all currently in Humbleyard ward. The proposed ward of Mulbarton (South) would comprise the remainder of Mulbarton parish together with Bracon Ash parish. The remainder of the existing Mergate ward, Wreningham parish, would be transferred to a new Newton Flotman ward. The part of Mulbarton parish in the proposed Mulbarton (South) ward would comprise all of the parish to the south of properties on the south side of The Common and west of Birchfield Lane, and south of (and including) Cuckoofield Lane, The Rosery and Brick Kiln Lane. The remainder of Mulbarton parish to the north would form part of the proposed Mulbarton (North) ward.

84 Under the District Council's proposals, Hethersett (North) and Hethersett (South) wards would have 7 per cent and 21 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 14 per cent more than the average by 2006). Mulbarton (North) and Mulbarton (South) wards would have equal to the average number of electors per

councillor and 21 per cent fewer than the average respectively (4 per cent and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

85 The Conservatives opposed the District Council's proposals in this area, arguing that the District Council's proposed single-member Hethersett (North) and Hethersett (South) wards and Mulbarton (North) and Mulbarton (South) wards should be combined into two-member Hethersett and Mulbarton wards respectively. They considered that no specific case had been made for the use of single-member wards in these instances. Under the Conservatives' proposals, Hethersett and Mulbarton wards would have 14 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (7 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

86 The Independents also proposed that the District Council's proposed single-member Hethersett (North) and Hethersett (South) wards should be combined into a two-member Hethersett ward. However, they supported the District Council's proposed Mulbarton (North) and Mulbarton (South) wards, commenting, "Mulbarton is a strung-out settlement which lends itself to being divided". Under the Independents' proposals, Hethersett would have 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (7 per cent more than the average by 2006). Mulbarton (North) and Mulbarton (South) wards would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor and 21 per cent fewer than the average respectively (4 per cent and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

87 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Hethersett Parish Council supported the division of the parish into two single-member district wards, as proposed by the District Council. However, to reflect historical identities it proposed that the proposed Hethersett (North) and Hethersett (South) wards be renamed 'Hethersett Lynch Green' and 'Hethersett Woodhall' respectively.

88 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One, noting the lack of consensus as to whether this area should be represented by single- or two-member wards. However, we note that, under the District Council's proposals, the variance in the proposed Hethersett (South) ward would exceed that which we would normally seek to recommend both now and in five years time. While we are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas, we find that electoral equality is often more achievable under a multi-member configuration. We are also concerned that the boundary proposed would artificially divide the Hethersett community, and not reflect its common identity and interests. In particular, we note that the proposed boundary would divide residential properties on both sides of Admirals Way (a cul-de-sac) in the north-east of the town.

89 Examining the District Council's proposed Mulbarton (North) and Mulbarton (South) wards, we note that they would enable significant improvements in electoral equality. However, as in Hethersett, we are not convinced on the basis of the evidence received that the division of Mulbarton parish would adequately reflect the common identity and interests of the community, particularly as both parts of the parish would then be placed in wards with one or more rural villages.

90 We have therefore not been persuaded to adopt the District Council's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations. Consequently, we are putting forward as part of our draft recommendations the Conservatives' and Independents' proposed two-member Hethersett ward, coterminous with the parish, and the Conservatives' proposed two-member Mulbarton ward comprising the parishes of Bracon Ash, East Carleton, Ketteringham, Mulbarton and Swardeston. We consider that our proposals provide the best available balance

between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, although we welcome further views on this issue from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three.

91 Under our draft recommendations, Hethersett and Mulbarton wards would have 14 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 7 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2006. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 3.

The South-west

Berners, Springfields, Stratton and Westwood wards

92 The single-member wards of Berners, Springfields, Stratton and Westwood are broadly situated to the east and south-east of Wymondham. Berners ward contains the parishes of Ashwellthorpe, Tasburgh and Tharston & Hapton, while Springfields ward comprises the parishes of Bunwell and Carleton Rode. Stratton ward is coterminous with the parish of Long Stratton, while Westwood ward contains the parishes of Aslacton, Forncett, Great Moulton, Talconeston and Wacton. Under existing arrangements, Berners ward has equal to the average number of electors per councillor (3 per cent more than the district average by 2006). Springfields ward is relatively over-represented, with 32 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (36 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Stratton and Westwood wards are both relatively under-represented, with 50 per cent and 36 per cent more electors per councillor than the average respectively (63 and 28 per cent more than the average by 2006).

93 At Stage One, the District Council proposed a new single-member Forncett ward comprising the “similar” parishes of Ashwellthorpe, from the existing Berners ward, and Forncett and Talconeston, from Westwood ward. It also proposed that the existing Springfields ward, comprising Bunwell and Carleton Rode parishes, be combined with Aslacton and Tibenham parishes, from Westwood and Long Row wards respectively, to form a new single-member Bunwell ward. The parishes of Great Moulton and Tasburgh would be respectively included in proposed Dickleburgh and Tasburgh wards. The District Council noted Great Moulton Parish Council’s preference for the inclusion of Aslacton and Great Moulton parishes in the same ward, but stated that it had not been able to accommodate this in its scheme.

94 The District Council also proposed single-member Stratton (North) and Stratton (South) wards. Stratton (North) ward would contain part of Long Stratton parish together with the parish of Tharston & Hapton, while Stratton (South) ward would contain the remaining part of Long Stratton parish, together with Wacton parish. The District Council stated that, “Long Stratton required more than one member but was not big enough for two” and that the other two parishes use, “many services which Long Stratton has to offer”. The part of Long Stratton parish in the proposed Stratton (North) ward would comprise all of the parish to the north of Jermyn Way, Bayspole Road, John Hill Close and Sweet Briar Road. It would also comprise all of the parish north of (and including) the Manor Road ‘crescent’, Swan Lane and Star Lane (including properties on the north side of Star Lane only). The remaining part of Long Stratton parish would form part of the District Council’s proposed Stratton (South) ward.

95 Under the District Council’s proposals, Bunwell and Forncett wards would both have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (both would have 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Stratton North and Stratton South wards would have 20 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer by 2006).

96 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposed wards of Forncett and Bunwell, but proposed that the District Council's proposed single-member Stratton (North) and Stratton (South) wards be combined in a two-member Stratton ward. They also considered that Forncett ward should be renamed 'Upper Tas Valley' ward. They argued that Forncett comprises less than half of the proposed ward electorate, which would contain both the River Tas and the Upper Tas Valley walk. Under the Conservatives' proposals, Stratton ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (equal to the average by 2006).

97 The Independents also supported the District Council's proposed wards of Forncett and Bunwell, but considered that they should retain the existing ward names of 'Berners' and 'Long Row' respectively. They also proposed a two-member Stratton ward, but comprising the parishes of Long Stratton and Tharston & Hapton only, preferring to include Wacton parish in a ward with Pulham Market and Pulham St Mary, as discussed below. They considered that this would more closely reflect local preferences in Long Stratton and Wacton. Under the Independents' proposals, Stratton ward would have 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (6 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

98 We received three other submissions in relation to this area. Great Moulton Parish Council objected to being placed in a different ward to Aslacton under the District Council's proposals. It stated that the two villages are contiguous, with shared facilities and common interests, and that Great Moulton has little in common with the remainder of the proposed Dickleburgh ward. Long Stratton Parish Council and District Councillor Smith (Stratton ward) supported the Conservatives' proposed two-member Stratton ward. The Parish Council stated that "it would wish for representatives to work together for all the electorate of Long Stratton and the two other parishes concerned and not just part."

99 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One. Examining the proposed Bunwell and Forncett wards, we note they would provide good electoral equality, resolving the over- and under-representation of the existing Springfield and Westwood wards. Further, we note that these wards were supported by the Conservatives and Independents. We consider that they possess satisfactory internal road communications, and would appear to reflect community identities and interests in the area reasonably well.

100 We note the objections of Great Moulton Parish Council. In particular, we note that the village of Sneath Common is divided between these parishes and the parish of Tivetshall St Margaret. As we have no power to recommend changes to parish boundaries, we would suggest that the anomalies in Sneath Common might be corrected at some future point by a parish review, which lies within the District Council's remit. We have received no alternative schemes that would enable us to better meet our statutory criteria in this area by placing Aslacton and Great Moulton in a single ward, while also securing good electoral equality. We have explored a number of alternative options and consider that these aims could possibly be achieved by the recommendation of a two-member rural ward in this area. However, we have received no evidence that such a ward would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the District Council's proposals, which we are therefore content to put forward as part of our draft recommendations. We recognise that the alternative ward names put forward by the Conservatives and the Independents for the proposed Bunwell and Forncett wards may be feasible. However, as stated in paragraph 44, we consider on the basis of the evidence received that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives.

101 Examining the District Council's proposed Stratton (North) and Stratton (South) wards, we note the lack of consensus in this area. As previously stated, we are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas and consider each case upon its merits. In this instance, we are however not convinced that the division of the town between single-member wards, each containing a rural parish, would sufficiently reflect community identities and interests and provide effective and convenient local government. In particular, we note that under the District Council's proposals, Tharston & Hapton parish would form part of the proposed Stratton (North) ward, and that there are properties in Tharston & Hapton parish in the Chequers Road area that geographically form part of the urban area of Long Stratton. However, properties situated directly across the parish boundary in Long Stratton parish, accessed via Chequers Road, would form part of Stratton (South) ward.

102 We therefore examined proposals for a two-member Stratton ward. As previously stated, we note the District Council's comments regarding the use of the town's services by residents of the parishes of Tharston & Hapton and Wacton. We are therefore content to recommend that they be placed in the same ward. While we note the Independents' opposition to the inclusion of Wacton parish in Stratton ward, we consider that we have received no evidence as to how this would not meet our objectives. We also note the lack of direct road connections between Pulham Market and Wacton parishes. We therefore concur with the view expressed by the Conservatives, Long Stratton Parish Council and Councillor Smith that a two-member Stratton ward would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than either the existing arrangements or the District Council's proposals.

103 Under our draft recommendations, Bunwell and Forncett wards would both have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (both would have 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Stratton ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (equal to the average by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 3.

Boyland, Diss Town and Long Row wards

104 The wards of Boyland, Diss Town and Long Row are situated in the south-west of the district. Boyland ward comprises the parishes of Bressingham and Roydon, while Long Row ward comprises the parishes of Burston & Shimpling, Gissing, Shelfanger, Tibenham and Winfarthing. Both wards are each represented by a single councillor. The three-member Diss Town ward is coterminous with the town of Diss. Boyland and Long Row wards currently have 31 per cent more and 16 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (25 per cent more and 21 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Diss Town ward has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

105 At Stage One, the District Council proposed a new single-member Bressingham ward. This would comprise the parish of Bressingham and a small part of Roydon parish, from the existing Boyland ward, the Heywood area of Diss parish, and the parishes of Burston & Shimpling, Gissing, Shelfanger and Winfarthing from Long Row ward. As described in the previous section, Tibenham parish would be included in the proposed Bunwell ward.

106 The District Council stated that a recently conducted review of parish boundaries (submitted April 2001) had proposed the creation of a new Heywood parish, subject to approval by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, corresponding to the area of Diss parish to be included in the proposed Bressingham ward. This would comprise all the existing Diss parish to the north of Burston Road. The District

Council commented, “The area of Heywood is said to have more affinity with Winfarthing and Burston [than with Diss town].” It also indicated that the parish boundary review had proposed a boundary amendment between the parishes of Bressingham and Roydon. This amendment, again subject to approval by the Secretary of State, corresponds to the small part of Roydon parish the District Council proposed including in Bressingham district ward, comprising an area in the village of Bressingham north of the A1066 High Road, west of Baynards Lane and Hall Lane, and south of the Bressingham parish boundary.

107 Under the District Council’s proposals, the remainder of Roydon parish would form a single-member Roydon ward, while the remainder of Diss parish would be divided into three single-member wards, to be named Diss (Central), Diss (East) and Diss (West). The District Council considered that creating three single-member wards for Diss would promote democracy and accountability. It added that it had not sought to propose a warding pattern combining Diss and Roydon, as during the recent parish review Roydon had strongly opposed a merger at parish level. Diss (West) ward would broadly comprise that part of the town to the west of Lower Denmark Street, Denmark Street, Shelfanger Road (to the junction with Factory Lane and Sunnyside) and Heywood Road, and to the south of Burston Road. Diss (Central) ward would be bounded in the west by Diss (West) ward and the north by Burston Road. In the east its boundary would run broadly to the east of Victoria Close, Skelton Road, Skelton Close, part of Champney’s Road, St Mary’s Drive, Fieldhouse Gardens, Hawk Crescent, Falcon Avenue and Peregrine Close. It would then proceed across field boundaries north to Walcot Green, and then follow a track to Burston Road. The proposed Diss (East) ward would comprise that part of the town to the east of Diss (Central) ward.

108 Under the District Council’s proposals, Bressingham and Roydon wards would have 5 per cent more and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 10 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Diss (Central), Diss (East) and Diss (West) wards would have 1 per cent more, 18 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent, 13 per cent and 7 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

109 The Conservatives supported the District Council’s proposals in this area, but argued that the proposed Bressingham ward should be renamed Bressingham & Burston. They considered that Bressingham constitutes less than half of the proposed ward electorate and is situated in the far west of the ward, whereas Burston, the parish with the second largest electorate, is situated in the east. The Independents opposed the District Council’s proposed wards of Diss (Central), Diss (East) and Diss (West), arguing that the local preference was for a three-member ward. They also indicated that there were two substantial parts of Diss town in Roydon parish to the north of Factory Lane, and to the west of Denmark Lane, although they did not propose that these areas should be included in their proposed Diss ward. The Independents also opposed the District Council’s proposal to include a small part of Roydon parish in Bressingham ward, which they proposed should retain the existing ward name of ‘Boyland’. Subject to this amendment, they supported the proposed Roydon ward. Under the Independents’ proposals, Bressingham, Diss and Roydon wards would have 3 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent fewer, 8 per cent fewer and 8 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

110 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Diss Town Council supported the proposal by the Independents to retain a three-member Diss ward, considering that the existing ward already secured democracy, accountability and electoral equality for the

electorate of the town. It considered that these would be hampered by the creation of separate wards at district and town level.

111 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One. We note that the District Council's proposed Bressingham and Roydon wards would provide good electoral equality and resolve the under- and over-representation of the existing Boyland and Long Row wards. We further note that they were supported by the Conservatives and (subject to a minor amendment) the Independents. We concur with the view expressed by the District Council that the rural Heywood area of Diss parish has more in common with the rural parishes of Bressingham ward than with Diss town, and consider that its inclusion also serves to improve road communications within Bressingham ward. We note the opposition of the Independents to the inclusion of a small part of Roydon parish in Bressingham ward. However, we consider that the majority of affected properties form part of Bressingham village, and that this amendment consequently provides a better reflection of community identities and interests than the existing ward boundary.

112 We note that, as stated by the Independents, approximately a third of the Roydon parish electorate is situated in two areas that form part of the Diss urban area. We consider that these areas and the western part of Diss parish are likely to share a community identity and common interests. However, we note that, should these areas be included in Diss for district warding purposes, the remainder of Roydon parish would have insufficient electors to form a separate single-member ward. We have therefore decided to adopt the District Council's proposed Bressingham and Roydon wards, although we would welcome further views on this issue from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three. None the less, we would suggest that the above parish boundary anomaly might be corrected at some future point. We have no power to recommend changes to parish boundaries, but such a review lies within the District Council's remit. We are also proposing that the proposed Bressingham ward be named 'Bressingham & Burston', as proposed by the Conservatives, in order to better reflect community identities and interests in this part of the district. While we note the Independents' proposed alternative name of 'Boyland', we also note that only one of its constituent parishes belongs to the existing Boyland ward.

113 We note the lack of consensus as to whether Diss town should be represented by three single-member wards or a three-member ward. As previously stated, we are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas, but often find that electoral equality is more achievable under a multi-member configuration. We note that under the District Council's proposals, the variance in the proposed Diss (East) ward would exceed that which we would normally seek to recommend both now and in five years time. We are also concerned that the boundaries proposed would artificially divide the Diss community. On the basis of the evidence received, we concur with the view expressed by the Independents and Diss Town Council that a three-member Diss ward, coterminous with the town (apart from the Heywood area as previously stated), would provide the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have therefore decided to adopt this ward as part of our draft recommendations, although we would welcome further views on this issue from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three.

114 Under our draft recommendations, Bressingham & Burston, Diss and Roydon wards would have 5 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average, 8 per cent fewer and 10 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 3 and Maps A3 and A4 in Appendix A.

Beck Vale, Depwade, Dickleburgh and Harleston wards

115 The single-member wards of Beck Vale, Depwade, Dickleburgh and Harleston are situated in the south of the district to the east of Diss. Beck Vale ward comprises the parishes of Pulham Market, Pulham St Mary and Starston, while Depwade ward contains the parishes of Brockdish, Needham and Scole. Dickleburgh ward comprises the parishes of Dickleburgh & Rushall, Tivetshall St Margaret and Tivetshall St Mary. Harleston ward is coterminous with the town of Redenhall with Harleston. Under existing arrangements, Beck Vale and Depwade wards have 6 per cent and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (both 8 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Dickleburgh ward is relatively over-represented, with 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (23 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Harleston ward is significantly under-represented, with 78 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (80 per cent more than the average by 2006).

116 At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the existing single-member Beck Vale ward, but renaming it Pulhams ward. It commented that, although the constituent parish councils were keen to retain both the existing ward and the existing ward name, it considered that ward names should be instantly recognisable. Similarly, the District Council proposed that the existing single-member Depwade ward be retained but renamed Scole ward. It commented that, “there have been no objections to this proposal and with these parishes in between the towns of Diss and Harleston and the largish parish of Dickleburgh to the north it makes sense to leave the ward as it is”. The existing Dickleburgh ward would, under the District Council’s proposals, be combined with the parish of Great Moulton, currently in Westwood ward, to form a revised single-member Dickleburgh ward. As previously stated, the District Council noted Great Moulton Parish Council’s preference for a combination with Aslacton, but stated that it had not been able to reflect this in its scheme. Under the District Council’s proposals, Dickleburgh, Pulhams and Scole wards would have 10 per cent more, 8 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent more, 10 per cent fewer and 10 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

117 The District Council proposed that the existing Harleston ward be divided into two single-member Harleston (East) and Harleston (West) wards “for reasons of democracy and accountability.” While it recognised that these wards would remain slightly over-represented, it stated that Harleston Town Council had expressed concern as to the accuracy of the forecast electorate for 2006, “as they claim that new properties are being created in in-fill locations all the time.” The District Council commented that it had no evidence of this, but considered that Harleston should be considered a special case. The proposed Harleston (East) ward would comprise all of Redenhall with Harleston parish to the east of the B1116 Shotford Road, London Road, The Thoroughfare, Redenhall Road and the A143. The proposed Harleston (West) ward would consist of the remainder of the parish to the west of these roads. Under the District Council’s proposals, Harleston (East) and Harleston (West) wards would have 19 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (both would have 12 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

118 The Conservatives supported the District Council’s proposed wards of Dickleburgh, Pulhams and Scole. However, they proposed a two-member Harleston ward coterminous with Redenhall with Harleston parish, stating, “We do not accept that there is any case made out to split the parish of Redenhall with Harleston into two wards.” Under the Conservatives proposals, Harleston ward would have 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (12 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

119 The Independents supported District Council's proposed wards of Dickleburgh and Scole, but proposed that the latter ward retain its existing name of 'Depwade'. However, they also proposed a single-member Beck Vale ward comprising the parishes of Pulham Market, Pulham St Mary and Wacton, arguing as previously stated that the District Council's proposal to include Wacton in Stratton (South) ward would not reflect local preferences. Under their proposals, the contiguous parish of Starston would be included in a two-member Harleston ward. They stated, "There is no justification for splitting this compact market town against its wishes." Under the Independents' proposals, Beck Vale and Harleston wards would both have 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10 per cent and 6 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

120 We received four further submissions in relation to this area. Redenhall with Harleston Town Council supported the Conservatives' proposed two-member Harleston ward, and opposed the District Council's proposed Harleston East and Harleston West wards. It also opposed a combination of the town with the parish of Wortwell to the east. The Town Council considered that two district councillors "should work together for the whole of the parish." Great Moulton Parish Council opposed the proposed Dickleburgh ward, arguing that it had little to do with the parishes of Dickleburgh, Tivetshall St Margaret and Tivetshall St Mary. As previously discussed, it proposed that Aslacton and Great Moulton parishes be included in the same ward. Pulham Market and Pulham St Mary Parish Councils supported the retention of the existing Beck Vale ward, which they considered reflected community identities and interests and provided effective and convenient local government.

121 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received at Stage One. We note that the District Council's proposals would resolve the over-representation of the existing Dickleburgh ward, and that Pulhams and Scole wards, renamed but retained from the existing arrangements, would continue to have acceptable electoral equality under a 46-member council. We consider that these three proposed wards possess satisfactory internal road communications and note the support of Pulham Market and Pulham St Mary Parish Councils for Pulhams ward. As discussed previously, we have not decided to adopt the Independents' proposed Beck Vale ward. While we note that the inclusion of Starston parish in a two-member Harleston ward would improve electoral equality, we do not consider on the basis of the evidence received that a ward combining rural Starston with urban Harleston would reflect community identities and interests in this part of the district. We also note Great Moulton Parish Council's views but, as previously stated, have received no alternative viable proposals for that part of the district. We recognise that the Independents' proposals to retain existing ward names may be feasible, particularly where no change to existing warding arrangements have taken place. However, we consider on the basis of the evidence received (see paragraph 44) that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives.

122 We note that on a council size of 46, Redenhall with Harleston parish is entitled to two councillors, but that there is a lack of consensus as to whether it should be represented by two single-member wards or a two-member ward. We are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas and consider each case upon its merits. We note that either option would result in the slight over-representation of the ward or wards, but as previously discussed consider that the town of Harleston is sufficiently different from the surrounding rural parishes as to require separate representation. However, we are concerned that the boundary proposed would artificially divide the Harleston community. We therefore concur with the view expressed by the Town Council, the Conservatives and the Independents that a two-member Harleston ward coterminous with the town would provide the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have therefore decided to put

this ward forward for consultation, although we welcome further views on this issue from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three.

123 Under our draft recommendations, Dickleburgh and Harleston wards would have 10 per cent more and 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent more and 12 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Pulhams and Scole wards would have 8 per cent and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (both 10 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 3.

The East

Crown Point, Rosebery, Smockmill and Tasvale wards

124 The wards of Crown Point, Rosebery, Smockmill and Tasvale are situated in the centre of the district to the south and east of Norwich. All are single-member wards apart from Rosebery ward, which is represented by two members. Crown Point ward comprises the parishes of Bixley, Caistor St Edmund, Kirby Bedon and Trowse with Newton, while Rosebery ward comprises the parishes of Framingham Earl, Framingham Pigot and Poringland. Smockmill comprises the parishes of Flordon, Newton Flotman, Saxlingham Nethergate and Swainsthorpe, while Tasvale comprises the parishes of Shotesham and Stoke Holy Cross. Crown Point is currently significantly over-represented, with 54 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (48 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Rosebery, Smockmill and Tasvale wards have 8 per cent fewer, 6 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (8 per cent more, 10 per cent more and 15 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

125 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that the existing Crown Point ward, less Kirby Bedon parish, be combined with Stoke Holy Cross parish to form a new single-member Stoke Holy Cross ward. Under its proposals, Kirby Bedon parish would be combined with parishes to its east to form a new single-member Rockland ward, as described in the following section. The remainder of the existing Tasvale ward, Shotesham parish, would be combined with the parishes of Saxlingham Nethergate, from the existing Smockmill ward, and Tasburgh, from Berners ward, to form a new single-member Tasburgh ward. The District Council commented that it had been unable to accommodate the preference of Shotesham Parish Council for a combination with Stoke Holy Cross parish and achieve good electoral equality. Finally, it proposed that Wreningham parish, from the existing Mergate ward, be combined with the remainder of the existing Smockmill ward to form a new single-member Newton Flotman ward. The District Council considered that this proposed ward reflected the preferences of Flordon, Newton Flotman and Swainsthorpe parishes, despite its unusual shape.

126 The District Council also proposed that the existing Rosebery ward be divided into two single-member wards to facilitate democracy and accountability. Rosebery (North) ward would consist of the parishes of Framingham Earl and Framingham Pigot, together with part of the parish of Poringland, while Rosebery (South) ward would consist of the remaining part of Poringland. The part of Poringland parish in the proposed Rosebery (North) ward would comprise that part of the parish to the north of Heath Loke, and to the north of properties on the north side of The Footpath, Elizabeth Road, Hadden Close and Rectory Lane prior to its junction with St Mary's Road. From that point, it would comprise that part of the parish to the north of (and including) Rectory Lane, Upgate and Whitehouse Gardens. Rosebery (South) ward would comprise the remaining part of Poringland parish.

127 Under the District Council's proposals, Newton Flotman, Stoke Holy Cross and Tasburgh wards would have 5 per cent fewer, 4 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 5 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Rosebery (North) and Rosebery (South) wards would have 11 per cent more and 31 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (7 per cent and 4 per cent more than the average by 2006).

128 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals in this area, except for the proposed Rosebery (North) and Rosebery (South) wards, where they proposed retaining the existing two-member Rosebery ward. They argued that no specific case had been made for the use of single-member wards and the division of Poringland parish. The Conservatives also considered 'Poringland' to be a more appropriate ward name given that the parish formed more than half of the proposed ward electorate. They also proposed that Tasburgh ward be named 'Nethergate', reflecting "local associations" and the central position of Saxlingham Nethergate parish within the ward, since Tasburgh parish contained slightly less than half of the proposed ward electorate. Under the Conservatives' proposals, Poringland ward would have 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (5 per cent more than the average by 2006).

129 The Independents supported the District Council's proposals in this area, except for the proposed Rosebery (North) and Rosebery (South) wards, where they proposed retaining the existing two-member Rosebery ward to reflect local preferences. They also proposed that the proposed Newton Flotman, Stoke Holy Cross and Tasburgh wards retain the existing ward names of 'Smockmill', 'Crown Point' and 'Tasvale'. Under the Independents' proposals, Rosebery ward would have the same variances now and in 2006 as the Conservatives' Poringland ward.

130 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One. We note that the District Council's proposed Newton Flotman, Stoke Holy Cross and Tasburgh wards would provide good electoral equality, in particular resolving the over-representation of the existing Crown Point ward. Further, we note that these wards were supported by the Conservatives and the Independents and possess satisfactory internal road communications. We are also content that the District Council has sought wherever possible to reflect local community identities and interests. While we note that Wreningham parish appears somewhat isolated in the proposed Newton Flotman ward, we were unable to identify an alternative warding pattern that would meet our objectives. We therefore consider that the District Council's three proposed wards provide the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and are content to put them forward for consultation as part of our draft recommendations. We recognise that the Conservatives' and Independents' proposed ward names may be feasible. However, we consider on the basis of the evidence received (see paragraph 44) that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives.

131 We note the lack of consensus as to whether the urban area of Poringland and Framingham Earl, together with the more rural parish of Framingham Pigot, should be represented by two single-member wards or one two-member ward. We are not opposed in principle to single-member wards in urban areas and consider each case upon its merits. However, we are not convinced on the basis of the evidence received that the division of Poringland parish would adequately reflect the identity and interests of the community. We also note that a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Framingham Earl, Framingham Pigot and Poringland would not contain all of the Poringland urban area, with parts remaining in Caistor St Edmund and Stoke Holy Cross parishes. However, we note that the inclusion of these areas would lead to a high electoral variance in both this ward and the District Council's

proposed Stoke Holy Cross ward. While a three-member ward encompassing both wards would resolve this problem, we have also received no evidence that this would reflect community identities and interests in the more rural Stoke Holy Cross ward. We have therefore decided to adopt the Conservatives' and Independents' proposed two-member Poringland ward, considering that it would provide the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We concur with the view expressed by the Conservatives that naming the ward after Poringland, the parish with by far the largest electorate would facilitate name recognition. We welcome further views on these issues from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three.

132 Under our draft recommendations, Newton Flotman and Poringland wards would have 5 per cent and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more than the average by 2006). Stoke Holy Cross and Tasburgh wards would have 4 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (5 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 3.

Abbeyfield, Beauchamp, Broads, Brookwood and Chet wards

133 The single-member wards of Abbeyfield, Beauchamp, Broads, Brookwood and Chet are situated in the north of the district, to the east of Norwich. Abbeyfield ward comprises the parishes of Carleton St Peter, Chedgrave, Claxton and Langley with Hardley, while Beauchamp ward comprises the parishes of Alington, Ashby St Mary, Bergh Apton, Thurton and Yelverton. Broads ward comprises the parishes of Bramerton, Hellington, Holverston, Rockland St Mary and Surlingham, while Brookwood comprises the parishes of Brooke, Howe, Kirstead and Woodton. Chet ward comprises the parishes of Loddon, Mundham, Seething and Sisland. Abbeyfield and Beauchamp wards currently have 27 and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (31 and 21 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Broads and Brookwood wards currently have 17 and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (21 and 16 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Chet ward currently has 29 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (24 per cent more than the average by 2006).

134 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the existing Broads ward be combined with the parishes of Alington and Yelverton, from the existing Beauchamp ward, and Kirby Bedon, from Crown Point ward, to form a new single-member Rockland ward. It also proposed that the existing Abbeyfield ward be combined with the parishes of Ashby St Mary and Thurton to form a new single-member Chedgrave ward. The remainder of Beauchamp ward, the parish of Bergh Apton, would be added to the parishes of Brooke, Howe and Kirstead (the existing Brookwood ward, less Woodton parish) and the parishes of Mundham and Seething, from Chet ward, to form a new single-member Brooke ward. Finally, the District Council proposed that the remainder of the existing Chet ward, the parishes of Loddon and Sisland, form a single-member Loddon ward. It added that there was local support for the inclusion of the rural parish of Sisland in this ward. The District Council commented that in its local consultation the parishes of the existing Beauchamp ward had opposed being divided between the above wards. None the less, it considered its proposals to best meet the Commission's objectives.

135 Under the District Council's proposals, Brooke and Chedgrave wards would have 8 per cent and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent and 2 per cent more than the average by 2006). Loddon and Rockland wards would have

5 per cent and 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (2 per cent and 10 per cent more than the average by 2006).

136 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals, but considered that the proposed Rockland ward be named 'Bramerton'. They argued that Rockland comprised only 29 per cent of the combined ward electorate and lay in the east of the ward, whereas they considered Bramerton was a focal point for local identities, including the church benefice. They also proposed that Chedgrave ward be named 'Loddon North', and Loddon ward be named 'Loddon East', after the former Loddon Rural District Council, as Chedgrave only constituted 40 per cent of the combined ward electorate, and the existing county electoral division was called "Loddon". The Independents also supported the District Council's proposals, but considered that the proposed Brooke, Chedgrave and Rockland wards should retain the existing ward names of 'Beauchamp', 'Abbeyfield' and 'Broads' respectively.

137 We received one further submission in relation to this area. Alington with Yelverton Parish Council opposed the proposed Broads and Brooke wards, arguing that the resulting division of Alington and Yelverton parishes from Bergh Apton parish would not reflect community identities and interests in this area. It stated that these parishes shared a "community affinity", as indicated by the common use of a school and post office, whereas to the north the A146 divided them from the remainder of the proposed Broads ward.

138 We have given careful consideration to the submissions received at Stage One. We note that the District Council's proposals would reduce the current and forecast electoral variance in the existing wards, and were supported by the Conservatives and the Independents. Examining the proposed Brooke, Chedgrave and Rockland wards, we note that they possess satisfactory road connections. However, Alington with Yelverton Parish Council has expressed the view that the A146 divides rather than links parishes in this part of the district, and the District Council has indicated that all the parishes of the existing Beauchamp ward are dissatisfied with its proposals in this area. We further note the evidence submitted by Alington with Yelverton Parish Council regarding its ties with Bergh Apton parish. However, we are unable to consider any area in isolation, but must bear in mind the requirement to achieve the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria across the district as a whole. We consider that the inclusion of Alington, Bergh Apton and Yelverton parishes in either Rockland or Brooke wards would considerably worsen electoral variances in the wards concerned. Furthermore, we have received no alternative proposals for this area that would meet our objectives. We have therefore decided to put all three wards forward as part of our draft recommendations, although we welcome further views from local residents and other interested parties at Stage Three.

139 We consider that separate representation for the town of Loddon, together with the small rural parish of Sisland, would better reflect community identities and interests than the existing arrangements. We note, however, that Sisland parish, due to its negligible electorate, could be placed with neighbouring rural parishes in the proposed Brooke ward. None the less, on the basis of the evidence received from the District Council, we are content to put the proposed Loddon ward forward for consultation as part of our draft recommendations. We recognise that the alternative ward names put forward by the Conservatives and the Independents may be feasible. However, as stated in paragraph 44, we consider on the basis of the evidence received that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives. In particular, we note that 'Bramerton', while a viable alternative ward name, is a parish with a comparatively small electorate in comparison to others in the proposed Rockland ward.

140 Under our draft recommendations, Brooke and Chedgrave wards would have 8 per cent and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent and 2 per cent more than the average by 2006). Loddon and Rockland wards would have 5 per cent and 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (2 per cent and 10 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 4.

Ditchingham, Hempnall and Valley wards

141 The single-member wards of Ditchingham, Hempnall and Valley are situated in the centre and south of the district. Ditchingham ward comprises the parishes of Bedingham, Ditchingham, Hedenham, Thwaite and Topcroft, while Hempnall ward comprises the parishes of Hempnall, Morningthorpe and Shelton. Valley ward comprises the parishes of Alburgh, Denton, Earsham and Wortwell. At present Ditchingham and Valley wards have 1 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent and 14 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Hempnall ward is currently over-represented, with 22 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (26 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

142 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the existing Valley ward be combined with the parish of Topcroft, currently in Ditchingham ward, to form a new single-member Earsham ward. It commented that it had taken into account the wish of the parishes of the existing Valley ward to remain together. The District Council also proposed a revised single-member Hempnall ward, comprising the existing ward together with Bedingham parish, from the existing Ditchingham ward and Woodton parish, from Brookwood ward. It argued that, despite its unusual shape, this ward would provide good electoral equality while reflecting the strong links of Bedingham and Woodton parishes. The remainder of the existing Ditchingham ward, the parishes of Ditchingham, Hedenham and Thwaite, would be combined with the parish of Broome, currently in Waveney ward, to form a revised single-member Ditchingham & Broome ward. The District Council stated that it had taken into account established ties between the parishes of Ditchingham and Thwaite, and that the addition of 'Broome' to the ward name reflected local preferences in Broome.

143 Under the District Council's proposals, Ditchingham & Broome and Earsham wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (9 per cent fewer and 7 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Hempnall ward would have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (equal to the average number of electors per councillor by 2006).

144 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals in this area, but considered that the proposed Ditchingham & Broome ward should retain the existing ward name of 'Ditchingham'. They commented that, given the District Council's approach to naming proposed wards after the constituent parish with the largest electorate, there was no logic to including Broome in the proposed ward name. The Independents supported the District Council's proposals, but also preferred to retain the existing ward name of 'Ditchingham' and considered that the proposed Earsham ward should retain the existing ward name 'Valley'.

145 We received two further submissions in relation to this area. Earsham and Wortwell parish councils stated that they opposed any potential combination of Wortwell parish with the neighbouring town of Harleston. They argued that the parishes of the existing Valley ward have regular joint meetings to discuss shared issues, and would oppose any attempt to place them in different district wards. Wortwell Parish Council also put forward alternative proposals for this part of the district. It proposed adding the parishes of Bedingham and

Hedenham from the existing Ditchingham ward to Valley ward to form an unnamed single-member ward (Ward A). It also proposed adding the parishes of Topcroft (from Ditchingham ward) and Woodton (from Brookwood ward) to Hempnall ward to form another single-member ward (Ward B). Under Wortwell Parish Council's proposals, Wards A and B would have 8 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more and equal to the average by 2006).

146 We have given careful consideration to the submissions received at Stage One. We consider that the District Council's proposals, which were supported by both the Conservatives and the Independents, would provide good electoral equality both now and in 2006. We are also content on the basis of the evidence received that the District Council has sought to take into account local preferences and concerns where possible, and that the proposed wards provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We note that the proposed wards possess satisfactory road connections, and in particular that Woodton and Bedingham parishes are well linked to the rest of the proposed Hempnall ward via the B1135. We consider that this ameliorates the concerns expressed by the District Council regarding the shape of the proposed ward.

147 While we note the alternative proposals put forward by Wortwell Parish Council, we consider that the separation of Bedingham and Woodton into two wards would not reflect community identities and interests in this part of the district. We also note that the inclusion of Hedenham parish in Ward A would lead to the over-representation of the proposed Ditchingham & Broome ward. We consider that the view expressed by Earsham and Wortwell parish councils, that the retention of the existing Valley parishes in a single ward would meet our statutory criteria, has been taken into account in the District Council's proposals. We also recognise that the alternative ward names put forward by the Conservatives and the Independents may be feasible. However, we consider on the basis of the evidence received that the ward name Ditchingham & Broome would appear to reflect a local preference, and as discussed in paragraph 44 generally consider that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives. We are therefore content to put all three proposed wards forward for consultation as part of our draft recommendations.

148 Under our draft recommendations, Ditchingham & Broome and Earsham would have 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (9 per cent fewer and 7 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Hempnall ward would have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (equal to the average number of electors per councillor by 2006). Our draft recommendations are illustrated on Map 4.

Clavering, Marshland and Waveney wards

149 The single-member wards of Clavering, Marshland and Waveney are situated in the east of the district. Clavering ward comprises the parishes of Haddiscoe, Hales, Heckingham, Norton Subcourse, Raveningham and Thurlton, while Marshland ward comprises the parishes of Aldeby, Burgh St Peter, Gillingham, Toft Monks and Wheatacre. Waveney ward comprises the parishes of Broome, Ellingham, Geldeston, Kirby Cane and Stockton. All three wards are forecast to be over-represented in 2006. At present, Clavering ward has 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (11 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Marshland and Waveney wards are over-represented both now and in 2006, with 19 per cent and 21 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (23 per cent and 27 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

150 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the existing Marshland ward, except the parish of Gillingham, be combined with the parishes of Haddiscoe, Norton Subcourse and Thurlton, from Clavering ward, to form a new single-member Thurlton ward. It commented that these parishes were similar in nature, that there was support for this proposal from Haddiscoe and Burgh St Peter parish councils, and that it was felt that Norton Subcourse and Thurlton should be retained in the same ward. As detailed in the previous section, the parish of Broome, currently in Waveney ward, would be transferred under the District Council's proposals to a new single-member Ditchingham & Broome ward. The remainder of Waveney ward, together with Gillingham parish and the remainder of Clavering ward, the parishes of Hales, Heckingham and Raveningham, would then form a new single-member Gillingham ward. The District Council again commented that there was local support for these proposals from Stockton Parish Meeting, and that the ward reflected close links between Ellingham and Kirby Cane parishes, and between Hales and Heckingham parishes.

151 Under the District Council's proposals, Gillingham and Thurlton wards would have 18 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. By 2006 electoral equality is expected to improve, with Gillingham and Thurlton wards having 10 per cent and 6 per cent more than the average respectively.

152 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals in this area, but considered that the proposed Gillingham and Thurlton wards should be renamed 'Clavering West' and 'Clavering East' respectively, after the former rural Hundred. They argued that Gillingham and Thurlton parishes were neither numerically dominant within the proposed ward electorates nor centrally located within the wards. The Independents also supported the District Council's proposals, but proposed that Gillingham and Thurlton wards retain the existing ward names of 'Waveney' and 'Marshland'.

153 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received at Stage One. We note that the District Council's proposals, which were supported by the Conservatives and the Independents, would resolve the over-representation of the existing Clavering, Marshland and Waveney wards. We also note that further improvements in electoral equality in this area are hindered by the presence to the east of the river Chet and the town of Loddon, and the fact that Ellingham parish cannot be separated sensibly from the parish of Kirby Cane. Examining the proposed Gillingham and Thurlton wards, we note that they possess good internal road communications, and concur with the view expressed by the District Council that the relatively sparsely populated rural parishes of Thurlton ward are similar in character. In both cases, we consider that the District Council has sought to reflect local community identities and interests. We recognise that the alternative ward names put forward by the Conservatives and the Independents may be feasible. However, as stated in paragraph 44, we consider on the basis of the evidence received that the District Council's proposed ward names best meet our objectives. We are therefore content to put these wards forward for consultation as part of our draft recommendations, considering that they represent the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this part of the district.

154 Under our draft recommendations, Gillingham and Thurlton wards would have 18 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10 per cent and 6 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 4.

Electoral Cycle

155 At Stage One the District Council stated that, “the current arrangements of whole-council elections would best suit the needs and wishes of this Council and the electorate of South Norfolk.” The Conservatives and Councillor Smith (Stratton ward) supported the District Council’s proposals. At present, the majority view appears to be that the current electoral cycle be retained and we therefore propose no change to the system of whole-council elections every four years.

Conclusions

156 Having considered all the evidence and submissions received during the first stage of the review, we propose that:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 47 to 46;
- there should be 34 wards;
- the boundaries of 37 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of seven, and four wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

157 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council’s proposals, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- in Diss, Harleston, Hethersett, Long Stratton, Mulbarton and Poringland, we propose adopting the Conservatives’ and/or Independents’ proposals for two- or three-member wards, in order to improve electoral equality, better reflect community identities and interests, and provide effective and convenient local government.
- Similarly, in Costessey we propose retaining the existing two-member wards of Old Costessey and New Costessey, as proposed by the Conservatives and Independents, subject to putting forward our own boundary amendments to improve electoral equality in both wards.
- Similarly, in Wymondham, we propose combining the District Council’s proposed single-member wards of Abbey, Cromwells, Northfields, Rustens and Town into two-member Abbey & Northfields and Rustens & Town wards, and a single-member Cromwells ward, subject to a number of minor boundary amendments.
- We propose changing the names of Bressingham, Rosebery and Yare wards to Bressingham & Burston, Poringland and Cringleford respectively.

158 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	47	46	47	46
Number of wards	41	34	41	34
Average number of electors per councillor	1,898	1,940	2,000	2,044
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	25	8	32	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	16	0	23	0

159 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for South Norfolk District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 25 to eight. By 2006 only one ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation

South Norfolk District Council should comprise 46 councillors serving 34 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Maps 3 and 4 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

160 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible 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 must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the towns of Diss and Wymondham and the parishes of Costessey and Roydon to reflect the proposed district wards. At the request of Cringleford Parish Council, we are also proposing to increase the number of councillors representing the parish. At the request of the District Council, we propose increasing the number of councillors representing the parish of Hethersett.

161 The town of Diss is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area, we are proposing to create two new town council wards, Diss Town ward and Heywood ward, to facilitate the division of the town between the proposed Bressingham & Burston and Diss wards. The boundary between the proposed Heywood and Diss Town town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary. We propose that the new Diss Town ward return 12 councillors and the new Heywood ward should return one councillor. We welcome views on our proposals for Diss town at Stage Three.

Draft Recommendation

Diss Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Diss Town (returning 12 councillors) and Heywood (returning one councillor). The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

162 The town of Wymondham is currently served by 15 councillors representing five wards: Abbey ward, Cromwells ward, Northfields ward, Rustens ward and Town ward, each represented by three councillors. At Stage One Wymondham Town Council proposed that its existing number of wards and councillors be retained. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area, we are proposing to modify the boundaries between the town council wards to reflect the new district warding. We are not proposing to modify the level of representation of any of the wards concerned. First, we propose modifying the boundaries of Cromwell town council ward to reflect the revised Cromwells single-member district ward. Second, we are proposing revised Abbey, Northfields, Rustens and Town town council wards to reflect the revised district wards of the same names put forward by the District Council.

163 However, as we are departing from the District Council's scheme in Wymondham to combine these four revised single-member district wards into a pair of two-member wards, Abbey and Northfields town council wards would together be coterminous with Abbey & Northfields district ward. Similarly, Rustens and Town town council wards would together be coterminous with Rustens & Town district ward. As a further result of our amendments to the District Council's scheme, Smithson Close would be placed in Town town council ward instead of being divided between Northfields and Town town council wards. Finally, we also propose that Bellrope Close, Bellrope Lane and Ringers Close be included in Town town council ward rather than Rustens town council ward. We would welcome views on our proposals for Wymondham town at Stage Three.

Draft Recommendation

Wymondham Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Abbey, Cromwells, Northfields, Rustens and Town, each returning three councillors. The boundaries between the five town council wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

164 The parish of Costessey is currently divided into two parish wards, New Costessey, represented by eight councillors, and Old Costessey, represented by seven councillors. In light of our draft recommendations in this area, we are proposing to modify the boundaries between the parish wards to reflect the new district warding. Further, we are also proposing to modify the level of representation of Old Costessey ward to more accurately reflect the distribution of the parish electorate. We propose that both New Costessey and Old Costessey wards be served by eight councillors, increasing the number of parish councillors from 15 to 16. We welcome views on our proposals for Costessey parish at Stage Three.

Draft Recommendation

Costessey Parish Council should comprise 16 parish councillors, instead of the current 15, representing two wards: New Costessey and Old Costessey, each returning eight councillors. The parish ward boundary between the two wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

165 The parish of Roydon is currently served by nine councillors and is not warded. In the light of our draft recommendations in this area, we are proposing to create two new parish wards, East ward and West ward, to facilitate the division of the parish between the proposed Bressingham & Burston and Roydon wards. The boundary between the proposed East and West parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary. We propose that the new East ward return eight councillors and the new West ward should return one councillor. We welcome views on our proposals for Roydon parish at Stage Three.

Draft Recommendation

Roydon Parish Council should comprise nine parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: East (returning eight councillors) and West (returning one councillor). The parish ward boundary between the two wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A4 in Appendix A.

166 The parish of Cringleford is currently served by nine councillors and is not warded. At Stage One, Cringleford Parish Council, supported by the District Council, proposed that the parish be served by 11 councillors. We are content to put forward this proposal as part of our draft recommendations.

Draft Recommendation

Cringleford Parish Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, instead of the current nine.

167 The parish of Hethersett is currently served by 11 councillors and is not warded. At Stage One, the District Council, proposed that the parish be served by 13 councillors, in response to consultation it had undertaken with Hethersett Parish Council. We are content to put forward this proposal as part of our draft recommendations.

Draft Recommendation

Hethersett Parish Council should comprise 13 parish councillors, instead of the current 11.

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

Draft Recommendation

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

Map 3: Draft Recommendations for South Norfolk (West)

Map 4: Draft Recommendations for South Norfolk (East)

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

169 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for South Norfolk contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 20 May 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

170 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
South Norfolk Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk

www.lgce.gov.uk

171 In the light of responses received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for South Norfolk: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the South Norfolk 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 Maps A2, A3, A4 and the large map at the back of this report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Costessey parish.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Diss town.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed warding of Roydon parish.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Wymondham.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for South Norfolk: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Costessey Parish

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Diss Town

Map A4: Proposed Warding of Roydon Parish

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Table B1: LGCE compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We consult on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.